

Journal of the
GRACE
Evangelical Society

"Faith Alone In Christ: Alone"

Journal of the GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

"Faith Alone in Christ Alone"

VOLUME 4, No. 2

AUTUMN 1991

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Journal of the GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

Published Semiannually by GES

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Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1800, Roanoke, TX 76262-1800). Subscription Rates: \$15.00 (U.S.) per year, \$7.50 per copy. Members of Grace Evangelical Society receive the Journal at no additional charge beyond the yearly membership dues of \$15.00 (\$10.00 for student members).

Purpose: The Grace Evangelical Society was formed “to promote the clear proclamation of God’s free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, which is properly correlated with and distinguished from issues related to discipleship.”

Statement of Faith: “Jesus Christ, God incarnate, paid the full penalty for man’s sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary. Any person who, in simple faith, trusts in the risen Christ as their only hope of heaven, refusing to trust in anything else, receives the gift of eternal life which, once granted, can never be lost.”

Third-class postage has been paid at Dallas, Texas. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1800, Roanoke, TX 76262-1800.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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We Believe In: REWARDS

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I. Introduction

Among the very last recorded words of our Lord Jesus Christ are these:

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My *reward* is with Me, to give to every one according to his *work*” (Rev 22:12; italics added).¹

This is a clear and definitive statement on the subject of rewards by the Lord Himself. Not to believe in rewards is not to believe His words. The Grace Evangelical Society *does* believe in rewards!

II. Rewards and Grace

Some Christians are troubled by the doctrine of rewards because this doctrine seems to suggest “merit” instead of “grace.” They argue that a doctrine of meritorious good works is a contradiction to the truth that we are not under the law but under grace (Rom 6:14).

This point of view is a serious misreading of the Scriptures. As a matter of fact, it badly confuses the doctrine of *divine grace* with the truth of *human responsibility*.

Look again at the words of Jesus quoted above. Our Lord says clearly that His “reward” is according to each man’s “work.” There is no way to escape the obvious implication that “rewards” are *earned*.

Salvation, of course, is *not* earned. Therefore it can be said to be “by grace . . . through faith” and “not of works” (Eph 2:8-9). Our works have nothing to do with whether we go to heaven or hell. Salvation is a

¹ All biblical quotations in this article are taken from the Holy Bible, New King James Version, copyright 1979, 1980, 1982, 1985 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers, of Nashville, TN.

gift and it is absolutely free. Faith in Christ is the means by which this gift is received.²

Paul taught us clearly that grace and works are mutually exclusive. His words are important:

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 not longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work (Rom 11:6).

In the light of this clear-cut statement, we dare not confuse the Bible's teaching about rewards with the truth of God's unconditional grace to us. If we claim that rewards must be "by grace" then we are saying they can have nothing to do with "works." But if we say *that*, we contradict our Lord's words which relate His "reward" to each man's "work."

If we try to "redefine" works in terms of "grace," then according to Paul we change the character of one or both of these. Either what we call "work" is no longer really work, or what we call "grace" is no longer really grace.

Lordship Salvation illustrates this unavoidable result. Since Lordship theologians claim that people must do good works in order to reach heaven, they cannot really call their doctrine salvation by "grace." But of course they *do* claim to teach salvation by grace. Yet, according to Paul, what they call "grace" is no longer really grace!

But Christians who deny that the works considered at the Judgment Seat of Christ are really rewarded on the basis of their spiritual merits fall into a similar error. They are trying to fit "works" and "grace"

² Preus is expressing Lutheran theology when he states "that faith's role in justification is purely instrumental, that faith is an *organum leptikon*, like the empty hand of a beggar receiving a gift, that it alone (*sola fide*) is the appropriate vehicle to receive reconciliation, forgiveness, Christ and His merits . . ." See Robert D. Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45 (1981): 172.

Faith, then, is not a good work (as it is taken to be quite often in Calvinistic circles). Faith is accepting the testimony of God as true (1 John 5:9-12). One may believe the Gospel without saying a prayer, without raising the hand or walking the aisle, indeed without any *effort* whatsoever. Work, on the other hand, always requires some *effort* on our part. To turn faith into a good work is a colossal confusion of categories and annuls the Pauline antithesis between faith and works.

Saving faith is a mere beggar's hand (to use the Lutheran metaphor), without any trace of meritorious activity at all. It offers nothing to God, and receives everything from Him.

together in a way that Paul says is impossible. In the process they will either distort the true meaning of grace or distort the meaning of work.

Let us hear Paul again:

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

In this verse, Paul uses precisely the same Greek word for “wages” that Jesus used in Rev 22:12. It is the Greek word *misthos*, which basically means “pay, wages.”³ It clearly carries the suggestion of getting what one has *earned*.

There is no getting around this biblical truth. God *gives* us His salvation, but He *pays* us for our good works.

To confuse these two lines of truth is to subvert the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of works in Scripture. It is an attempt to mix spiritual apples and oranges. The result can only be confusion about the true nature of both of these great themes in the Bible.

This is *not* to say, of course, that there is *no connection* between God’s grace to us and the works that we do for Him. Of course there is a connection! We would not even be able to do rewardable good works if we had not been regenerated by grace through faith. As the Apostle Peter makes clear to us, at the moment of salvation we receive “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). That is to say, God has given us—by grace—all that we need to live a godly life.

But we must utilize this provision *diligently*. Peter says this quite plainly too:

But also for this very reason, *giving all diligence*, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge . . . (2 Pet 1:5; italics added).

Thus God graciously supplies the means by which we may serve Him, but the decision to serve, and the diligence employed in doing so, are *our* contribution. Thus our works involve *our* efforts and are rewardable.

A totally passive view of the Christian life, in which we make no effort to do right or to please God, has no foundation in the Bible. We are not

³ *Misthos* refers to some kind of monetary compensation in Matt 20:8; Acts 1:18; Jas 5:4; 2 Pet 2:15; and Jude 11. But the English word “pay” (or “compensation”) would work in virtually every NT instance of this word. The frequent traditional translation “reward” somewhat clouds for the English reader a point that was obvious to the Greek reader. “Reward” referred to one’s pay or compensation for this or that. A day of *misthos* would signify “payday”!

mere passive vehicles for the Holy Spirit, but active ones who must apply "all diligence."

As we do, we *earn* rewards!

III. Rewards and Selfishness

Another problem some Christians have with the doctrine of rewards is that this doctrine seems to them to appeal to our "selfishness." Such Christian brothers may go on to say that we do not need to be motivated this way. Instead, we ought to do all that we do for God out of love and gratitude to Him.

This point of view, however, confronts a serious problem of its own. Not only is a doctrine of rewards taught in Scripture, but we are actually commanded to pursue them.

Thus Jesus said:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt 6:19-21).

We may observe here that our Lord does not present the pursuit of heavenly treasure as though it were optional. On the contrary, it is clear that He wants every disciple of His to lay up this celestial wealth.

The reason for this is also stated. Wherever our *treasure* happens to be, that's where our hearts will be focused. And God wants our hearts to be focused on heaven and that is why we are commanded to invest in heavenly rewards.

God knows better than we do what will captivate our hearts for Him. Evidently, rewards play a significant role in this.

It may sound pious for someone to say: "*I am not interested in rewards! I serve God out of love and gratitude alone!*" But such a person is claiming to be more loftily motivated than even the Apostle Paul himself! He wrote:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Cor 9:24-27).

Obviously Paul was not “running” to obtain his justification or his eternal salvation! Those things were already his by *grace alone*. It follows then that Paul is talking about the “reward”—the prize—that could be won by a person who ran a winning race.

Obviously, too, Paul is highly motivated by the thought of winning this prize. He dedicates himself to obtaining it with the same intense self-discipline that characterizes the superior athlete.

Those who disparage rewards as a powerful Christian motivation ought to read their NT again—this time, with their eyes open!

But is this motivation selfish? We believe that no motivation encouraged by the Lord Jesus and His Apostles could ever possibly be termed “selfish”!

What is wrong, in fact, is our own incorrect view of “selfishness.” Scripture does not teach us to be uninterested in our own happiness or well-being. The very desire to escape eternal damnation is a legitimate and urgent self-interest. The instinct to preserve our lives is the same. Nor are pleasure and enjoyment illegitimate experiences.

When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, He furnished them with “every tree . . . that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen 2:9). They could enjoy themselves freely provided they abstained from eating from the one forbidden tree. Similarly, Paul tells rich people that “God . . . gives us richly all things *to enjoy* (1 Tim 6:17; italics added).

Selfishness ought not to be defined simply as the pursuit of our own self-interest. Instead, it should be defined as the pursuit of our self-interest *in our own way*, rather than in God’s way. Since “love” is a preeminent virtue in Christianity, true selfishness often involves a pursuit of self-interest that violates the law of love.

But no one who seriously pursues heavenly treasure can afford to be unloving. As Paul pointed out in his great chapter on love, all seemingly spiritual and sacrificial activities are reduced to nothing in the absence of love (1 Cor 13:1-3). Loveless activity will no doubt go up in billows of smoke at the Judgment Seat of Christ as though it were so much wood, hay, or stubble (1 Cor 3:11-15).

No indeed! It is not selfish to obey God by pursuing eternal rewards. Still less can someone who does so afford to be selfish in nature. For if he is, he is forfeiting the very rewards he professes to seek.

No wonder that James censures his Christian readers for showing partiality toward the rich and neglecting the poor. In doing so they violate the “royal law” of Scripture: “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Jas 2:8).

A couple of verses later, James gives his fellow Christians the bottom line:

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.
For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.
Mercy triumphs over judgment (Jas 2:12-13).⁴

The doctrine of the Judgment Seat of Christ and of rewards is not merely *not* selfish. It is one of the strongest scriptural motivations for an *unselfish*, loving, and merciful lifestyle!

IV. Rewards and Other Motivations

It is not the point of this article to claim that rewards are the *only* motivation for godly living. Nor is it our point to claim that rewards are the *best* motivation. Our point is simply that rewards provide a valid and important biblical motivation for the Christian life.

But clearly there *are* other valid and important motivations for commitment to God. Let us mention some of these.

A. Love and Gratitude

Love and gratitude are indeed worthy motivations. Paul could write that “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Elsewhere Paul speaks of being constrained by the “love of Christ” to a life no longer lived for oneself but “for Him who died” for us “and rose again” (2 Cor 5:14-15). Obviously Paul found in the Cross a manifestation of love that was powerfully motivating to him. So of course should we.

The Apostle John likewise said: “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

B. Temporal Consequences of Sin

Another motivation for godly living is concern about the *temporal* consequences of sin. Although no failure can call a believer’s eternal

⁴James 2:12-13 contains a challenging concept. If we have been unmerciful people in our lifetime—harsh, censorious, unconcerned, unhelpful—at the Judgment Seat of Christ we can expect judgment “by the book” without that admixture of divine mercy which we will all urgently need. Mercy will *beat* (“triumph over”) judgment in the sense that the merciful person will get more credit than would be strictly due in a rigid, uncompromising review of his or her life. Which of us would not wish for this kind of “extra credit” when we stand before our Lord?

salvation into question, the believer's sin may have disastrous earthly consequences.

When Paul warns about immorality within the Christian community, he also warns about divine retribution for this. "The Lord," he says, "is the avenger of all such" (1 Thess 4:6). James, in turn, warns that sin can lead to physical death (Jas 1:14-15; 5:20), just as the OT frequently so warned (Prov 10:27; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14; 19:16).

The Lord Himself promises, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev 3:19).

Ananias and Sapphira, of course, were punished with immediate death for their lie in the midst of a Spirit-controlled church. Nothing in Acts 5:1-11 suggests that they were not saved. King David is the classic example of a born-again person who reaped the consequences of committing adultery and murder. Though forgiven for his sin (2 Sam 12:13), God nevertheless exacted a price from him. The child that Bathsheba had borne to him died (2 Sam 12:15-19). The subsequent rebellion of Absalom, with all its tragic ramifications, was another part of the divine chastening on David (2 Sam 12:11-12; see 16:20-23).

Forgiveness, of course, re-established David's fellowship with God. But it did not annul all temporal penalties for his grievous sin.⁵ We need to take this to heart. We can indeed confess our sins and be forgiven and restored to harmony with God (1 John 1:9). But this may not prevent such dire temporal consequences as loss of health, broken homes, disturbed children, and many other negative things.

Handled in a biblical way, this principle can be powerfully motivating.

C. Temporal Benefits of Righteous Living

But just as there are temporal *consequences* of sin, there are also

⁵ It is important to remember that forgiveness is not the remission of a penalty but the removal of estrangement between two parties. This is true whether we think on a human or a divine level. Forgiveness extended by the party who is wronged to the one who has wronged him is the same as saying that friendship, or harmony, or fellowship, is renewed.

When God extends His forgiveness to us, He restores us to fellowship with Himself (see 1 John 1:5-10). But as the case of David shows, He may allow us to reap severe consequences from what we have done wrong. I should not carelessly suppose that when I confess my sins to God, I have insulated myself from all the unfavorable consequences—even physical death—that my sinful behavior sets in motion.

For example, a believer may seek and find forgiveness for homosexual activity. But he may still contract AIDS and die.

temporal *benefits* from righteous living. These benefits can provide yet another motivation for a holy life.

For example, Paul declares that “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). Here he seems to be talking about our *present* experience of God’s kingdom (compare Col 1:13). Obviously, too, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) is made up of traits which are highly profitable to possess as we move through life. They are among the blessings of righteousness.

The Apostle Peter also directly addresses the matter of present benefits from godly living. He does so by drawing on Psalm 34 when he writes:

“He who would love life
And see good days,
Let him refrain his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking guile;
Let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil”
(1 Pet 3:10-12; Ps 34:12-16).

Peter clearly believed in the temporal benefits of righteous living (see 1 Pet 3:13-17 as well).

No doubt the list of biblical motivations for holiness could be extended further. For example, one could mention the challenge in 1 John to “abide” in Christ to avoid shame at His coming (1 John 2:28). But enough has been said to show that the NT is rich in motivational material. The doctrine of rewards is biblical. It is one excellent motivation to live well.

But it is not the only one.

V. Conclusion

Many people tend to downplay the role of rewards in Christian experience because they are looking for a simple answer to a complex question. There is a tendency to want to fix on *one motivation par excellence* as the crucial key to Christian living.

But careful study of the NT does not encourage so simplistic an approach. Man as created in God’s image, and fallen into sin, and then regenerated by God’s grace, is a highly *complex* entity. There are no easy answers as to how such a person may learn to live for God. We need

everything that God has been pleased to reveal about this process in the NT.

There are no one-line, “sound-bite” answers to this question. If we seek for such answers, we are chasing an illusion. Nothing will replace careful and detailed study of the many passages that bear on this subject.

But the study of the NT in detail does disclose one thing. It discloses that there is a biblical doctrine of rewards and that this doctrine surfaces in *many, many* passages both in the Gospels and in the Epistles.⁶

The failure to recognize this truth for what it is has caused many people to confuse it with the doctrine of salvation. But such a misconception serves only to collapse the basic NT distinction between grace and works. Among its worst effects is an error like Lordship Salvation.

But even many Christians who understand grace are confused by the doctrine of rewards because they try to make *everything* grace and eliminate “merit” of any kind from the Christian experience. But to indulge this kind of confusion is to rob oneself of a potent and spiritually energizing motivation to do God’s will.

Let us get ourselves back on track. Let us give to the doctrine of rewards the same high visibility that it has in the NT. Let us sense anew the dynamic power of this truth in the lives of great spiritual men, like Paul himself.

Let us listen again to the famous words he penned prior to his approaching death. Can anyone fail to see in them that the Apostle was inspired right to the end of his earthly career by the prospect of reward? He wrote thus:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Tim 4:7-8).

Clearly the Apostle Paul believed in rewards. That is a conviction we should all heartily share.

⁶ It is not the purpose of this article to discuss all these passages, or even the various kinds of rewards about which the Bible speaks. That is well beyond the scope of a brief presentation like this one. In fact this writer has written an entire book on the subject of rewards (*Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards*, 2nd edition [Dallas: Redención Viva, 1987]). For those interested in doing so, the subject may be pursued more fully there.

A RETURN TO ROME:

LORDSHIP SALVATION'S DOCTRINE OF FAITH

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I. Introduction

John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* has rekindled the debate long smoldering in Evangelical circles over Lordship Salvation.¹ At the center of this debate is the question of the nature of saving faith: whether it entails a response of the human will to the lordship of Christ. Dr. MacArthur has become the leading proponent of the Lordship position.

At the same time, however, he has taken the Lordship account of faith a significant step further. Traditionally, Lordship advocates have extended faith to include commitment, but not obedience, which for them is faith's sure fruit. But MacArthur, in a chapter entitled "The Nature of True Faith," repeatedly speaks of *obedience itself* as constitutive of faith.² For MacArthur good works are no longer merely the *product* of saving faith. They are an integral *part* of it.

This is a significant development. But it is also a serious departure from Evangelical Protestant doctrine. In fact, MacArthur's proposal is virtually an invitation to return to the Medieval Roman Catholic understanding of "formed faith" (*fides formata*), the very notion that Luther repeatedly attacked in his famous 1535 commentary on Galatians.

¹ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988). See the responses by Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989) and Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Grand Rapids and Dallas: Zondervan and Redención Viva, 1989). For the debate at an early stage, see Everett Harrison, "Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior?—No," *Eternity* 10 (September, 1959): 14, 16, 48, and John Stott, "Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior?—Yes," *Eternity* 10 (September, 1959): 15, 17-18, 36-38.

² *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 169-78.

II. MacArthur's Account of Faith

There is an initial ambiguity, if not contradiction, in MacArthur's account of faith.³ At times he describes the relationship between faith and works in the traditional terminology of cause and effect (works being the *effect* of saving faith). At other times he treats the relationship as one of a whole to its parts (works being a *part* of saving faith). But it is clearly the latter model that takes precedence for him.

MacArthur writes that faith "encompasses obedience,"⁴ and that obedience is "an integral part of saving faith."⁵ Indeed, obedience is bound up in the very "definition of faith,"⁶ being a constitutive element in "what it means to believe."⁷ Thus any "concept of faith that excludes obedience"⁸ must be rejected because obedience is "indivisibly wrapped up in the idea of believing."⁹ In fact, "the character of true faith" is nothing less than the "higher righteousness" of the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-11.¹⁰ MacArthur even suggests that obedience is "synonymous with" faith.¹¹ And he quotes with approval Rudolf Bultmann's dictum, "'To believe' is 'to obey.'"¹²

³ For the difficulty in interpreting MacArthur, see Darrell Bock, "A Review of *The Gospel According to Jesus*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (January-March, 1989), 21-49.

⁴ *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 173.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹² *Ibid.*, 176. The quotation is from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 6:205. Bultmann's account of faith, however, is not so much a result of his philological competence, as of his existentialism and his disenchantment with traditional religious institutions before and during World War II. It is not surprising that a similar account of faith is given by Bonhoeffer: "Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes . . . faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience" (*The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Macmillan, 1963], 69). A similar disenchantment lies behind contemporary performative theories of faith which define faith in terms of praxis. (See Avery Dulles, "The Meaning of Faith Considered in Relationship to Justice" in *The Faith that Does Justice*, Woodstock Studies 2 [New York: Paulist Press, 1977], 10-46). In this regard it is worth remembering that the overriding concern driving Lordship Salvation theology is an intense desire to reverse the trend toward spiritual complacency in the Church today. My own sense is that the psychological parallels here are extremely suggestive. The history of the Church is replete with examples of individuals whose *legitimate* concerns have had significant adverse effects on their theologies.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that when MacArthur invokes the traditional cause-and-effect model and says, for example, that faith “produces” obedience, this is the case only in a secondary sense, that is, only in the sense that faith already is *obedience*. Likewise, when he says that obedience is the “product” of faith, this too should be taken in a qualified sense. For as he plainly states, saving faith “embodies” righteous works.¹³ According to MacArthur, then, the works that follow faith are not, strictly speaking, its effects. They are rather the temporal manifestations or expressions of the obedience inherent in faith itself.

Of course, something like this has always been a central tenet of Lordship Salvation. Faith is defined in light of the lordship of Christ, a lordship that calls for obedience. It is just that MacArthur goes beyond the traditional account. For traditionally, obedience is said to be present in faith mediately, that is, by way of an act of personal submission or commitment, an inclining of the will in the direction of obedience.¹⁴ With MacArthur, however, it is present in the act of faith immediately: To believe is *to obey*.¹⁵

III. Scholasticism's Account of Faith

A number of criticisms from a number of directions have already been leveled against MacArthur's account of faith. Zane Hodges, for example, has made an *exegetical* case against it.¹⁶ Charles Ryrie, on the other hand, makes a *theological* one.¹⁷ And Darrell Bock has offered what might be called a *philosophical* critique—calling into question the coherence of MacArthur's presentation.¹⁸ But I would like to approach MacArthur's definition *from a history of ideas perspective*. For it seems to me that MacArthur has introduced into Lordship theology the old Roman Catholic doctrine of “formed faith.”

The Catholic notion of faith has as its source Augustine's illuminist

¹³ Ibid., 175.

¹⁴ Thus J. I. Packer in his foreword to *The Gospel According to Jesus* speaks of “transforming commitment to the living Christ” as the specific difference of saving faith. Packer is apparently unaware that MacArthur is saying something different from him.

¹⁵ This explains why MacArthur has found it necessary to supplement the traditional cause/effect language for describing the relationship of faith and obedience with the language of a whole and its parts.

¹⁶ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*

¹⁷ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*.

¹⁸ Bock, “Review.”

account. For Augustine faith is a species of knowledge. It is not knowing in the truest or fullest sense. But neither is it mere opinion. Rather, it is a sort of middle way, a knowing based on the authority of preached truth. Thus faith is a kind of assent: "to believe is to think with assent" (*credere est cum assensione cogitare*).¹⁹

Yet, for Augustine, faith as assent is not saving. It is the basis of Christian experience. But it is not sufficient in and of itself to bring one into saving union with Christ. That "cannot occur unless both hope and love are added."²⁰ Simple faith, then, if it is to be saving faith, must be augmented. For biblical support Augustine quotes Gal 5:6 which in its Latin translation suggests that there is a certain kind of "faith which works through love" (*fides quae per dilectionem operatur*).²¹

But Augustine's account of a faith augmented by love does more than simply remove the ostensive scandal of *credere est cum assensione cogitare*. It provides a handy means for reconciling James and Paul on the matter of justification by faith. Thus it soon found its way into the mainstream of the Pauline commentary tradition.²² Addressing passages like Rom 3:28, early commentators such as Rabanus Maurus, Sedulius Scotus, and Florus of Lyon, were unanimous that justification is according to Paul "by faith without works" (*per fidem sine operibus*). But they were also quick to point out the apparent contradiction of this by James for whom "faith without works is dead" and "a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."²³ Augustine's reading of Gal 5:6 was a way out. Strictly speaking, we are not justified by works, but by faith. But faith, if it is indeed saving faith, is joined to good works through love.

Through the Glossa Ordinaria²⁴ Augustine's account of faith was

¹⁹ *On the Predestination of the Saints*, 5.

²⁰ *Sermon*, 144.2 (*Migne's Patrologia Latina* [henceforth *MPL*] 38, col. 788).

²¹ *Sermon*, 2.8 (*MPL* 38, col. 32). In fairness to Augustine, the Latin translation he used added a relative pronoun (*quae*, which) and so suggests a closer relationship between faith and love than the original "faith working through love" (*pistis di' agapēs energoumenē*).

²² Thus Augustine's *Sermon* 2.8 is quoted in explanation of Rom 3:28 in Rabanus Maurus's *Enarrationum in epistolas Beati Pauli libri triginta* (*MPL* 111, col. 1344), in Sedulius Scotus's *Collectanea in omnes Beati Pauli epistolas* (*MPL* 103, col. 45) and Florus of Lyon's *Expositio in epistolas Beati Pauli* (*MPL* 119, col. 286). See the discussion in Charles Carlson, *Justification in Earlier Medieval Theology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

²³ The Latin for these expressions is *fidem sine operibus*, *fides sine operibus mortua est*, and *ex operibus justificatur homo et non ex fide tantum*.

²⁴ *MPL* 114, col. 481.

finally handed on to scholastic theologians. However, under the influence of Greek philosophy the scholastics reformulated Augustine's dictum in light of Aristotelian hylomorphism.²⁵ Accordingly, "faith that works through love" (*fides quae per dilectionem operatur*) was replaced by "faith formed by love" (*fides per caritatem formata*).²⁶ Peter Lombard, therefore, speaks of faith becoming effective (*virtus*) only when given shape (*informat*) by works of love.²⁷ Likewise, Bellarmine later writes that "faith does not justify as such, unless it be formed by love (*fides non justificat formaliter, nisi ab ipsa caritate formata*)."²⁸

In typical fashion, Thomas Aquinas explains:

The act of faith is ordered to the object of the will, which is the good, as to its end. But the good which is the end of faith, namely the divine good, is the proper object of love. Therefore love is said to be the form of faith (*forma fidei*) because through love the act of faith is perfected and given shape (*perficitur et formatur*).²⁹

The shift from *fides operatur* to *fides formata* is a subtle one. But it is by no means an insignificant one. For with faith thus conceived, works of love stop being simply the fruit of faith and become the form of it.³⁰ This means that Augustine's causal model of a faith that produces good works is replaced by Aquinas's model, where good works are involved in the very notion of faith as its *forma*, that by which it is what it is. In simpler terms, for the scholastics, works stopped being the *product* of faith and became an *integral part* of it.

But this is nothing other than John MacArthur's account of faith in medieval philosophical verbiage! Because for MacArthur faith no longer merely *produces* good works; it "includes," "encompasses," and "embodies" them. And obedience is no longer simply the *fruit* of a faith

²⁵ Hylomorphism is the teaching that corporeal beings consist of a combination of Aristotelian forms (Gk., *morphē*) and primordial matter (Gk., *hylē*). Ed.

²⁶ Luther would later complain: "And so [according to scholastic theology] love is the form of faith, and faith is merely the 'matter' of love. In this way they prefer love to faith and attribute righteousness, not to faith but to love. For that by virtue of which something is what it is [i.e., its form], is the same thing, only more so" (*Luther's Works* [henceforth *LW*], 26:269).

²⁷ *Libri IV Sententiarum*, III, 23, 9.

²⁸ *De Justificatione*, II, 4.

²⁹ *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 4, a. 3.

³⁰ Thus the Council of Trent condemns all who say that "works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof" (canon 21 on Justification).

that works through love (namely, commitment). It is "an integral part" of it, indivisibly wrapped up in its "definition," in its "concept," its "idea."³¹

IV. The Reformers' Account of Faith

It was in regard to the scholastic notion of faith, with its disjunction between faith as either "formed" or "unformed" that the Reformers proposed a third alternative.³² For Luther faith was not so much a way of knowing something as a way of relating to someone. He defined faith as *fiducia*, trust, and he disallowed altogether the distinction between *fides informis* and *fides formata*.

The following statements are from his mature lectures on Galatians given in 1531 (published in 1535), in which he repeatedly attacks the scholastic notion of *fides formata*. It is worth noting that he argues that both love and works must be excluded from the concept of faith:

They [the scholastics] say that we must believe in Christ and that faith is the foundation of salvation, but they say that this faith does not justify unless it is "formed by love." This is not the truth of the Gospel; it is falsehood and pretense. The true Gospel, however, is this: Works or love are not the ornament or perfection of faith; but faith itself is a gift of God, a work of God in our hearts, which justifies us because it takes hold of Christ as the Savior . . . Therefore what the scholastics have taught about justifying faith "formed by love" is an empty dream. For the faith that takes hold of Christ, the Son of God, and is adorned by Him is the faith that justifies, not a faith that includes love.³³

³¹ I would also argue that Lordship theology does much more than simply end up (à la MacArthur) with a scholastic notion of faith. It actually recapitulates the whole medieval process from *credere est cum assensione cogitare* to *fides quae per dilectionem operatur* to *fides per caritatem formata*. In both cases (Roman Catholic theology and Lordship theology) the initial assumption is that faith by itself is mere assent and must therefore be augmented (either by love or commitment), and in both cases a faith productive of good works eventually becomes a faith somehow constituted by them.

³² Echoing Luther's critique of scholasticism, Harnack writes: "Faith is either *fides informis*, therefore not yet faith, or *fides formata*, therefore no longer faith. In fact *fiducia* can find no place." (*Outlines of the History of Dogma* [New York: Funk and Wagnall Company, 1893], 494).

³³ *LW*, 26:88. And in his comments on Gal 2:20, Luther states explicitly that it is not love but Christ that is the *forma* or perfection of our faith (see note 39 below).

Luther is adamant that unadorned faith saves, that is,

faith in Christ, without the Law or works. The blind sophists [Luther's favorite term for scholastic theologians] do not understand this. Therefore they dream that faith does not justify unless it does the works of love. In this way faith that believes in Christ becomes idle and useless, for it is deprived of the power to justify unless it has been "formed by love." But you set the Law and love aside until another place and time; and you direct your attention to the point at issue here, namely, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dies on the cross and bears my sin.³⁴

And he later adds:

Paul clearly refutes the gloss made up by the sophists about a "formed faith," and, putting the Law aside, he speaks only about faith. Once the Law has been put aside, love is also put aside, as well as everything that belongs to the Law; all that is kept is faith, which justifies and makes alive.³⁵

Consider also the following comment concerning Abraham's faith in Luther's 1538 lectures on Genesis:

Then what? Is the Law useless for righteousness? Yes, certainly. But does faith alone, without works, justify? Yes, certainly. Otherwise you must repudiate Moses, who declares that Abraham is righteous prior to the Law and prior to the works of the Law, not because he sacrificed his son, who had not yet been born, and not because he did this or that work, but because he believed God who gave him a promise. In this passage no mention is made of any preparation for grace, of any faith formed by works, or of any preceding disposition. This, however, is mentioned: that at that time Abraham was in the midst of sins, doubts, and fears, and was exceedingly troubled in spirit. How, then, did he obtain righteousness? In this way: God speaks and Abraham believes what God is saying.³⁶

To be sure, the faith Luther envisions produces a union with Christ that bears fruit in good works. On this point he could not have been clearer—he had to be, because his Roman adversaries repeatedly accused him of holding to something that from their perspective seemed to be

³⁴ Ibid., 160.

³⁵ Ibid., 271.

³⁶ LW, 3:20-21.

mere intellectual assent (what they termed *fides informis*) as the basis for justification. At the same time, however, he was equally clear, as the above texts make plain, that a firm distinction is at all times to be maintained between faith as *productive* of good works and faith as somehow *constituted* by them.

On this point Calvin was also clear. Commenting on Rom 3:28, he writes:

Paul states his main proposition as being now incontrovertible, and adds an explanation, for when works are expressly excluded, much light is thrown on justification by faith. For this reason our opponents spend their greatest efforts in their attempts to involve faith in the merits of works. They allow indeed that man is justified by faith, but not by faith alone. In fact, they bestow on love the power of justification, though in what they say they ascribe it to faith.³⁷

Of course, the way his Roman contemporaries placed the power of justification in love while at the same time attributing it to faith was by way of "faith formed by love."

In terms of the present discussion it might be said that in repudiating the medieval account of formed faith the Reformers repudiated any account of faith and works where the latter is an aspect of the former. Works may evidence faith, works may be an effect of faith, but works are not a part of it.³⁸ And for that matter, neither is love. Faith,

³⁷ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 8:79.

³⁸ In an appendix to *The Gospel According to Jesus*, MacArthur quotes extensively from the Protestant tradition in an attempt to show historic support of his position. However, a close reading of texts from Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin reveals that they have no concept of a faith of which works are an integral part, but only of a faith of which works are either directly or indirectly the fruit. Thus (in the texts quoted) Luther speaks of works that "flow out" of faith, that "blossom forth" from faith, and are caused by faith as heat and light are caused by fire. As for Calvin, he only indirectly links faith and works. For him it is not faith but the presence of Christ and the Spirit in the believer's life that produces works. In some of the *later* Reformed authors quoted, however, faith and works *do* coalesce. But they do so only mediately, that is, only through an act of commitment or surrender that is somehow present in faith. For an insightful study of the shift in the definition of faith in late Reformed theology, see Tom Lewellen, "Has Lordship Salvation Been Taught throughout Church History?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (January-March, 1990), 54-68. At any rate, in the texts quoted in this appendix MacArthur's part/whole model is *nowhere* to be found.

understood not as a kind of assent but as personal trust, did not need to be “formed” or brought to completion either by love or by obedience. It was complete as it stood. For by it and it alone one was brought into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.³⁹

V. Conclusion

The relationship between faith and works has always been a problem for theologians. This is not likely to change any time soon. But, while attempts to give a consistent account of all the relevant biblical material have always left questions, Evangelicals have historically maintained that justification is by faith alone and that works are best understood as the fruit of faith. There is no doubt that John MacArthur would affirm the first part of this (justification by faith alone). But he has clearly departed from the second (works understood as simply the fruit of faith). In so doing, however, he has redefined faith so that he does not mean by “faith alone” what traditionally has been intended. Ironically—and tragically—he appears to mean the very thing that the Reformers originally rejected.

³⁹ Luther writes: “Christ is my ‘form’ which adorns my faith” (*LW* 26:167).

CHRISTIANS WHO LOSE THEIR LEGACY:

GALATIANS 5:21

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I. Introduction

On three occasions (1 Cor 6:9-11, Gal 5:19-21, and Eph 5:5-7) the Apostle Paul listed various vices and then said that people who live like that “will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Galatians 5:19-21 has been selected as the representative text for this study. It reads:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

For the Arminian exegete these verses create no difficulty. Paul is viewed as threatening his believing readers with loss of salvation if they fail to persevere in a godly lifestyle.

For the exegete who believes in eternal security, however, these verses seem to present a problem. If loss of *salvation* is not being threatened, what *is*?

Four options have been proposed: the Reformed Perseverance View, the Worthy Walk View, the Present Rewards View, and the Future Rewards View.

We will begin with a brief presentation of these four views.

II. Four Views Which Uphold Eternal Security

The following views all eliminate the apparent problem in Gal 5:21.

A. The Reformed Perseverance View

Most Reformed exegetes argue that Paul’s warning concerned false

professors, not genuine believers.¹ They suggest that Paul was warning believers, including both true and false professors, that if they live characteristically sinful lives they will prove to be false professors and hence will not enter God's kingdom.

According to this view true believers will certainly persevere in the faith. God guarantees this. Since those who fail to persevere never had genuine faith and thus were never saved in the first place, they obviously cannot be said to have lost their salvation.

B. The Worthy Walk View

I first heard this view articulated in an eschatology course by Dr. Craig Glickman, one of my professors at Dallas Theological Seminary. I have since discovered several others who also advocate this interpretation.²

This view is similar to the Reformed Perseverance View in two ways. Both suggest that *inheriting* the kingdom actually refers to *entering* the kingdom and that those who fail to inherit the kingdom are unbelievers.

However, this position is also different from the Reformed Perseverance View. It does not believe that Paul is addressing this passage to both true and false professors. Rather, only true believers are in view. In addition, Paul is seen to be exhorting true believers not to indulge in the vices listed. Genuine Christians are viewed as capable of practicing as a habit of life the various sins listed (cf. 1 Cor 3:3).

According to this view Paul was calling genuine believers to live in a manner worthy of their high calling as children of God (cf. Eph 4:1, 16; 5:5-7). Paul's point is that it doesn't make sense for believers, those who will inherit the kingdom, to live like the unrighteous (i.e., unbelievers) who will not inherit the kingdom.

¹Representatives of this view include John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), 213-30; Walter J. Chantry, *God's Righteous Kingdom* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 89-98; D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 170-90; Frank Stagg, *Polarities of Man's Existence in Biblical Perspective* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 172-73; John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 162-63.

²See William L. Pettingill, *By Grace Through Faith Plus Nothing* (Findlay, OH: Fundamental Truth Publishers, 1938), 90-91; Bob Yandian, *Galatians: The Spirit-Controlled Life* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1985), 230-32; J. Eric Binion, "Paul's Concept of Inheritance" (unpublished Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1987).

This view sees no explicit warning in these texts. Rather, it sees an appeal to holiness based on reason and responsibility.

C. The Present Rewards View

According to this view inheriting the kingdom refers in Paul's vice lists to inheriting present blessings associated with the present aspect of the kingdom of God.³ The warning is thus seen as temporal in nature: unfaithful believers will be miserable.

The Present Rewards View thus solves the apparent difficulty by suggesting that inheriting the kingdom is not the same as entering the kingdom.

D. The Future Rewards View

This view is similar to the Present Rewards View in that it too suggests that inheriting the kingdom refers to obtaining rewards, not to entering the kingdom. However, it differs in that it sees inheriting the kingdom as referring to future, not present, rewards.

According to this view inheriting the kingdom in Paul's writings refers to future possession of and rulership in the kingdom.⁴ Believers whose Christian lives prove to have been characterized by the fruit of the Spirit will possess the kingdom and reign in it as members of the King of kings' world government. However, believers whose Christian lives prove to have been characterized by the deeds of the flesh will neither have possession of nor rulership in the coming kingdom, although they will be citizens in it.

³ See R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 121-34; Manford G. Gutzke, *Plain Talk on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 138.

⁴ Representatives of this view include Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse: A Study in Eternal Rewards*, Second Edition (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1987), 76-77ff.; Charles Deveau, "The New Testament Concept of Eternal Inheritance" (unpublished Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979); Harry Ashe Lane, "Paul's Use of the Root *Klērōnomēō* in Relationship to the Believer's Inheritance in the Eternal Kingdom" (unpublished Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978); G. H. Lang, *Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks*, Reprint Edition (Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle Publishing Co., 1984; first published in 1936), 112-16; Robert Govett, *Govett on Galatians*, Reprint Edition (Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle Publishing Co., 1981; first published in 1872), 196-200.

III. Deficiencies of the Perseverance, Worthy Walk, and Present Rewards Views

In determining which view of a given passage is correct, it is helpful to eliminate any view which does not fit the context, or which does not harmonize with other clear teachings of Scripture. For example, the Arminian understanding of our passage was eliminated because it involved the rejection of eternal security—a doctrine which is unmistakably biblical (John 5:24; 6:35-40; 10:27-30; Rom 8:38-39).

I believe that the first three views mentioned above, the Reformed Perseverance, Worthy Walk, and Present Rewards Views, all can be eliminated on the basis of the context and the clear teaching of Scripture.

A. The Reformed Perseverance View

A number of major difficulties attend this view.⁵

First, eternal salvation is *not* conditioned elsewhere in Scripture upon persevering in good works. Believing in Christ as one's Savior is the sole condition given (John 3:16; 4:10ff; 5:24; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). A number of passages specifically indicate that eternal salvation is not of works (Rom 4:1-5; Eph 2:9; Titus 3:5).

Second, there are clear examples in Scripture of genuine believers who did *not* persevere in good works, but who instead walked in the flesh. Solomon ended his life as an idolator (1 Kings 11). Many of the believers in Corinth, although five years old as Christians, were still carnal and fleshly—yet they are called babes *in Christ* (1 Cor 3:1-3). One believer at Corinth was actually living in immorality with his stepmother and was brazenly unrepentant (1 Cor 5:5). A number of believers in Corinth were sick, and some had already died, as a result of their selfish and drunken disregard for the sacredness of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:30). Demas, whom Paul at least twice referred to as his co-laborer in Christ's service (Col 4:14; Phlm 24), later is said by Paul to have "forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim 4:10). Likewise James refers to the need to turn back fellow believers who have wandered from the truth (Jas 5:19-20).

Third, the Book of Galatians is addressed to genuine believers (Gal 1:8-9) and there is no indication in the context of chapter five that *unbelievers* are being warned. In fact, exactly the opposite is true. In 5:13

⁵ For further discussion see Robert N. Wilkin, "An Exegetical Evaluation of the Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints," unpublished Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1982.

Paul refers to those addressed in 5:13-26 as *brethren*. Furthermore, in 6:1 Paul again refers to those being warned as *brethren*, and he gives instructions for the spiritual among them to restore those who become ensnared by the deeds of the flesh.

Fourth, the immediate context explicitly rejects the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Rather than affirming that all true believers will walk in the Spirit, Paul commands the believers at the churches of Galatia to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Such an admonition would be misplaced if addressed to an unbeliever since it is impossible for those devoid of the Holy Spirit to walk in the Spirit. Clearly in this passage Paul is saying that it is possible for genuine believers to walk in the flesh and practice the sins mentioned in the vice list (cf. vv 16, 17, 21, 25, 26).

Fifth, these verses are clearly ethical in nature and look to a future judgment according to one's works. John M. G. Barclay writes:

One major problem with this interpretation [the Reformed perseverance interpretation] is in coming to terms with Paul's specific comments about judgment on the basis of works (see e.g., Gal 5:21; 6:7-9).⁶

Although not commenting on the Reformed understanding of this passage, Sadler echoes the same sentiment: "This is one of those numerous places which assure us that the judgment hereafter will be according to works."⁷

The interpreter who does not distinguish between eternal salvation and eternal rewards is forced to see all of the Judgment Seat of Christ passages as referring to some sort of final judgment for believers to determine who gets into the kingdom. Whether the interpreter is Arminian or Reformed, he views good works as a condition of kingdom entrance.

There is, of course, no final judgment to determine who gets into the kingdom and who does not. The Judgment Seat of Christ is for believers only and it concerns rewards, not kingdom entrance (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10). The Great White Throne Judgment is for *unbelievers only*—people already condemned according to John 3:18: "he who does not believe is *condemned already*"—and it concerns degrees of punishment in hell, not kingdom entrance (cf. Matt 10:15; 11:21-24; Rev 20:13).

⁶ John M. G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 32.

⁷ M. F. Sadler, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902), 101.

Sixth, this interpretation eliminates something which the Scriptures clearly affirm, namely, assurance of salvation. If the Reformed Perseverance View were correct, one would never know for sure until he died if he was saved because it would always be possible that tomorrow his works might cross the line and become sinful enough to disqualify him from kingdom entrance. Indeed, under such a system one couldn't even be sure *today* that his works were good enough to qualify him to enter the kingdom.

Seventh, this view produces a works-salvation mentality. Once a person begins to think that he must persevere in the faith in order to enter the kingdom, he then believes that eternal salvation is conditioned upon his works, not on his faith only.

For these reasons I find the Reformed Perseverance View to be wholly untenable.

B. The Worthy Walk View

This was the view I held when I wrote my master's thesis.⁸ I have since come, however, to believe that it is not likely that Paul had this idea in mind.

The major weakness of this view is that there is nothing in the context to suggest that "those who do such things" refers to unbelievers. Indeed, as mentioned above, just the opposite is true. The context suggests that it is the Galatian believers (and by application all believers) who are in danger of losing their legacy.

Secondly, this view eliminates any explicit warning. Why would Paul fail to say in context what the believer who walked in the flesh will lose? In a parallel section in the next chapter (Gal 6:6-10), Paul states that those who sow to the flesh *will reap corruption*.⁹

For these reasons I feel the Worthy Walk View is most likely not the meaning which Paul intended.

C. The Present Rewards View

It is true that there is a sense in which the kingdom of God is already present. We already are citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20) and are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6). So, there could be a sense

⁸ See footnote 5.

⁹ The warning in Gal 6:8 regarding reaping corruption concerns a failure to lay up eternal rewards. See the discussion below under Gal 6:7-9 for a defense of this conclusion.

in which inheriting the kingdom *could* refer to some present experience of the kingdom.

However, there are no other NT examples where inheriting the kingdom is used in this way.

More telling still is the fact that in Paul's only use of this expression outside of the three vice lists it clearly has an eschatological reference. According to Paul in 1 Cor 15:50, in order to inherit the kingdom one must first be resurrected from the dead.

This view is thus very unlikely.

IV. Strengths of the Future Rewards View

Even though the other views have been shown to be unlikely, it yet remains to be demonstrated that the Future Rewards View was Paul's intended meaning.

There are a number of compelling reasons which have led me to adopt this interpretation.

A. The Other Views' Weaknesses Are This View's Strengths

The Future Rewards View answers all of the objections raised under the preceding views.

It does not suggest that persevering in good works is a condition of eternal salvation in addition to believing in Christ.

It has no difficulty with the many examples in Scripture of genuine believers who walked in the flesh.

It sees those being addressed as genuine believers, as the context clearly shows.

It has no argument with the fact that the context acknowledges the possibility that genuine believers might walk in the flesh.

It is completely compatible with the ethical nature of the passage and the fact that judgment according to one's works is in view.

It does not eliminate assurance of salvation.

It does not produce a works-salvation mentality.

It is in harmony with the eschatological aspect of the expression found in 1 Cor 15:50. (Indeed, as shall be shown later, that text offers compelling support for this view.)

And, it does find in the passage a clear warning to believers.

All of these points are compelling evidence that this view is the one intended by Paul.

In addition, there are several other strengths of this view.

B. The "X Approach" Suggests This View

If one could force himself to look at this passage without prejudice, I am convinced that he would almost certainly come to the Future Rewards View.

Many people mistakenly assume that the expression *inheriting the kingdom* refers to getting into the kingdom. This, of course, eliminates the Future Rewards View since it does not understand that expression in that way.

One way I have found to help people consider that the expression may refer to something other than kingdom entrance is to invoke what I call the "X approach." The X approach involves the placement of an X in place of the expression in question. Thus in Gal 5:21 we would read, "those who practice such things will not X."

To what would we expect X to refer? In light of Paul's other writings, we would expect something like "*will not be approved*" or "*will not rule with Christ*."

Consider other passages in Paul's writings in which he warns believers of the consequences of walking in the flesh.

The Apostle Paul was concerned (and wanted all believers to share his concern) that he might fail to fight the good fight and finish the course with the result that he would be *disapproved* (1 Cor 9:27).

Paul told Timothy that in order to be *approved* workers, believers must be diligent in their study and application of the Word of God (2 Tim 2:15).

The Apostle Paul did not know until the very end of his life, and then evidently only because of divine revelation,¹⁰ that he would *receive the crown of righteousness* which is reserved for those believers who have loved His appearing (2 Tim 4:7-8).

If believers fail to endure in the faith (the Apostle Paul included himself as a possible failure), then they will lose *the privilege of ruling with Christ* (2 Tim 2:12), even though their eternal salvation is unaffected (2 Tim 2:11, 13).¹¹

Likewise, if believers' works are burned up, *they will suffer loss*, but they themselves will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor 3:15).

¹⁰ In other places Paul indicates that believers can't know before the Judgment Seat of Christ what the outcome of that judgment will be (1 Cor 4:1-5; 2 Tim 2:12).

¹¹ See Brad McCoy, "Secure Yet Scrutinized," *JOTGES* 1 (Autumn 1988), 21-33.

Paul taught that all believers will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ where their works—whether good *or bad* (i.e., the sort of works Paul lists in Gal 5:19-21)—will be judged and where they will be *recompensed accordingly* (2 Cor 5:10).

There is no passage in Paul's writings in which he says that believers who walk in the flesh will fail to enter the kingdom. There are, however, as we have just seen, a host of passages in which Paul links future rewards with walking in the Spirit.

The X approach strongly suggests, indeed demands, that this passage is talking about kingdom rewards, not kingdom entrance.

C. First Corinthians 15:50

As mentioned above, this is Paul's only use of our expression outside of the three vice lists. As such, it should be very instructive.

Here Paul said that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Paul is defending the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the dead in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. In v 50 he is reminding believers that only those with resurrected bodies can inherit the kingdom of God.

For those of us who believe that there will be people with un-resurrected bodies who take part in the kingdom, Paul must be talking about something other than kingdom entrance.

In the Millennial Kingdom there will be children born (Isa 65:20-23). And since people with resurrected bodies cannot have children according to our Lord's teachings (Matt 22:30), that demands that people with natural bodies must be in the kingdom.

Likewise, we know that no one with a resurrected body will sin (1 John 3:2). Yet at the end of the Millennium there will be many people who take part in a rebellion against Christ led by Satan (Rev 20:7-10). Only people with natural bodies could possibly rebel against the King of kings.

Paul's point in 1 Cor 15:50 is that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then the Corinthians could not hope to rule with Christ in His coming kingdom—something which they clearly desired (cf. 1 Cor 4:8; 6:3).

First Corinthians 15:50 refutes any view which understands inheriting the kingdom as merely getting in. On the other hand, it supports well the Future Rewards View.

D. The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are teachings of the Lord to believers about the rewards which will come to those whose attitudes and actions are pleasing to Him.

Each beatitude begins with a promise of blessing—a rewards concept.

The final beatitude explicitly states that there will be great *rewards* for those believers who persevere in the face of persecution.

Three of the beatitudes use expressions which are almost certainly synonymous with inheriting the kingdom. In vv 3 and 10 the Lord promises that those who are poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake will receive the kingdom of heaven ("for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"). And, in v 5 the Lord says that the meek "shall inherit the earth."

Receiving the kingdom of heaven in this context is a rewards concept. This is easily seen by comparing vv 10 and 12. Verse 10 says that those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake *will receive the kingdom of heaven*. Verse 12 says that those who are persecuted for Christ's sake should "rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *your reward in heaven*." Receiving the kingdom of heaven is parallel to receiving great reward in heaven just as persevering under persecution for righteousness' sake is parallel to persevering under persecution for Christ's sake.

Of course, eternal salvation cannot be in view here since it is not a reward for holding up under persecution.¹² It is a free gift (John 4:10ff; Rom 3:24; Eph 2:9; Rev 22:17).

Receiving the kingdom in this passage thus refers to some reward. In light of other passages, rulership and its attendant privileges and responsibilities must be in view. All believers will be in the kingdom; however, only faithful believers will rule and possess it (Luke 19:11-27; Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12).

Since *inheriting the earth* is a synonymous expression to *receiving the kingdom*, it too refers here to ruling and possessing the kingdom. After all, the kingdom will take place on earth (cf. Rev 20-22). To receive the kingdom is to inherit the earth. Those who are meek will be co-heirs

¹²In the early Church the teaching circulated that one sure way of getting into the kingdom was to die a martyr's death. As a result some people actually went out of their way to be martyred for the Church. They viewed it a small price to pay for eternal salvation. Unfortunately, their faith was little different from that of the kamikaze pilots of WW II. Whether Buddhist or "Christian," it is a grave mistake to trust in one's works for eternal salvation.

with Christ and will share in kingdom rule and glory.¹³

The Lord Himself is a perfect illustration of the truth of the beatitudes. He was meek and poor in spirit, and He willingly accepted persecution for righteousness' sake. As a result He Himself will inherit the earth and receive the kingdom. In Ps 2:8 God the Father says, "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession." Quite probably the author of Hebrews had this in mind when he spoke of the Lord Jesus, "who for the joy [of reigning] set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2; see Heb 1:8-9).

Believers who faithfully serve Christ can enter into His inheritance and become His co-heirs (Luke 19:11-27).

The Beatitudes add strong support to the Future Rewards View of inheriting the kingdom.

E. Galatians 6:7-9

Galatians 5:19-23 and 6:7-9 are talking about the same subject: walking in the Spirit versus walking in the flesh. It would thus be very helpful to consider Gal 6:7-9, since it is a parallel passage within the same book and even the same subsection of the book.

Galatians 6:8 says that he who sows to the flesh will reap *corruption*. The expression *will reap corruption* in 6:8 is parallel to *not inheriting the kingdom* in 5:21. If we can determine what *corruption* means, we necessarily also determine what the expression *will not inherit the kingdom* means as well.

Corruption (*phthora*) refers to "ruin, destruction, dissolution, deterioration, [or] corruption."¹⁴ It could refer to many types of ruin, corruption, etc.

Many commentators understand *phthora* in Gal 6:8 to refer to eternal destruction, being influenced by the later statement that those who sow to the Spirit will reap eternal life.¹⁵

¹³ See the discussion concerning Gal 6:8 (s.v. Gal 6:7-9) and Matt 19:29 (s.v. The Rich Young Ruler) below. Inheriting the earth in Matt 5:5 is parallel to inheriting eternal life in Matt 19:29 and reaping eternal life in Gal 6:8 (which in turn is parallel to inheriting the kingdom in Gal 5:21). See also footnote 22.

¹⁴ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed., 1979), 858.

¹⁵ See, for example, Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), 218-20; Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Minneapolis, MN: The James Family Christian Publishers, 1978), 146; Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 858.

However, many other commentators, including some who believe in the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, understand *phthora* in Gal 6:8 as referring to *temporal* decay and loss. John F. MacArthur, Jr., for example, writes,

The word "corruption" means decay and death. When the person sows to the flesh he reaps death and decay.

Keep in mind that this is a general principle. The Christian who sows to the flesh will reap corruption, erosion of the joy and the peace that he has with Christ. The unsaved person who continues to sow in the flesh all his life, reaps spiritual (present) and eternal (ultimate) death. . . .

Here I'm seeing eternal life in a qualitative aspect, not quantitative. Eternal life is a matter of quality not quantity.

Some of the most absolutely wretched, miserable people I have ever met are people with eternal life. Because of sin they have forfeited the qualitative joys and blessings and the riches of their eternal life. I am not saying they forfeit eternal life. What I am saying is that they forfeit the joy and the peace and the blessing that come when one is sowing to the Spirit. This often happens to Christians who fall from living by the grace principle.¹⁶

Similarly Copley says,

If you support carnal institutions, you will not reap damnation, or separation from God; but you will reap corruption. The teaching you support corrupts, defiles, disintegrates, instead of feeding and building up. You will be "saved as by fire," but your works burned.¹⁷

Likewise Donald Campbell writes,

If a person sows to please his sinful nature, that is, if he spends his money to indulge the flesh, he will reap a harvest that will fade into oblivion. On the other hand, if he uses his funds to support the Lord's work, or sows to please the Spirit, and promotes his own spiritual growth, he will reap a harvest that will last forever.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Liberated for Life: Galatians* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976), 126. Note that MacArthur understands "reaping eternal life" in 6:8 as referring, not to getting into the kingdom, but to obtaining joy and peace and blessings.

¹⁷ A. S. Copley, *The Liberty of the Sons of God: Lessons on Galatians* (Kansas City, MO: Grace and Glory, n.d.), 90.

¹⁸ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT Edition, s.v. "Galatians" (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 610.

Finally, F. F. Bruce sees in Gal 6:8 a clear parallel with 2 Cor 5:10:

The eternal life is the resurrection life of Christ, mediated to believers by 'the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead' (Rom 8:11). . . But its future aspect, with their appearance before the tribunal of Christ, to "receive good or evil, according to the deeds done in the body" (2 Cor 5:10), is specially implied here. Any one who did not seriously believe in such a coming assessment, or thought that the law of sowing and reaping could safely be ignored, would indeed be treating God with contempt.¹⁹

As these and other commentators²⁰ note, these verses are dealing with something which believers reap for work done. Eternal salvation is not a reward for work done. Rather, it is a free gift.

Since the expression *will reap corruption* in Gal 6:8 refers to loss of eternal treasure (and possibly as well to loss of present joy), the parallel expression *will not inherit the kingdom* in 5:21 conveys the same sense.

Galatians 6:7-9 thus supports the Future Rewards view.

F. The Rich Young Ruler

The rich young ruler asked the Lord Jesus what he must do to *inherit eternal life* (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18).²¹ Based on the ensuing discussion it is clear that by the expression *inherit eternal life* he meant *get into the kingdom of God*.

Even though the rich young ruler was using our expression²² to refer

¹⁹ *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 265.

²⁰ See also, Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 114. Commenting on Gal 6:8 he writes: "And while he already possesses eternal life, there is a sense in which the spiritually minded man will one day have a fuller realization of eternal life, will 'reap life everlasting.'"

²¹ Matthew has "what good thing must I do that I may have (echo) eternal life?" (Matt 19:16).

²² While the expression *inheriting the kingdom* does not specifically appear in this passage, the related expression *inheriting eternal life* does. If there is any difference in meaning between those two expressions, the difference is not great enough to rule this passage out as a valid test of one's view of inheriting the kingdom.

(In private conversation Zane Hodges suggested that there is a slight difference between the two expressions. He feels that the former refers to rulership in the kingdom and that it requires enduring in the faith until the end of one's life [2 Tim 2:12]. He believes that the latter expression concerns how full and

to getting into the kingdom, not to obtaining rewards in it, there is good reason to believe that the Lord wanted His listeners to understand it in the rewards sense.

Often overlooked in the analysis of this pericope is the promise the Lord made to the rich young ruler. He promised him *treasure in heaven* (not kingdom entrance!)²³ if he sold all that he had and gave the proceeds to the poor (Matt 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). Heavenly treasure is a reward, not a metaphor for eternal salvation (cf. Matt 6:19-21).

Also often missed is the significance of the disciples' follow-up question and Jesus' response. Peter, speaking for the twelve, said, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore, what shall we have?"

The Lord's response again concerns eternal rewards, not kingdom entrance. Peter and the other disciples, excluding Judas Iscariot, had already been guaranteed kingdom entrance by the Lord (cf. Luke 10:20). Now the Lord promises them something more: "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28).

Ruling with Christ is not guaranteed to all believers. Rather, it is a reward which will be given only to those believers who are faithful to Christ until the rapture or their death (Luke 19:11-27; Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-27; 3:21).

The Lord continued His response by saying that anyone who has left family, home, and lands for His sake will receive rewards here and now and will "inherit eternal life" (Matt 19:29; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 18:29-30). While some understand *inheriting eternal life* here to be a reference to eternal salvation, that is not a plausible interpretation. As we have already noted under Gal 6:7-9 above, even some of those who believe in the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints understand

abundant one's eternal experience will be [see the discussion above under Gal 6:8] and that, he suggests, is not identical to rulership in the kingdom. Indeed, he suggests that inheriting eternal life does not require lifelong endurance in the faith. In light of Matt 19:29 he feels that any sacrifice for Christ's sake will result in a heightened eternal experience.)

²³The Lord knew this man well. He knew that he would only do such a thing if he believed that He was the Christ, the Savior of the world. Only on such a One's authority would he give up all his earthly treasure. And, if he believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior of the world, then kingdom entrance would have been guaranteed him (John 11:25-27; 20:31). Of course, this promise was not limited to the rich young ruler. Any believer who makes a sacrifice for God will be rewarded eternally (see, for example, Matt 6:19-21; 19:29; Gal 6:6-10).

reaping eternal life for work done as a reference to eternal rewards. The faithful believer will experience eternal life in a fuller sense. He will have a more abundant eternal experience.

Eternal salvation is not a reward for service performed. It is a free gift received by faith alone.²⁴ Eternal rewards, on the other hand, *are* a reward for faithful service, as this passage shows.

The accounts of the rich young ruler thus confirm the Future Rewards interpretation of Gal 5:19-21.

V. Conclusion

Paul told the believers in Galatia that if their manner of life was characterized by walking in the flesh then they would not inherit the kingdom of God.

This article has suggested that inheriting the kingdom in Gal 5:21 (and in the parallels in 1 Corinthians 6 and Ephesians 5) refers to obtaining eternal rewards. Particularly, the Lord's approval and ruling with Him were found to be in view.

I have personally found this to be a very challenging passage. I enjoy serving Christ now. I strongly desire to serve Him as much as is possible in the kingdom. I very much want my Lord's approval, as well as the attendant privilege of ruling with Him.

This motivates me daily to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Him. It motivates me to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

Walking in the flesh, though appealing to our old nature (Gal 5:17; Heb 11:25), is very unappealing for a number of reasons.²⁵ One of those reasons is that to do so results in *losing our legacy*.

Christians can't lose their salvation. However, they can lose their reward. The ultimate inheritance is the kingdom itself. Oh, that we might be numbered among those who are found worthy to inherit it! That is a legacy worth living—and even dying—for.

²⁴ The account of the rich young ruler in Luke follows the famous parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The only recorded reference to justification on the lips of Jesus is found there. The self-righteous religious man did not go away justified. Rather, it was the sinner who beat his breast and cried out to God for mercy who was declared righteous. The rich young ruler pericope is set against this background. Clearly the rich young ruler is identified with the Pharisee who thought that he was better than common sinners and who felt that he deserved kingdom entrance on the basis of his good deeds.

No one can inherit (Matt 19:29) or reap (Gal 6:8) eternal life on the basis of work done who has not first received eternal life as a free gift (Luke 18:9-14; 15-17, 18-27).

²⁵ See Zane Hodges's article, "We Believe In: Rewards," in this issue, 8-10.

A Voice from the Past:

THE KNOWLEDGE OF SALVATION*

GEORGE CUTTING¹

Before you turn to the verse which I shall ask you very carefully to look at, which speaks of *how* a believer is to *know* that he has eternal life, let me quote it in the distorted way that man's imagination often puts it:

These happy feelings I have given to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

Now, open your Bible, and while you compare this with God's blessed and unchanging Word, may He give you from your very heart to say with David: "*I hate* the double-minded, but *I love Your law*" (Ps 119:113). This verse just misquoted is the thirteenth verse of the fifth chapter of the First Epistle of John, and reads thus in our version:²

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* [emphasis supplied].

How did the firstborn sons of the thousands of Israel know for certain that they were safe the night of the Passover and Egypt's judgment?

Let us take a visit to two of their houses and hear what they have to say.

We find in the first house we enter that they are all shivering with fear and suspense.

* This excerpt is from the well-known and widely blessed Gospel booklet "Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment." The complete booklet is available from Back to the Bible of Lincoln, Nebraska, and from Good New Publishers of Wheaton, Illinois.

¹ George Cutting (1843-1934) also wrote the Gospel booklet, "Light for Anxious Souls."

² The Bible verses have been updated from the KJV to the NKJV. Also, a few old-fashioned or strictly British expressions have been modernized for today's readers. Ed.

What is the secret of all this paleness and trembling? we inquire. The firstborn son informs us that the angel of death is coming around the land, and that he is not quite certain how matters will stand with him at that solemn moment.

"When the destroying angel has *passed our house*," says he, "*and the night of judgment is over*, I shall *then know* that I am safe, but I cannot see how I can be quite sure of it until then. They say they *are* sure of salvation next door, but we think it very presumptuous. All I can do is spend the long dreary night hoping for the best."

"Well," we inquire, "but has the God of Israel not provided a way of safety for His people?"

"True," he replies, "and we have availed ourselves of that way of escape. The blood of the spotless and unblemished first-year lamb has been duly sprinkled with the bunch of hyssop on the lintel and two side-posts, but still we are not fully assured of shelter." Let us now leave these doubting, troubled ones, and enter next door.

What a striking contrast meets our eye at once! Joy beams on every countenance. There they stand with girded loins and staff in hand, enjoying the roasted lamb.

What can be the meaning of all this joy on such a solemn night as this?

"Ah," say they all, "we are only waiting for Jehovah's marching orders, and then we shall bid a last farewell to the taskmaster's cruel lash and all the drudgery of Egypt."

"But hold. Do you forget that this is the night of Egypt's judgment?"

"Right well we know it; but our firstborn son is safe. The blood has been sprinkled according to the wish of our God."

"But so it has been next door," we reply, "but they are all unhappy because all uncertain of safety."

"Ah," responds the firstborn firmly, "but we have *more than the sprinkled blood*, we have the *unerring word of God about it*. God has said, 'When I *see the blood* I will pass over you.' God rests satisfied with the *blood* outside and we rest satisfied with *His word inside*."

The sprinkled *blood* makes us *safe*.

The spoken *word* makes us *sure*.

Could anything make us more safe than the sprinkled blood, or more sure than His spoken word? Nothing, *nothing*.

Now reader, let me ask *you* a question. *Which of these two houses, do you think, was the safer?*

Do you say No. 2, where all were so happy? No, then, you are wrong. *Both are safe alike.*

Their *safety* depends on what God thinks about *the blood outside*, and not on the state of their *feelings inside*.

If you would be sure of your own blessing, then, dear reader, listen not to the unstable testimony of inward emotions, but to the infallible witness of the Word of God.

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

Let me give you a simple illustration from everyday life. A certain farmer in the country, not having sufficient grass for his cattle applies for a piece of pasture land which he hears is to be leased near his own house. For some time he gets no answer from the landlord. One day a neighbor comes in and says, "I feel quite sure you will get that field. Don't you recollect how that last Christmas he sent you a special present of game and that he gave you a kind nod of recognition the other day when he drove past in the carriage?" And with such like words the farmer's mind is filled with sanguine hopes.

Next day another neighbor meets him, and in course of conversation he says, "I'm afraid you will stand no chance whatever of getting that grass-field. Mr. ___ has applied for it, and you cannot but be aware what a favorite he is with the Squire—occasionally visiting with him, etc., etc." And the poor farmer's bright hopes are dashed to the ground and burst like soap-bubbles. One day he is hoping, the next day full of perplexing doubts.

Presently the postman calls, and the farmer's heart beats fast as he breaks the seal of the letter, for he sees by the handwriting that it is from the Squire himself. See his countenance change from anxious suspense to undisguised joy as he reads and re-reads that letter.

"*It's a settled thing now*," he exclaims to his wife; "no more doubts and fears about it. The Squire says the field is mine as long as I require it, on the most easy terms. I care for no man's opinion now. *His word settles it.*"

Now many a poor soul is in a like condition to the poor troubled farmer—tossed and perplexed by the opinions of men, or the thoughts and feelings of his own treacherous heart! And it is only upon receiving the Word of God *as the Word of God*, that *certainty* takes the place of doubts and peradventures. When God speaks there *must* be certainty, whether He pronounces the damnation of the unbeliever or the salvation of the believer.

"*Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven*" (Ps 119:89); and to the simple-hearted believer His *word settles all*.

"Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num 23:19).

"I need no other argument,
I want no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died—
And that He died for me."

The believer can add—

And that "God says so."

But how may I be sure that I have *the right kind of faith*?

Well, there can be but one answer to that question, namely, Have you confidence in *the right Person*?—*that is, in the blessed Son of God*?

It is not a question of the amount of your faith, but of the *trustworthiness of the person* you repose your confidence in. One man takes hold of Christ, as it were, with a drowning man's grip; another but touches the hem of His garment; but the sinner who does the former is not a bit safer than the one who does the latter. They have both made the same discovery, namely: that while all of self is totally untrustworthy, they may safely confide in *Christ*, calmly rely on *His word* and confidently rest in the eternal efficacy of *His finished work*. That is what is meant by believing in HIM. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me *has* everlasting life" (John 6:47, emphasis supplied).

Make sure of it then, my reader, that your confidence is *not* reposed in your works of amendment, your religious observances, your pious feeling when under religious influences, your moral training from childhood, and the like. You may have the strongest faith in any or all of these and perish everlastingly. Do not deceive yourself by any "fair show in the flesh."³ The feeblest *faith in Christ* eternally saves, while the strongest faith in aught beside is but the offspring of a *deceived heart*—but the leafy twigs of your enemy's arranging over the pitfall of eternal perdition.

God, in the Gospel, simply introduces to you the Lord Jesus Christ, and says, "This is *My* beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." You may, He says, with all confidence trust *His* heart, though you cannot with impunity trust your own.

Blessed, thrice-blessed Lord Jesus, who would not trust Thee and praise Thy name!

³ This is the Apostle Paul's expression for the Galatian legalists' glorying in outward religious rites (Gal 6:12). Ed.

"I do really believe on Him," said a sad-looking soul to me one day, "but yet, when asked if I am saved, I do not like to say Yes, *for fear I should be telling a lie.*" This young woman was a butcher's daughter, in a small town in the Midlands.⁴ It happened to be market day, and her father had not then returned from the market. So I said: "Now, suppose when your father comes home you ask him how many sheep he bought today and he answers *"Ten."* After a while a man comes to the shop and says, "How many sheep did your father buy today?" and you reply, "I don't like to say for fear I should be telling a lie." "But," said the mother (who was standing by at the time), with righteous indignation, "that would be making her father the liar."

Now, dear reader, don't you see that this well-meaning young woman was virtually making Christ a liar, saying, "I do believe on the Son of God, but I do not like to say I am saved *lest I should be telling a lie,*" when Christ Himself has said, "He who believes in Me *has* everlasting life!" (John 6:47, emphasis supplied).

But, says another, "*How may I be sure that I really do believe?* I have *tried* often to believe, and looked *within* to see if I had got it; but the more I look at my faith the less I seem to have."

Ah, my friend, you are looking in the wrong direction to find *that* out, and your *trying* to believe but plainly shows that you are on the wrong track.

Let me give you another illustration to explain what I want to convey to you.

You are sitting at your quiet fireside one evening, when a man comes in and tells you that the station-master has been killed that night at the railway.

Now it so happens that this man has long borne the character in the place of being a very dishonest man, and the most daring and dishonest liar in the neighborhood.

Do you believe, or even *try to believe* that man?

"Of course not," you exclaim.

Pray, why not?

"Oh, I *know him* too well for that."

But tell me how you *know* that you don't believe him? Is it by looking within at your faith or feelings?

"No," you reply, "I think of the *man* that brings me the message."

Presently, a neighbor drops in and says: "The station-master has been

⁴The central counties of England. Ed.

run over by a freight train tonight and killed on the spot." After he has left I hear you cautiously say, "Well, I *partly* believe it now, for to my recollection this man only once in his life deceived me, though I have known him from boyhood."

But again I ask, Is it by looking at your faith this time that you *know* you partly believe it?

"No," you repeat, "I am thinking of the character of my informant."

Well, this man has scarcely left your room before a third person enters and brings you the same sad news as the first. But this time you say, "Now, John, since *you* tell me, I *believe* it."

Again, I press my question (which is, remember, but the re-echo of your own), "How do you *know* that you so confidently believe your friend John?"

"Because of *who* and *what John is*," you reply. "He never has deceived me and I don't think he ever will."

Well, then just in the same way I *know* that I *believe the Gospel*, namely, because of the One who brings me the news. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God that He *has testified of His Son* . . . 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" (1 John 5:9, 10, emphasis supplied). "Abraham *believed* God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Rom 4:3, emphasis supplied).

An anxious soul once said to a servant of Christ, "Oh, sir, *I can't believe!*" to which the preacher wisely and quietly replied: "Indeed, *who* is it that you cannot believe?" This broke the spell. He had been looking at faith as an indescribable something that he must feel within himself in order to be sure that he was all right for heaven, whereas faith ever looks outside to a living Person and His finished work, and quietly listens to the testimony of a faithful God about both.

It is the *outside look* that brings the *inside peace*. When a man turns his face towards the sun, his own shadow is behind him. You cannot look at self and a glorified Christ in heaven at the same moment.

Thus we have seen that the *blessed Person* of God's Son wins my confidence; His *finished work* makes me eternally safe; *God's Word* about those who believe on Him makes me unalterably sure. I find in Christ and His work the *way* of salvation, and in the Word of God the *knowledge* of salvation.

Grace in the Arts:

JESUS AND EMILY:

The Biblical Roots of Emily Dickinson's Poetry

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Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Dallas, Texas

I never saw a Moor—
I never saw the Sea—
Yet know I how the Heather looks
And what a Wave must be.¹

I never spoke with God
Nor visited in Heaven—
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the Chart² were given—

I. Introduction

The above poem, #1052, from the 1,775 poems in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*,³ is typical of this writer. It is short, it is clever, it capitalizes nouns as if the language were German rather than English, and, like many (but definitely not *most*) of the author's poems, it has a religious touch (*God* and *Heaven*).

This article proposes to show that yet another great writer owes at least part of her genius with words and serious thinking about life and death to her conservative Protestant heritage with its deep biblical roots.

II. The Career of Emily Dickinson

Outwardly, Dickinson's life seems most uneventful. Born in Amherst,

¹ Alternative reading in her mss.: "And what a Billow be."

² Alternative reading: "Checks."

³ Edited by Thomas H. Johnson. Boston: Little Brown and Company, n.d., 770 pp.

Massachusetts in 1830, she lived her life in her father's house in Amherst and died unmarried in Amherst in 1886. Inwardly, there was, as expressed in her extremely original poetry, a whole universe of observation, speculation, and expression of nature (a specialty), humanity, religion, and death (her frequent obsession).

Her "public" career, highly restricted though it was, began on April 15, 1862, when Emily was 31 years old. On that day a former "free church" pastor,⁴ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, opened one of several letters in response to his article in the *Atlantic Monthly* and to "his 'Letter to a Young Contributor,' practical advice for those wishing to break into print."⁵ He was open-minded, interested in women's issues, and women writers especially.

All of the four poems she enclosed showed that she was far more than a mere novice at writing poetry. One of the four was the now popular #318 (Emily used no titles; the numbers are editorial and for convenience):

I'll tell you how the Sun rose—
 A Ribbon at a time—
 The Steeples swam in Amethyst—
 The news, like Squirrels, ran—
 The Hills untied their Bonnets—
 The Bobolinks—begun—
 Then I said softly to myself—
 "That must have been the Sun!"
 But how he set—I know not—
 There seemed a purple stile
 That little Yellow boys and girls
 Were climbing all the while—
 Till when they reached the other side,
 A Dominie⁶ in Gray—
 Put gently up the evening Bars—
 And led the flock away—

Higginson couldn't quite classify Emily's work—it didn't fit traditional forms—but he had sensitivity enough to ask what she liked

⁴This should not be confused with the evangelical denominations of Northern European countries that split off from the state churches, or their North American offshoots.

⁵Dickinson, *Poems*, v.

⁶Dominie — A term used for a Dutch Reformed clergyman, probably chosen for its pleasant sound and to fit the meter.

to read, who her friends were, how old she was, and, most important—for more poems. He wasn't quite sure she was actually writing *poetry*; he wrote that her work was "remarkable, though odd . . . *too delicate*—not strong enough to publish."⁷

Since Dickinson has become one of the best-loved North American poets in history, Higginson was clearly wrong on the last point. Perhaps he can be partly excused since she *was* very much ahead of her time.

Three decades later, and five years after her death, the ex-pastor recalled his early correspondence with Miss Dickinson:⁸

The impression of a wholly new and original poetic genius was as distinct on my mind at the first reading of these four poems as it is now, after thirty years of further knowledge; and with it came the problem never yet solved, what place ought to be assigned in literature to what is so remarkable, yet so elusive of criticism.⁹

Dickinson agreed that "to publish" was "foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin." She speaks of "My Barefoot-Rank" (being unrecognized) as "better," and, whimsically, of "the approbation of my Dog."¹⁰

Though the poet often sent her poems to friends in letters, only after her death was the full extent of her writing discovered. Forty-nine packets of poetry, written in ink on folded sheets loosely held together by loops threaded through the "spine," were found by her sister Lavinia.

Lavinia persuaded an Amherst professor's wife, Mabel Loomis Todd, who enlisted Higginson's help, to prepare a first volume of 115 poems for publication.

Higginson felt the public wasn't quite ready yet for Emily's unusual "meters," punctuation, and other idiosyncrasies:

Colonel Higginson was apprehensive about the willingness of the public to accept the poems as they stood. Therefore in preparing copy for the printer he undertook to smooth rhymes, regularize the meter, delete provincialisms, and substitute "sensible" metaphors. Thus "folks" became "those," "heft" became "weight," and occasionally line arrangement was altered.¹¹

⁷ Dickinson, *Poems*, vi.

⁸ Their correspondence lasted until her death.

⁹ Dickinson, *Poems*, vi.

¹⁰ Ibid. Emily would take her dog, Carlo, out on her nature walks. (If any reader knows Carlo's color or breed, this reviewer would be glad to learn of it.)

¹¹ Ibid., ix.

Roberts Brothers of Boston published the first slender volume of Dickinson's work, *Poems by Emily Dickinson*, and it was a significant literary event of the year 1890. Samuel G. Ward, a Transcendentalist writer, responded as follows:

I am, with all the world, intensely interested in Emily Dickinson. No wonder six editions have been sold, every copy, I should think to a New Englander. She may become world famous, or she may never get out of New England. She is the quintessence of that element we all have who are of the Puritan descent *pur sang* ["pure blood"]. We came to this country to think our own thoughts with nobody to hinder.¹²

The public wanted more—and more. Fortunately, fewer and fewer changes were made in her work by “editors.” Sometimes, however, manuscripts varied within several “editions” of her own (unique) handwriting.

III. Dickinson's Religious Experience

Emily's Family Roots

Emily Dickinson had a strong Puritan heritage, her family tracing to “the Great Migration” to New England of 1630 (not the radical Separatists of 1620).

Though of very good stock, highly literate, and descended from those who experienced “the Great Awakening” of 1740 under Jonathan Edwards, Emily just couldn't seem to accept the evangelistic doctrines that swept her town and the famous college located there:

The revival spirit, calling for deep individual soul-searching, confession of sin, and repentance, was very much alive in Emily Dickinson's time and caused her anguish. No fewer than eight revivals swept Amherst, college and town, during her formative years, roughly between 1840 and 1862. She could never see herself as a sinner in the hands of an angry God. She could never testify, as so many of her pious friends did, to that direct visitation of the Spirit which was essential to membership in the church. If she never became a “christian” (more often than not, she spelled the word with a small “c”), if her unique calling took her far from the ways of orthodoxy, *it still was the Puritan in her that made her feel that the burden of proof was on her, and that the burden was a mighty one* [italics supplied].¹³

¹² Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, New One-Volume Edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 24.

Emily's Bible Knowledge

There was no shortage of copies of God's Word in the family in which Emily grew up. The Dickinson Collection at Harvard contains nineteen Bibles.¹⁴ (And this was long before the multiplication of translations and "Study Bibles"!) Her father, Edward Dickinson, read a chapter a day. The Bible was also read from the pulpit and at family prayers.

The following excerpt, though extensive, is crucial to the thesis of our article and should prove of interest both to Bible-lovers and poetry-lovers. The italics are mine:

Emily's copy, inscribed to her, is an 1843 edition of the King James Version; so we can assume she had one of her own at least by the time she was twelve. How much she read it in the early years is a matter of conjecture; *she certainly heard it a great deal*. By whatever process, it *was in and through her consciousness like no other book*. When she told Higginson in the spring of 1862 that she had, for prose, "Mr Ruskin—Sir Thomas Browne—and the Revelations," she gave an utterly inadequate notion of her knowledge and use of it. *The extraordinary range of the Biblical allusions in her letters and poems shows how arbitrary her selection here of Revelation is*, although admittedly the "Gem chapter" (XXI) was a favorite, and in one of the few moments when we can actually catch her in the act of reading the Bible, she is deep in Revelation . . . But in the length and breadth of her letters and poems very few books of the Bible are not represented in some way, by word, phrase, reference, or allusion. *She was saturated with it and could apparently summon it to her aid at will*. She began early. At fourteen she wrote Abiah Root that she thought she could "keep house very comfortably" if she knew how to cook but admitted that her situation was a little like "faith without works, which you know we are told is dead" [James 2:26]. She apologized (we recall) for her pedantry: "Excuse my quoting from the Scripture, dear Abiah, for it was so handy in this case I couldn't get along very well without it." Next year, again to Abiah, she rolled together Matthew 13:15 and Ecclesiastes 12:6, with delightful imprecision, *in a brand-new Dickinson Version*: "When our eyes are dull of seeing & our ears of hearing, when the silver cord is loosed & the golden bowl broken"—an indication perhaps that, so far, she was doing more listening than reading, that she heard the great phrases ringing in her ears rather than saw them in print before her eyes. (Her freedom with the text is characteristic of a lifelong habit. *Her quotations are seldom exact*.)¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 694, n. 18.

¹⁵ Ibid., 694-95.

Although from an artistic and personal viewpoint Emily originally found God's Word "arid," in the mid-1860's she wrote to Joseph Lyman:

Some years after we saw each other last I fell to reading the Old & New Testament. I had known it as an arid book but looking I saw how infinitely wise & merry it is.

Anybody that knows grammar must admit the surpassing splendor & force of its speech, but the fathomless gulfs of meaning—those words which He spoke to those most necessary to him, hints about some celestial reunion—yearning for a oneness—has any one fathomed that sea? I know those to whom those words are very near & necessary, I wish they were more so to me, for I see them shedding a serenity quite wonderful & blessed. They are great bars of sunlight in many a shady heart.¹⁶

The longing for faith's assurance shows up clearly in the sad words, "I wish they were more so to me."

Emily's Theology

Miss Dickinson did not like doctrine. Her excellent biographer, Richard B. Sewall, writes: "Although perhaps the most religious person in town, she had stopped going to church by the time she was thirty."¹⁷ Nevertheless, though she never joined the church, she still imbibed a great deal of the Christian heritage:

Scorn doctrines as she would, she all but polled the preachers, or any older, wiser person she thought could help her, for their ideas on immortality. "The Clergyman says I shall see my Father," she said. She scorned the doctrines she did not like; and if the assurance of the preacher never seems to have convinced her, *it was the Christian dispensation that gave form and meaning—ponder it and question it as she would—to her life* [emphasis supplied]. She lived, it seems, in a state of wonder and hope: "I wonder how long we shall wonder," she wrote, "how early we shall *know*." But it was the Bible and her Christian heritage that gave her the questions to wonder about and the destiny to hope for.¹⁸

The part of "theology" that Emily could relate to best was Christology. Though not in a fully orthodox sense, she did have a certain love for Jesus.

¹⁶ Ibid., 695-96.

¹⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹⁸ Ibid., 381.

Probably her reading of Revelation, certain psalms, the Song of Songs, *The Imitation of Christ*, and who knows what else, brought forth the beautiful heavenly bridegroom poem (#817):

Given in Marriage unto Thee
Oh thou Celestial Host—
Bride of the Father and the Son
Bride of the Holy Ghost.

Other Betrothal shall dissolve—
Wedlock of Will, decay—
Only the Keeper of this Ring
Conquer Mortality—

The Gospel in a nutshell, John 3:16, would seem to have inspired the first stanza of #573:

The Test of Love—is Death—
Our Lord—"so loved"—it saith—
What Largest Lover—hath—
Another—doth—

God's love to humanity is pictured in the terms of Longfellow's "The Courtship of Miles Standish" in #357:¹⁹

God is a distant—stately Lover—
Woos, as He states us—by His Son—
Verily, a Vicarious Courtship—
"Miles", and "Priscilla", were such an One—

But, lest the Soul—like fair "Priscilla"
Choose the Envoy—and spurn the Groom—
Vouches, with hyperbolic archness—
"Miles", and "John Alden" were Synonym—

Emily and the Revival Meetings

Most people associate "revivals" with the Southern U.S., emotional denominations, and a fair amount of noise. The New England revivals of Emily's youth were more intellectual, but nonetheless fervent and

¹⁹"God," "Miles," and "the Groom" are the Father; "His Son," "the Envoy," and "John Alden" are Jesus. "Priscilla" is the human "Soul," perhaps even Emily herself. The last line would seem to express the essential unity of the Father and the Son.

evangelical. The sixteen-year-old New Englander feared she might be too moved by them, though once she felt she had "found" her Savior. In a letter of January 31, 1846 that is almost entirely devoted to religion, Emily confessed she had not become a Christian in the Amherst revival of the winter of 1845:

She has seen "many who felt there was nothing in religion . . . melted at once," and it has been "really wonderful to see how near heaven came to sinful mortals." Once, *for a short time*, "she had known this beatific state herself, when "I felt I had found my savior [sic]." "I never enjoyed," she wrote, "such perfect peace and happiness." But "I soon forgot my morning prayer or else it was irksome to me. One by one my old habits returned and I cared less for religion than ever." At Abiah's recent announcement that she was close to conversion, Emily "shed many tears." She herself longs to follow after: "*I feel that I shall never be happy without I love Christ.*" But midway through the letter she makes a striking admission, a real bit of self-discovery. Putting aside the revival rhetoric, she seems to be speaking in her own voice (even to the misspelling):

Perhaps you will not beleive [sic] it Dear A. but I attended none of the meetings last winter. *I felt that I was so easily excited that I might again be deceived and I dared not trust myself* [emphasis supplied].²⁰

After her friend Abiah became a Christian, their correspondence became less frequent.

The "gospel" she heard demanded total commitment before one could be saved, judging from these selections from letters to Abiah in 1854:

"I do not feel that I could give up all for Christ, were I called to die. Pray for me Dear A. that I may yet enter into the kingdom, that there may be room left for me in the shining courts above [emphasis supplied].²¹

A Free Grace Christian wonders what response Emily would have had to a clear, "non-Lordship Salvation" appeal based on grace alone, apart from performance or works.

From Mount Holyoke, a year and a half later, Emily writes:

There is a great deal of religious interest here and many are flocking to the ark of safety. *I have not yet given up to the claims of Christ*, but

²⁰ Ibid., 381.

²¹ Ibid., 382-3.

trust I am not entirely thoughtless on so important & serious a subject [emphasis supplied].²²

IV. Christian Motifs in Dickinson's Poetry

In spite of her apparent fear of receiving Christ as Savior and Lord and of not being able to be totally committed or absolutely surrendered,²³ Emily identified with Christ in His sufferings more and more as she went through life. The last few lines of #561 (about 1862) illustrate this:

A piercing Comfort it affords
In passing Calvary—
To note the fashions—of the Cross—
And how they're mostly worn—
Still fascinated to presume
That Some—are like My Own—

In the year that the Civil War broke out Emily penned the following appealing poem (at least to Christians):

Savior! I've no one else to tell—
And so I trouble *thee*.
I am the one forgot thee so—
Dost thou remember me?
Nor, for myself, I came so far—
That were the little load—
I brought thee the imperial Heart
I had not strength to hold—
The Heart I carried in my own—
Till mine too heavy grew—
Yet—strangest—*heavier* since it went—
Is it too large for *you*?

²² Ibid., 383.

²³ Ibid., 382. Sewall writes about Emily's possible experience as follows: "Just when and under what circumstances Emily had once known the peace of submission to Christ we will probably never know. But its evanescence had apparently frightened her. She had been 'easily excited' once, and she would not subject herself to the experience again—or, as she put it . . . 'Many conversed with me seriously and affectionately and I was almost inclined to yeild [sic] to the claims of He who is greater than I.' So, she confessed to Abiah, 'I am continually putting off becoming a christian [sic]. Evil voices lisp in my ear—' Later on, these 'evil voices' were to become 'siren' voices, and still later, 'beautiful tempters' whispering to her; but what she meant precisely she did not say."

During the first full year of the War (1862), perhaps fearing that the threatened draft would take away her beloved brother Austin, Emily wrote the following "prayer":

At least—to pray—is left—is left—
 Oh Jesus—in the Air—
 I know not which thy chamber is—
 I'm knocking—everywhere—
 Thou settest Earthquake in the South—
 And Maelstrom, in the Sea—
 Say, Jesus Christ of Nazareth—
 Hast thou no Arm for Me?

The "Earthquake in the South" may well refer to the then recent secession of the Confederate States of America and the bloody war that ensued.

I felt that this poem seemed rather irreverent, but sharing it with a literary-minded Christian friend, was pleased to see that he interpreted it in a much sincerer light.²⁴

Nature Poems

Many of Dickinson's finest poems describe nature in unique and charming ways. Some of these also are painted with a brush dipped in biblical colors. We have space for only a few:

#265 Where Ships of Purple—gently toss—
 On Seas of Daffodil—
 Fantastic Sailors—mingle—
 And then—the Wharf is still!

#228 Blazing in Gold and quenching in Purple
 Leaping like Leopards to the Sky
 Then at the feet of the old Horizon

²⁴It has been my pleasure to "introduce" two evangelical friends from other English-speaking countries to our fine New England poet: a South African currently an officer in a Christian college in Johannesburg, and the Nova Scotia-bred English editor of the New King James Version of the Bible, Dr. William McDowell (the friend mentioned above). I hope this little article will win more admirers of Emily's poetic genius—much of which can be understood *fully* only by people "saturated" in the Bible (as she was). Sadly, her biblical knowledge may never have resulted in new birth by faith in Christ alone.

Laying her spotted Face to die
Stooping as low as the Otter's Window
Touching the Roof and tinting the Barn
Kissing her Bonnet to the Meadow
And the Juggler of Day is gone

#28

So has a Daisy vanished
From the fields today—
So tiptoed many a slipper
To Paradise away—

Oozed so in crimson bubbles
Day's departing tide—
Blooming—tripping—flowing—
Are ye then with God?

#1574

No ladder needs the bird but skies
To situate its wings,
Nor any leader's grim baton
Arraigns it as it sings.
The implements of bliss are few—
As Jesus says of *Him*,
"Come unto me" the moiety
That wafts the cherubim.

When describing nature, Emily's Puritan, Protestant, and biblical roots tend to produce some of the metaphorical blossoms. The final two stanzas of #130 on "the old—old sophistries of June":

Oh Sacrament of summer days,
Oh Last Communion in the Haze—
Permit a child to join.

Thy sacred emblems to partake—
Thy consecrated bread to take
And thine immortal wine!

V. Conclusion

Did Emily ever respond to the Lord's knock on her door (#317)?²⁵

Just so—Jesus—raps—
 He—doesn't weary—
 Last—at the Knocker—
 And first—at the Bell.
 Then—on divinest tiptoe—standing—
 Might He but spy the lady's soul—
 When He—retires—
 Chilled—or weary—
 It will be ample time for—me—
 Patient—upon the steps—*until* then—
 Heart! I am knocking—low at thee.

There is always the possibility that Dickinson got saved as a young girl, but many of her poems seem to suggest the opposite. "Consider the Lilies," she wrote to a friend two years before her death, was "the only Commandment I ever obeyed."²⁶

No doubt a great exaggeration, but nature and poetry lovers can at least rejoice that this one "commandment" from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:28) was obeyed—and bore exquisite literary fruit.

Our final selection, "If I'm Lost" (#256)²⁷ illustrates the tragedy of having fine Protestant roots, great biblical knowledge, and yet one day, having "the Savior's face" turn "away from you":

If I'm lost—now
 That I was found—
 Shall still my transport be—
 That once—on me—those Jasper Gates
 Blazed open—suddenly—
 That in my awkward—gazing—face—
 The Angels—softly peered—
 And touched me with their fleeces,
 Almost as if they cared—

²⁵This poem is obviously suggested by Rev 3:20. While often used as a Gospel verse (perhaps acceptable as such by application), in context Jesus is addressing Christians who had been shutting Him out of their actual lifestyle.

²⁶Sewall, *Life*, 23.

²⁷This is one of *twenty-eight* poems Emily started with the little word *if*.

I'm banished—now—you know it—
How foreign that can be—
You'll know—Sir—when the Savior's face
Turns so—away from you—

We can't hope to reconcile human responsibility and divine sovereignty in this (or any other!) study, but I think Miss Dickinson's plight, humanly speaking, can be laid at least partly at the door of Puritan theology. Since liberals love to "bash" our North American Puritan ancestors, one hesitates to give them any more ammunition. After all, they were hard-working, Bible-loving, frugal, good, family-oriented, and (contrary to popular slander) often well-adjusted and happy people. However, there seems to be a gaping hole in their outlook which only grace could have filled up.

Did Emily ever hear a really clear Gospel presentation? One wonders. Fortunately those of us who believe in God's truly amazing grace can easily picture our poet sometime before her death resting by faith in the "Heavenly Bridegroom." If so—and only *if*—we can believe that "those Jasper Gates" suddenly blazed open for a very sensitive woman from Amherst, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

CALVINISM EX CATHEDRA:

A REVIEW OF JOHN H. GERSTNER'S *WRONGLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH:* *A CRITIQUE OF DISPENSATIONALISM*¹

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John H. Gerstner is a well-known and prolific writer/theologian from the Reformed tradition. His recent book, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, is a trenchant assault on Dispensationalism in general and Grace theology in particular. The latter he flatly labels as Antinomianism.

I welcome this book. The issues are sharply drawn and the author has largely avoided pejorative rhetoric and harsh verbal abuse. Some readers may not think this is so, but this reviewer would differ with them. Gerstner's criticisms of Dispensationalism are certainly severe. But given his own position, they must be seen as his frank and candid assessments of an opposing theology.

Perhaps the last paragraph of his conclusion expresses his spirit as well as anything else that he says:

My plea to all dispensationalists is this—show me the fundamental error in what I teach or admit your own fundamental error. We cannot both be right. One of us is wrong—seriously wrong. If you are wrong (in your doctrine, as I charge), you are preaching nothing less than a false gospel. This calls for genuine repentance and fruits worthy of it before the Lord Jesus Christ whom we both profess to love and serve.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*²

Fair enough! Who could object to such an attitude? We have no quarrel with Gerstner himself, therefore. Our quarrel is with his

¹ John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991), xii+276 pp. In this review article, Hodges has followed Gerstner's policy of capitalizing *Dispensationalism* (the theology) and lower-casing *dispensationalists* (its adherents). Ed.

² Gerstner, 263.

theology. Within the obvious limitations of an article like this, we will examine that theology as best we can.

I. What Gerstner Presupposes

Gerstner rejects the apologetic presuppositionalism which is associated especially with the name of Cornelius Van Til and Westminster Seminary.³ Yet the theological approach of Gerstner's book seems to this reviewer to be essentially presuppositional.

Accordingly, on just the fourth page of his section on "Theology" (Part III of his book) we read this:

We believe with the great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that Calvinism is just another name for Christianity. The denial of Calvinism is a very grave mistake.⁴

"*Calvinism is just another name for Christianity*"! This is an astounding claim even if it *was* previously made by Spurgeon! We would expect, therefore, some systematic defense of such a bold assertion.

But this we do not find. What we have instead is the measuring of Dispensationalism by the yardstick of Reformed theology, especially as articulated by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).⁵ Thus Gerstner is committed to 5-point Calvinism or, as I will call it for clarity's sake, "Classical Calvinism."

To be sure, Gerstner *does* interact with, and seeks to refute, dispensational arguments against his theological stance. But this is not the same as establishing the case for "Classical Calvinism" from the Bible. Of course, to do *that*, Gerstner would have needed to write another book, if not a series of books. That would have been impractical.

But the overall effect of Gerstner's approach is unsatisfactory. The grid out of which he works ("Classical Calvinism") becomes, in effect, the arbiter of dispensational exegesis and theology. His outlook is not much different than that of a committed Roman Catholic polemicist who takes the authoritative doctrines of his church as his starting point.

In other words, here we have Calvinism *ex cathedra*! Dortian theology is Gerstner's starting point as well as his only goal. Whatever contradicts his "Classical Calvinism" is of questionable orthodoxy for this author. We are not saying that Gerstner is not entitled to his convictions. He surely is. But his approach will hardly be persuasive to

³ Ibid., 78-79.

⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁵ Ibid., 105.

those who wonder whether "Classical Calvinism" is a biblical form of theology at all.

II. What Gerstner Ignores

Strikingly, Gerstner passes by in silence one of the most significant theological issues of our day. This issue touches close to the core of the dispensational/Reformed debate. The issue is the relationship between Calvin himself and "Classical Calvinism" in regard to the nature of saving faith and the grounds for the assurance of salvation.

Again, for purposes of clarity, we shall refer to "Calvin's Calvinism" as over against "Classical Calvinism."

The two are *not* identical. As R. T. Kendall has so effectively shown, Calvin himself held to *unlimited* atonement and to the doctrine that *assurance is of the essence of* (i.e., an integral part of) *saving faith*. Kendall's book on this subject (1979)⁶ is based on his D. Phil. thesis done at Oxford. Kendall told this reviewer in person that one of his readers was J. I. Packer, a well-known "Classical Calvinist," and that Packer told Kendall that he thought Kendall had demonstrated his case concerning Calvin's beliefs. So also M. Charles Bell agrees with Kendall in *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (1985).⁷ Another Calvin scholar, A. N. S. Lane, took much the same view independently of Kendall.⁸

Gerstner refers only once to Kendall's work, and that in a footnote referring to the subject of the atonement.⁹ (Strangely, Kendall's name is omitted from the index of Gerstner's book, perhaps because it does not appear in Gerstner's text.) So far as the reviewer has noticed, there is no reference at all to Bell or Lane.

But a scholar of Gerstner's stature cannot possibly be ignorant of the discussion about the nature of faith in "Calvin's Calvinism" vis-à-vis "Classical Calvinism." Perhaps he would have found it awkward to admit that "Classical Calvinism" no longer holds *Calvin's* view of faith and assurance, whereas many dispensationalists do! And that includes this reviewer.

Such an admission by Gerstner would indeed be necessary. Even in the last century, the distinction was forthrightly admitted by Robert L.

⁶ See R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: University Press, 1979).

⁷ M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985).

⁸ A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979):32-54.

⁹ Gerstner, 125, note 48.

Dabney, a Reformed theologian and scholar. Dabney wrote two articles entitled (in his collected writings) "Theology of the Plymouth Brethren." There he says this:

The source of this [Plymouth Brethren] error is no doubt that doctrine concerning faith which the first Reformers, as Calvin and Luther, were led to adopt from their opposition to the hateful and tyrannical teachings of Rome...These noble Reformers...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*" [italics in Dabney].¹⁰

Later he adds these telling comments:

It is very obvious...that these views of faith and assurance...ground themselves in the faulty definitions of saving faith which we received from the first Reformers. They, as we saw, defined saving faith as a belief that "Christ has saved *me*," making the assurance of hope of its necessary essence. Now, the later Reformers, and those learned, holy and modest teachers of the Reformed Churches, whose influence the Plymouth Brethren regard as so unhealthy for true religion, have subjected this view to searching examination, and rejected it (as does the Westminster Assembly) on scriptural grounds [italics in Dabney].¹¹

Here, then, is a facet of the discussion *which Gerstner has completely suppressed*. According to him, Dispensationalism has its roots in the Plymouth Brethren movement.¹² The Gospel proclaimed by both, he charges, is antinomian in character.¹³ But we are never told by this writer that the dispensational/Plymouth Brethren view of saving faith has its roots in *Reformation theology*!

This is a little bit like trying to explain the World Series competition to someone without ever mentioning the baseball season which led up to it. In tracing the roots of the contemporary debate on the Gospel, Gerstner stops digging just before he hits pay dirt!

III. What Gerstner Believes about Faith

The reviewer confesses that he is displeased with Gerstner's claim that

¹⁰ *Discussions by Robert L. Dabney*, ed. by C. R. Vaughn (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1890), 1:173.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹² Gerstner, 21-56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 209-30.

“Hodges fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the issue when he thinks that works are some sort of addendum, something beyond the faith itself. We maintain that it is *implicit in the faith* from the beginning” [italics added].¹⁴

Gerstner has just quoted a statement I made in *The Gospel Under Siege* to the effect that “to faith are added other conditions or provisos, by which the essential nature of the Gospel is radically transformed.”¹⁵ I doubt that Gerstner would deny that some theologies do exactly that.

But Gerstner should have read on.

In the next few sentences I state exactly what Gerstner has claimed I don’t understand:

Often, in fact, a distinction is drawn between the kind of faith which saves and the kind of faith which does not. But the kind of faith which *does* [italics in my text] save is always seen to be the kind that results in some form of overt obedience. By this means, the obedience becomes at least *an implicit part of the transaction between man and God*. “Saving” faith has thus been subtly redefined in terms of its fruits [italics added].¹⁶

Isn’t this precisely what Gerstner has claimed I do not comprehend? Reformed theologians are fond of asserting that those who oppose their theology do not understand it. This implies that, if their opponents *did* understand, their objections would be null. But that is not the case.

Many contemporary Grace writers understand the Reformed position perfectly well. But they charge that such theology is doing a semantic dance around the biblical concepts of faith and works. Thus Reformed writers like Gerstner want to have it both ways—salvation by faith alone, but no salvation without works! In this way they affirm Pauline orthodoxy and subvert it at the same time.

Nowhere is this clearer in Gerstner’s book than when he writes (speaking about an article by L. Blauvelt), as follows:

Again, this fundamental failure to comprehend is evident. [Again, this charge!] Lordship teaching does not “add works,” as if faith were not sufficient. *The “works” are part of the definition of faith* [italics added].¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 226.

¹⁵ *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, Redención Viva, 1981), 4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gerstner, 257.

Exactly! And this is precisely the error of Reformed thought about faith. Reformed theology teaches a synergy of faith and works which is blatantly at odds with Paul and with the Reformers.

Thus the Apostle wrote:

And if by grace, 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).

Compare this with:

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace... (Rom 4:16).

Reformed theology has created a theological hybrid which abandons the Pauline antinomy between faith and works. From the Pauline perspective, the “grace” of which Reformed thinkers speak is no longer grace at all. Once “‘works’ are part of the definition of faith,” faith has been redefined in non-Pauline terms.

John Calvin knew nothing of any such definition of faith either. Indeed, his own definition is justly famous:

Now, we shall have a complete definition of faith, if we say, that it is a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit (*Institutes* III. ii. 7).¹⁸

Note that for Calvin faith is “knowledge.” Elsewhere Calvin “describes faith as illumination (*illuminatio*) [*Institutes* III. i. 4], knowledge as opposed to the submission [!] of our feeling (*cognitio, non sensus nostri submissio*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 2], certainty (*certitudo*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 6], a firm conviction (*solida persuasio*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 16], assurance (*securitas*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 16], firm assurance (*solida securitas*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 16], and full assurance (*plena securitas*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 22].”¹⁹

The Reformed “definition” of faith *as including* “works” is utterly alien both to Calvin and to Paul. Insofar as such a definition depends on Reformed theology’s standard treatment of Jas 2:14–26, it is resting on a foundation of sand.

¹⁸ Quoted from the 2-volume edition of the *Institutes* translated by John Allen and published at Philadelphia by the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education [n.d.].

¹⁹ Quoted from Kendall, 19.

To his credit, Gerstner seeks to address my argument from Jas 2:26. There James states:

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

I have urged that this simile clearly implies that a *dead* faith was *once alive*, just as a dead body that has lost its spirit was once alive.²⁰

But what is Gerstner's own reading of Jas 2:26? It is this:

James 2:26 makes the point of the passage perfectly clear. All that James says is that, just as you cannot have a man without a body and spirit together, so you cannot have a Christian without works and faith together.²¹

What impartial reader would ever get *this* idea out of the text of James? In no way does James say that one does not "have a man" without body and spirit being together. Is a man non-existent simply because his spirit has left his body? Has he *never* existed? But Gerstner implies that a Christian has *never existed as a Christian* if his faith is not accompanied by works!

James is manifestly comparing a dead faith to a dead body from which the spirit has departed. Gerstner's exegesis is a transparent case of reading into a text what one wants to get out of it.

Of course, Gerstner would also say to me (as in fact he does) that I am overlooking a significant distinction when I discuss "works." Gerstner writes:

So we see . . . that Hodges does not critique the traditional orthodox (!) position accurately . . . Hodges, and virtually all dispensationalists, do not see the elementary difference between *non-meritorious* "requirements," "conditions," "necessary obligations," "indispensable duties," and "musts," as the natural outworking of true faith, in distinction from faith in the Savior *plus meritorious works* as the very basis of salvation."²²

Here I plead guilty. I admit that I "do not see the elementary difference" Gerstner is talking about. In fact, I deny it. Not only is it in no way "elementary," it is not even biblical!

²⁰ See *The Gospel Under Siege*, 50; see also my *Dead Faith—What Is It?* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1987), 7-9.

²¹ Gerstner, 229.

²² *Ibid.*, 226.

We must note that Paul did *not* say,

Now to him who works *meritoriously*...

but simply,

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

For Paul, “works” always implied “debt”—i.e., they were meritorious! Neither does Paul say,

But to him who does not work *meritoriously*, but believes (*and is willing to work non-meritoriously*)...

but he *does* say,

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

Reformed theology makes a shambles of the Pauline contrast between faith and works. Gerstner’s “elementary difference” is really a *non-existent* difference!

IV. What Gerstner Says on Other Matters

Even in an article-size review like this one, it is impossible to deal with all the significant issues raised by Gerstner’s book. We must now be satisfied to discuss more briefly a number of other matters addressed by this author.

The Atonement

Gerstner is a frank and unapologetic believer in the doctrine of limited atonement. Indeed, his statements on this issue are so bald that one is tempted to shudder at them.

Take this one as an example:

[John 3:16] is supposed to teach that God so loved everyone in the world that He gave His only Son to provide them an opportunity to be saved by faith. What is wrong with this interpretation? First, such a “love” on God’s part, so far from being love, would be a *refinement of cruelty*. As we have seen, offering a gift of life to a spiritual corpse, a brilliant sunset to a blind man, and a reward to a legless cripple if only he will come and get it, are *horrible mockeries* (italics added).²³

²³ Ibid., 124.

But can we not say that if God ordains the existence of immortal beings for whom He makes no provision at all that they should escape eternal torment, that this too is a “refinement of cruelty”? Is it not also a “horrible mockery” for God to send His temporal blessings (Matt 5:45; Acts 14:17) on the “unjust” whose fate is eternally sealed and whose creation had no other possible outcome in view except everlasting damnation?

With its total rejection of any and all capacity in man to respond to God’s love and favor, “Classical Calvinism” leaves itself with a cruel God who is only a caricature of the generous and loving Creator of the Bible.

Sanctification

As is characteristic of “Classical Calvinists,” Gerstner charges that dispensationalists hold to a “total separation of justification and sanctification.”²⁴ But this is a manifest distortion of our convictions.

Just because a dispensationalist does not hold that a high-degree of present sanctification is an “inevitable result” of justification, does not mean that his theology views them in “total separation.” An astute theologian like Gerstner should know better than to say so.

In fact, most dispensationalists (including the reviewer) hold that some measure or degree of sanctification *will* indeed result from justification.²⁵ Moreover, we hold that final sanctification *is* an inevitable result of justification (“and whom He justified, these He also glorified”—Rom 8:30). What we do *not* believe is that *assurance of salvation* is dependent on the measure or degree of one’s sanctification in this life.

It is in his discussion of sanctification that Gerstner makes perhaps the most wildly inaccurate statement in the entire book:

Its [Dispensationalism’s] preaching has *always* been very lopsidedly balanced in favor of their notion of grace with a *conspicuous absence* of moral stress [italics added].²⁶

To anyone who has moved for years in dispensational circles, as this reviewer has, this claim is absurd. Evidently the author has heard very few dispensational messages indeed. Either that, or he has heard the wrong kind!

²⁴ Ibid., 24.

²⁵ See my discussion in *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas and Grand Rapids: Redención Viva and Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 213-15 (found in endnote 4 for chapter 6).

²⁶ Gerstner, 250.

Antinomianism

Gerstner makes liberal use of Reformed theology's favorite theological "cuss word"—Antinomianism. According to him, both the Plymouth Brethren and consistent dispensationalists (such as John F. Walvoord and Charles C. Ryrie, for example) preach an antinomian gospel. He even states that my book, *The Gospel Under Siege*, "should be entitled, 'Antinomianism Under Siege'"²⁷—an amusing suggestion which I have no plans to act upon!

But the meaning of the term, *Antinomianism*, is notoriously slippery. Gerstner holds this view:

From the essential truth that no sinner in himself can merit salvation, the antinomian draws the erroneous conclusion that good works need not accompany faith in the saint. The question is not whether good works are necessary to salvation, but in what way they are necessary. As the inevitable outworking of saving faith, they are necessary for salvation" [italics in Gerstner].²⁸

This statement is preceded, two sentences earlier, by this:

Thus, good works may be said to be *a condition for obtaining salvation* in that they inevitably accompany genuine faith [italics added].²⁹

This is precisely the issue. In Reformed thought good works *are* a *condition* for salvation. A deft Reformed thinker, like Samuel Logan, might add that good works are not a *cause* of salvation, while faith is both a *cause* and a *condition* for this.³⁰ But the bottom line is that, for Reformed Theology, there are *two conditions* for final salvation—faith and works!

This articulation of things is clearly foreign, not only to the Apostle Paul, but also to Calvin and Luther, who confronted essentially the same theology in Roman Catholicism. No doubt Gerstner would argue that the NT teaches the necessity of good works for final salvation; and, if it did, they *would be* a condition for that. But the NT does not teach this, not even in James 2.

The real issue is not quite what Gerstner appears to think it is. One can hold (as I do) that some good works, at least, *are* inevitable—unless

²⁷ Ibid., 225.

²⁸ Ibid., 210.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See Samuel T. Logan, Jr., "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," *Westminster Theological Quarterly* 46 (1984): 26-52.

the Christian dies immediately after believing in Christ. But one can equally hold that the presence or absence of good works would not at all determine the validity of a person's faith. With Calvin I can affirm that "my faith is a divine and spiritual belief that God has saved me,"³¹ "which is founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ."³² Since assurance is of the essence of saving faith, such confidence in God's Word is self-authenticating and does not need further confirmation by works. Whether works are present or absent is irrelevant. Faith in Christ saves and the believer has assurance at the moment of faith.

It is the Reformed effort to verify and authenticate faith by works which leads to a redefinition of faith in which "'works' are a part of the definition of faith."³³ Thus "works" logically become a co-condition with faith for final salvation. The result is not reformational or biblical orthodoxy at all, but a full-scale retreat toward Roman Catholic synergy. Though expressed in theological categories quite different from Catholicism, the results of Reformed and Catholic thought about final salvation are not fundamentally very different at all.

We *could* define "Antinomianism" in the way the American Heritage Dictionary (2nd College Edition, 1985) does as "holding that faith alone is necessary for salvation." If that were what was meant by the term, I would be quite comfortable with it. Unfortunately, because "Antinomianism" implies to many minds a disregard for moral issues, I must reject this designation. I urge my Reformed counterparts to drop this term because of its pejorative, and often unfair, connotations and overtones. But I will not hold my breath waiting for them to do so!

V. Conclusion

Although this review has been primarily negative, the reviewer does not mean to leave the impression that everything in this book is wrong. That is certainly not the case.

Gerstner is correct in perceiving a theological drift by some dispensationalists in the direction of Reformed thought. Dallas Seminary is his major illustration of this (47-49). Gerstner is also right, I believe,

³¹ See the quotation in Dabney which is cited on p. 62.

³² See Calvin's definition quoted on p. 64.

³³ Gerstner, 257. I am aware that both Calvin and Reformed thinkers maintain a doctrine of spurious, temporary faith. For a good discussion of this issue, see Kendall, 21-28. Calvin, it seems, did not really consistently integrate his concept of temporary faith with his own definition of saving faith. I think he would be appalled at the way Reformed theology has done this.

in his claim that dispensational theology and Reformed theology are essentially incompatible. In Gerstner's view, no one can be a true dispensationalist and a Calvinist (= "Classical Calvinist") at the same time. Rather effectively he shows that dispensationalists have normally rejected or modified all of the so-called "5 points of Calvinism." The reviewer wonders why anyone would wish to plant his foot in both theological camps. The doctrinal divide between them is enormous and essentially unbridgeable.

Thus, overall, Gerstner's book has the effect of sharply and clearly delineating the two camps which are the primary participants in the debate over "Lordship Salvation." Gerstner clearly dispels the myth that this debate is largely semantic and does not represent a significant cleavage in evangelical thought. We appreciate this result and commend Gerstner for his effectiveness in bringing this deep cleavage to light. For that reason alone, if for no other, every serious student of Grace theology ought to obtain this book.

And for responsible leaders in the Grace movement, Gerstner's volume is not optional—but mandatory—reading.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. I. Translated by Kirsopp Lake. Vol. 24 in *The Loeb Classical Library*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912. 409 pp. Cloth, \$15.50.

When the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* was started in mid-1988, the book and periodical reviewers were faced with the question of how far back in time one could go in reviewing materials germane to our grace emphasis. Some of the seminal work on the Lordship Salvation issue was from the 1950's, for example. Well, I'd like to go back *eighteen or nineteen centuries* to review some of the early "church fathers," the so-called "Apostolic Fathers." (Apostolic they are not, but "sub-apostolic"—in both senses of that word.)

This volume in the Loeb dual language (Greek/English or Latin/English) classical series took the present reviewer a long time to read since I decided to read the Greek side and look over at the English only to save looking up the words I didn't know. Also, it was interesting to see how Kirsopp Lake, a NT textual scholar from an earlier day, handled his texts. He used largely King-James-type English, complete with *thee's* and *thou's*.

The first volume contains *I Clement*, a letter from the Church of Rome to the Church at Corinth; *II Clement*, probably not by Clement nor yet an epistle; the *Epistles of Ignatius*; the *Epistle of Polycarp*; the *Didache*; and the *Epistle of Barnabas*.

All of these works are valuable for illustrating Koine Greek usage and vocabulary, as well as for their many quotations from the NT, thus aiding textual critics.

Sadly, most of these works also illustrate how quickly and how far second-century Christendom fell from the NT doctrines of grace. As my former seminary Greek professor, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, used to say, "They ought not to be called 'the church fathers,' but 'the church children'!"

Devout and dedicated these men generally were, but each seemed to have his own legalistic note to harp on. In Rome's re-write of history to accomodate later papal power, she made Clement the fourth bishop of Rome (= pope to them). Just to read the letter with its *multiple*-leadership background refutes this. But in Ignatius we can see hierarchical church

government growing fast apace, at least in Asia. Submission to the one "monarchal" bishop as to Christ seems to be Ignatius's hobbyhorse in all his letters. One can't help admire his heroism, however, as he "courted" martyrdom on his way to Rome.

One work in this volume, *The Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, has special interest to me because it was in comparing a dual language edition of this work in a book by Harry Rimmer (*Crying Stones*) that I became interested in learning Greek when I was still in high school. *The Didache* gives interesting insights into early Christian church life, including how to treat itinerant prophets. Some scholars believe that at least the first part of *The Didache*, "The Two Ways," is a Christianized *Jewish* manual. It certainly doesn't read like the NT emphasis.

I strongly recommend the dual language approach for reading the classics. This first volume of *The Apostolic Fathers* should be in every serious NT student's library.

Arthur L. Farstad

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Dallas, TX

Sin, the Savior, and Salvation. By Robert P. Lightner. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991. 318 pp. Cloth, \$16.95.

Considering the modern confusion over the doctrines concerning salvation, a book which speaks clearly on the subject is very welcome. Dr. Robert Lightner, Professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, has written a book that will help many sort through the issues and dispel pockets of confusion.

The book is well organized, as indicated in its title. One's doctrine of sin determines one's doctrine of the Savior and His work, which in turn determines one's doctrine of salvation. Lightner moves the reader in a logical progression through these doctrines ending with a practical discussion of evangelism.

Lightner does not dodge the tough theological questions about salvation. He discusses the sovereignty of God in relation to man's responsibility, the extent of the atonement, the question of those who cannot believe, and the issues of security and assurance. In all these discussions, I found him to be balanced, fair, and biblically accurate.

Commendably, a separate chapter is devoted to the Lordship Salvation controversy. Lightner firmly rejects it as an addition to the Gospel of grace. He addresses the main theological arguments and three main passages (Acts 16:30-31; Rom 10:9-10; Jas 2:14-26). Though his discussion is brief, the reader will find enough exposition and logic to roundly reject Lordship Salvation.

Sometimes the reader may find other discussions too brief to satisfy deeper inquiry. However, this book will serve as an excellent introduction to the doctrines surrounding salvation. It will be an excellent textbook for college courses and a resource for serious laymen. Discussion questions after each chapter and an annotated bibliography at the end enhance the book's value.

Though the reader will not have every question answered, nor every theological or interpretive option presented, he will gain a cohesive overview of soteriology. I heartily recommend this book for any library.

Charles C. Bing

Editorial Board

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Pastor, Burleson Bible Church

Burleson, TX

First Corinthians. Alfred Martin. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1989. 149 pp. plus Appendix, Select Bibliography, and Scripture Index. Cloth, \$16.95.

Dr. Martin served with distinction at Moody Bible Institute for thirty-two years where he taught in the Bible Department and became Vice President and Dean of Education. In his "retirement" he has kept busy writing and also teaching, first at Dallas Bible College and part-time at Southern Bible Institute.

This short but valuable commentary is Martin's first book with Loizeaux Brothers, though he has several books to his credit with other publishers. The book is very readable and is based on the New King James Version, which is printed paragraph by paragraph in the text, a practical help to readers.

Though concise, the commentary does adequately cover this important epistle. This reviewer has been "team-preaching" through 1 Corinthians on Sunday evenings, and of all the many commentaries that

I possess on this epistle, this one often gives the most suitable help for popular communication.

Considering how much controversial material there is in 1 Corinthians (e.g., divorce, tongues, "doubtful things") it is noteworthy that the author maintains an irenic and humble spirit throughout.

The fact that *I agree* with most of his interpretations, including his conservative stance on the Greek text underlying the translation, obviously makes me more favorable to the book than some would be. I must, however, part company with Dr. Martin on a few things, such as the question of head-coverings and water baptism.

Martin's writing is clear, devout, and a pleasure to read. This book is definitely worth acquiring if you want to understand, teach, or preach through this very relevant epistle.

Arthur L. Farstad

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Dallas, TX

A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament. Edited by Roy B. Zuck with consulting editors Eugene H. Merrill and Darrell L. Bock. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991. 446 pp. Cloth, \$27.99.

In his foreword to this book, Dr. Kenneth Barker (of NIV renown) states, "In my estimation, it is the best evangelical volume to appear on the subject of biblical theology in my lifetime." Though my shorter years on this earth would make a similar statement less impressive, I whole-heartedly agree with him.

The book's contributors all teach at Dallas Theological Seminary (Robert B. Chisholm, Thomas L. Constable, Homer Heater, Eugene H. Merrill, and Roy B. Zuck), which brings some consistency to interpretations. Overall, the entire volume is clear and helpful, though as with many multi-authored works, treatment and quality is uneven.

One author's contribution deserves special mention. I must heap plaudits on Dr. Merrill for his mastery and exposition of the central theological theme of the OT (called the "theological center"). Though many ideas have been proposed in modern OT studies, none has been more clearly stated and developed than his here. Merrill does this primarily in chapter one, especially in his treatment of Genesis. In my

opinion, this makes the first thirty pages more than worth the high price of the book.

Merrill argues that the theme of OT theology is God's rule over the earth and all other things through His image, the human race (p. 30). His support focuses on Gen 1:26-28 with an insightful exposition. Such a theme sees Israel as the means by which God will restore His rule through man, which man lost in the fall, and Jesus Christ as the Second Adam who will regain God's rule over the earth.

Fortunately for the reader, Merrill develops his theme in a total of twelve books of the OT. The other authors do not appear as cognizant of the theme, although the book implies that it also informs their respective theologies. Though they do a commendable job in developing theological emphases of the various books, they do not master the essential synthesis as does Merrill.

I have always been an advocate of synthesis which emphasizes the unity of the Bible and the single divine Author. This informs our analyses of the parts of the Bible and our development of theology from the Bible. I am excited that this OT theology provides such a unity and has articulated it so well. It will lay a firm foundation for teaching and preaching the OT books.

I recommend that this book find a place on the shelf of every serious Bible student, teacher, and preacher.

Charles C. Bing
Editorial Board

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Pastor, Burleson Bible Church
Burleson, TX

Say Yes! How to Renew Your Spiritual Passion. By Luis Palau. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1991. 172 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

Say Yes! is a call to repentance to the Church—an appeal to wake up and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. God desires to fill our lives with His victory, power, and joy. Instead of presenting a mechanical methodology of discipleship training as done by some writers, Palau makes a personal appeal to individuals, speaking straight to the heart. The tone is serious, convicting, and gentle—without accusing, negative, or critical overtones. The example of Christ washing the disciples' feet is not only a central theme of the book, but the spirit of the writer as well.

Palau starts off with a candid personal account of his own testimony. Like many Christians who grew up going to church, he struggled intensely to find fulfillment and joy by involvement in church activities, reading the Bible, attending prayer meetings, and witnessing and preaching to the lost. Yet with all this activity and earnest desire to please God, Palau became more frustrated and unhappy. Then he discovered four important spiritual principles which changed the whole course of his life. The book centers around these principles.

Palau next lays the groundwork for the four truths by discussing spiritual warfare and the Christian's victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Holiness is stressed as he illustrates how various sins not considered serious (or gross) today are nevertheless causing much damage and hindrance. An unthankful spirit, resentment, and a critical, unloving attitude are examples of the long list of "sins of the flesh" which must be pinpointed and confessed.

In his chapter on "The Cleansed Life" Palau explains that Jesus' example of footwashing must be followed in a spiritual form. Christians need to learn to *gently* "wash each others' feet" from the defilement of the world. This means that sins must be lovingly confronted and confessed. This is perhaps the hardest of the four principles to apply since it involves confession and repentance on the part of the offender, as well as courage, love, and obedience on the part of the "footwasher." Palau recounts that in a church in Colombia a man stood up in the middle of his sermon and confessed his sins. Soon there was a lot of "footwashing" going on, and revival came to that church.

The *second principle* is consecration, involving the dedicating of one's life to follow Christ in obedience. Here the believer must offer himself (or herself) as a living sacrifice *totally* consumed by God, with *nothing held back*.

Third, there is the Christ-centered life expressed by Paul in Gal 2:20. As we yield to Christ, He produces in us a strong faith and victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The final and *fourth* spiritual principle is concern, or a "passion," for the lost. When Christians reach this stage they gain a deep concern for unbelievers' souls. Once this is obtained, witnessing will begin automatically and *supernaturally*.

Although *Say Yes!* has many positive points, the Gospel message is unclear in at least one place where Palau describes his conversion. While Luis was a boy at camp, his counselor presented to him a condition for his obtaining eternal salvation—*confession with his mouth that Christ*

is *Lord*—based on a view of Rom 10:9-10 that contrasts with simply “believing in Christ.” Palau does not clarify in *Say Yes!* whether or not he believes that verbal confession is really a condition for salvation.

Nevertheless, Palau’s book is well worth reading.

Mark J. Farstad

Production Staff

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Dallas, TX

Going for the Gold. By Joe L. Wall. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991. 180 pp. Paper, \$6.95.

“[The] whole subject of rewards for the believer is one, I am afraid, rarely thought of by the ordinary Christian, or even the average student of the Scriptures. But it is both a joyous and solemn theme and should serve as a potent incentive for holiness of life [see Wilbur Smith, ‘Inheritance and Reward in Heaven,’ *Eternity*, March 1977, p. 79, as cited in *Going for the Gold*, p. 20.]”

The absence of teaching on this very important subject remains a perplexing mystery, because the *bēma* (Judgment Seat) of Christ surfaces in a profusion of passages in the NT. Today when the judgment of believers is taught, it is sometimes down-played as insignificant, and Christians are sometimes cautioned that living for reward is not a proper motivation for them. However, the presentation of the Judgment Seat of Christ in *Going for the Gold* is different. In this book, Dr. Joe Wall, chancellor of Colorado Christian University, defines the importance of this judgment and points out the motivation it should generate for every believer to live for Christ.

The book is divided into three parts. *Part one* presents general information: the future reality of the judgment of believers and the motivation it can provide for us now; an overview of future judgments (of believers and unbelievers); an overview of the *bēma* of Christ; what happens to a believer after he dies; a synopsis of the scriptural picture of heaven; prophetic events relating to the judgment of believers; and indications that the *bēma* may be very soon. *Part two* looks at the Judgment Seat of Christ more specifically by examining eternal rewards, the basis of rewards for believers, what believers can do now to prepare for the Judgment Seat, and the possibility of a “negative” judgment for

some believers. *Part three* is meant to be an applicational section based on the believers' future judgment and contains information about rewards as "crowns," divine guidance and future reward, "persevering under trial," evangelism and future reward, and reward for godly church leaders.

There are three major strengths of this book which members of GES will appreciate. First, the author is a proponent of grace. For example, he denounces Lordship Salvation, then states: ". . . we need to make certain our hearers in no way are left with the impression that their salvation depends on them, their feelings, their deeds, or even how much faith they can build up. Rather it depends entirely on Christ, and it is appropriated by the simplest of trust in Him" (p. 58).

Second, a clear and biblical presentation of the Judgment Seat of Christ is given. Not only are the ideas of reward and loss of reward presented accurately, but also the way believers attain reward—by living faithfully for Christ by God's grace. Wall also emphasizes the biblical teaching that future reward is a valid motivation to stimulate believers to faithful living.

Third, the author attempts to show how this topic relates to us by application. He gives clear principles for Christians to apply in order to obtain eternal honor from the King.

Along with the strengths of this book, there are some evident weaknesses. First, much information is included which is not directly related to the issue of rewards. For this reason, chapters 1–6 and 12–16 could have been eliminated. (Though Wall does present valid application from this study in part two of the book, much of part three—the applicational section of the book—does not appear to harmonize well with the topic at hand.)

Second, this reviewer would like to have seen the author demonstrate more in-depth exegesis on passages relative to his topic. These passages, properly developed expositively, would demonstrate the Grace position and provide readers with a powerful motivation for faithful living. Currently Lordship Salvation advocates and those holding to a strong perseverance-of-the-saints view use some of these to maintain their theological positions.

Third, better editorial work could have eliminated grammatical errors and redundancies, reduced unnecessary material, and encouraged the author to provide evidence for some of his statements and inferences.

Still, *Going for the Gold* is recommended for its clarity and accuracy on the basic principles of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Since the judgment

of believers will affect all Christians for eternity, we need to understand it and prepare for it. This book can serve to get us started in that direction.

John Claeys
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Home Coming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child. By John Bradshaw. New York: Bantam Books, 1990. 288 pp. Cloth, \$18.95.

This is not a Christian book. However, it is a book being read by many Christians and which certainly presents itself as a *spiritual* book. For these reasons, I believe it deserves a review.

As one who grew up in an alcoholic home and has read much on this subject, I find some value in this book. The case histories often hit home with me. So, too, did a number of the suggestions on how to slow down and relax. Unfortunately, the positive aspects of this book are far outweighed by the negatives.

One school of thought in psychology today suggests that in order to overcome childhood pain and abuse we must go back and relive the experiences. Bradshaw sees this as absolutely essential if growth is to take place.

To accomplish this Bradshaw suggests a series of meditation/imagery exercises. I was uncomfortable with the exercises. There is a definite New Age flavor to them (e.g., pp. 219, 258-61) that most Christians will find unsettling. By the end of the book we are told to ask our "inner guide" what our purpose in life is (pp. 258-61)!

Several other cautions are in order. First, the book is filled with very explicit sexual language.

Second, Bradshaw espouses the view held by many in psychology today that homosexuality is not abnormal or sinful, rather it is a matter of "biological predisposition" (p. 126).

Third, the author rejects an evangelical view of the Gospel. He implies that there is no hell (pp. 26, 45-46). And he considers the following remark he heard a preacher make as an example of "*abuse* at church": "You can't be good enough to be acceptable in the eyes of God." Bradshaw responds, "What a terrible affront to God the Creator" (p. 46; see also pp. 177-78, 189).

Fourth, Bradshaw considers premarital sex to be normal and healthy, not sinful, for adolescents and adults (pp. 162, 165, 234-35).

Fifth, the biblical concept of spiritual regeneration by faith in Christ is replaced with psychological regeneration by connecting with one's "essential self" (pp. 252-65). The latter is achieved by imagery which culminates in one's "inner guide" revealing one's purpose in life (pp. 258-61).

Sixth, for Bradshaw absolute truth can only be found by getting in touch with one's inner child (e.g., pp. 234-35). Even then, it is only true for that individual. This sort of thinking leads him to do things like encourage an evangelical Christian wife and mother to listen to her inner child and divorce her loving and devoted husband (p. 283).

Unfortunately, then, despite some good content in places, this is definitely *not* a book I can recommend reading.

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Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

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The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority-Textform. Ed. by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont; Exec. Ed. William David McBrayer. Atlanta: The Original Word Publishers, 1991. lvii + 510 pp. Paper, \$24.95.

Having themselves edited a Greek NT (*The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*) the present reviewers can appreciate the work that went into this volume. We welcome its appearance heartily as yet another evidence of growing support for conservative principles of NT textual criticism.

The *format* of this Greek NT is attractive: a large paperback with appropriate designs on the cover ("Greek fret" border and a Corinthian capital). The Preface and Introduction are fifty-seven pages long and the text plus Appendix and Bibliography are 510 pages long.

The type face is clear and gives a simple, uncluttered look to the pages, which are totally devoid of punctuation, breathings, capitalization, paragraphing, or critical apparatus (footnotes with textual variants). This may well prove to be the book's greatest asset as well as its greatest liability. Since the early mss. lack all of the things mentioned above, one is able to get a better idea of what actual mss. are like. However, in testing

readability with a number of non-experts (but who have had two to three years of Greek), we found that all agreed it was hard to read the text without the commonly accepted editorial helps. On the other hand, those who are proficient enough in Greek to dispense with punctuation and accenting, etc., tend to be the very ones who most desire a textual apparatus.

Perhaps a second edition will include these features. Even as it stands the Testament is a valuable tool to have, especially for the Introduction, and to compare those passages—John 7:53–8:11 (fully documented in the Appendix in various editions) and Revelation, both of which sections of the NT have readings with no actual *majority* reading as such.

The *textual theory* expounded in the Robinson/Pierpont edition is a striking departure from all previous theories about the Majority Text. Robinson/Pierpont actually prefer the term “Byzantine” to the term “Majority,” which Robinson calls a “misnomer” (p. xviii). When their theory is examined, it seems clear why the designation “Byzantine” is favored.

According to these editors, the “original Byzantine Textform must have rapidly degenerated into the various uncontrolled popular texts which prevailed in certain times and localities” (p. xxx). But after the Church received official sanction under the Emperor Constantine, with greater communication between churches, there came a “spontaneous ‘improvement’ of manuscripts through cross-correction” (pp. xxx-xxxi). The new “‘universal text’ could only be one which would approach the common archetype which lay behind *all* the local texts” (p. xxxi).

Thus Robinson/Pierpont reintroduce the once-popular “process view” by which recent scholars have often explained the origin of the Majority Text. Ironically, the editors reject the previous “process view,” citing Hodges’s criticism of that view (p. xxv). But the same criticism applies to the Robinson/Pierpont view with equal force. If the mixed, partially-corrupted local texts that existed prior to Constantine’s time were sporadically and unsystematically cross-pollinated with other such texts, the result could only be the same as it was in the history of the Latin Vulgate: increasing textual mixture and textual corruption. There is no way such a process could produce the relatively high-level of uniformity found in the great mass of “Byzantine” manuscripts. The Robinson/Pierpont explanation is transmissionally inconceivable. Only a formal, official revision (à la Hort!) could get the job done.

Earlier the editors cite favorably the statement by Hort that “a certain presumption . . . remains that a majority of extant documents is more likely to represent a majority of ancestral documents at each stage of

the transmission than *vice versa*" (p. xx). The editors rightly call this "the only logical position for textual scholars to hold" (p. xxi). Yet the editors themselves apparently violate this position when they speak of the Byzantine text "degenerating" into local texts prior to the age of Constantine. If a period existed in which the "Byzantine Textform" could *not* claim a majority of *documents*, then Hort's "theoretical presumption" must be false for the NT. Normal Majority text theory maintains the validity of Hort's statement on the basis of the available data. Robinson/Pierpont seem to embrace, then reject, Hort's "presumption."

Robinson/Pierpont also reject the use of stemmatics in reconstructing the original text, but on inadequate grounds. According to them "stemmatics have not been applied successfully to the NT Greek documents because such *cannot* be applied to a textually 'mixed' body of documents" (p. xxiii, n.). This is very arbitrary and amounts to saying that what has not been done *cannot* be done. On the contrary, Josef Schmid, whose volumes on the text of Revelation are invaluable, has worked stemmatically with considerable success and he even convinced E. C. Colwell that an overarching stemma for the Book of Revelation was possible, though Schmid himself did not think so (see Colwell, *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 53). With the arrival of high-tech computers, the problems posed by mixture are no longer the barrier to stemmatics that earlier textual scholars believed them to be. Even with the "mixed" manuscripts of Revelation, when one knows the readings of a half-dozen or so key witnesses, he will be able in most cases to project how the remaining approximately 200 manuscripts will divide numerically on the variants in question. Most NT manuscripts are far from being as textually "mixed" as some scholars imply.

Throughout their introduction the editors refer to the so-called "Western" and "Caesarean" texttypes. But today the existence of either of these texttypes is an open question. Kurt Aland now prefers the designation D-text (instead of "Western") since Codex D stands alone as a representative of its own peculiar form of text.

It is inaccurate to say, as these editors do, that "a purely 'majority' textual theory disregards texttype distinctions and resorts ultimately to following the numerical majority wherever such might lead" (p. lii). Granted, there are proponents of the Majority Text for whom this is true. But, as a generalization, it is certainly not correct.

The term "Majority Text" was originally coined by Kurt Aland and refers to the fact that a certain type of text is found in the majority of the surviving *documents*. In this sense it is a *documentary* term and not a way of referring to particular readings. One can obviously prefer the Majority Text as an overall *form* witnessed to by the majority of *documents*, without having to insist that every single original reading must have a majority of the surviving manuscripts in its favor. The overall *form* of text in the Hodges/Farstad edition is clearly the *form* found in a majority of the NT documents (except in John 7:53-8:11 and in Revelation where no one "form" of the text is in the majority). In this sense it is not illegitimate to call the Majority Text itself a "texttype." But it is transmissionally possible that some of the *original* readings of this "texttype" are not attested in a majority of the extant manuscripts known today.

All in all, the Robinson/Pierpont position on textual theory seems built on shaky foundations. Why should "the most appropriate goal" for their edition be to print a text "quite acceptable to any Greek-speaking scribe throughout the Byzantine era" (p. lv)? Why is not the most appropriate goal to print as far as possible the *original* text, whether acceptable to Byzantine scribes or not? Are we looking here merely for the post-Constantine text? If so, let us call it "Byzantine" as these editors do. To us, at least, the "Majority Text" means the form of text found in the autographs themselves and which has *always been found in the majority of documents* throughout the history of NT transmission.

But after saying all this, the reviewers wish to affirm again their appreciation for the considerable labor that has gone into this edition. We welcome this volume warmly. The more discussion there is of these issues, the better.

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PERIODICAL REVIEWS

"The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans. Part II: The Obedience of Faith and Judgment by Works," D. B. Garlington, *Westminster Theological Journal* 53, 1991, pp. 47-72.

This is the second of two articles on the meaning of the phrase "the obedience of the faith" in Romans. (See review of Part I, *JOTGES* 4 [Spring 1991]: 89-92.) The first article suggested that Paul's use of the phrase "obedience of faith" in Romans meant "believing obedience" (adjectival genitive)—a deliberately ambiguous expression which could denote both the obedience which *is* faith and the obedience which is the *product* of faith. This second article builds on this interpretation and focuses on the relation of the obedience of faith to final vindication on the day of judgment. Specifically, how can the NT passages be reconciled, which on the one hand, declare present justification to be secured by faith alone, while other passages (Rom 2:13; Matt 12:36-37; Jas 2:24; 2 Cor 5:10) describe a future justification by works?

The article consists of three divisions: first, an examination of Paul's dialogue with Israel in Rom 1:1-3:8; second, an examination of Rom 2:13: "The Justification of the Doers of the Law"; and third, an explanation of what it means to be a doer of the law in Romans 2.

To be a doer of the law is to love others, because it is *love* that fulfills the law (Rom 13:9-10; Gal 5:13-14). Israel's misguided devotion to the law led them to hate those outside the law and thus to violate the very spirit of the law. In this sense, they were not "doers of the law" (pp. 66-67). Love is the supreme characteristic of the Christian faith. In a word, the "obedience of the faith" is love: "Hence if we ask what is the obedience of faith that results in eschatological justification, the answer is love, which fulfills the law" (p. 67).

Yet there must be a perseverance in this love, because "embodied in the obedience of the faith" is "the work of endurance consequent upon entrance into Christ" (p. 67). Quoting Jas 1:12, "Blessed is the man who *endures* trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who *love* him," Garlington comments: "Conspicuous here is the combination of perseverance and love as the preconditions of eternal life. The bottom line then is that *the obedience of faith which finally justifies is perseverance, motivated by*

love" (p. 68). This perseverance is guaranteed by the work of Christ in the believer; it is God's activity in the believer through faith which results in a life of obedience, which "entails specific and concrete acts of a lifestyle pleasing to God" (p. 70).

According to Garlington, all believers in Christ will fulfill the requirement of Rom 2:13, since Christ works in them to persevere in love, and in so doing, fulfill the law. In this sense they fulfill the requirement for justification, which is to be "doers of the law." The future judgment by works will vindicate all those who have faith in Christ, "because obedience itself is the product of faith; and where true faith and love exist, there must be ultimate vindication" (p. 70). Thus justification by faith will result in works which will lead to final eschatological justification.

Garlington's scholarship and depth of research into Pauline studies is to be commended. The article is a fine resource for research into Pauline studies regarding the law. But there is much to disagree with in his *conclusions*.

Romans 2:13 is not an explanation of how to be justified, but a standard to which none will attain, as evidenced by Paul's argument in 3:1-20. He rejects this interpretation of 2:13 as "hypothetical" without adequate reason.

The author also fails to distinguish between justification by faith and the future judgment of a believer's works at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:13-15; 2 Cor 5:9-10). The Judgment Seat does evaluate according to works, but it is in order to determine rewards and position in the kingdom, not to test the validity of a person's salvation (1 Cor 3:14-15).

On the other hand, Garlington assumes that faith once exercised will certainly blossom forth into a lifelong commitment to Christ, to loving others, and to good works, because Christ now operates in the individual. But at the same time he does allow for the possibility of apostasy, and so closes with a pastoral exhortation that "it is of primary importance that *preaching minister to the upbuilding of faith: faith and its growth must receive the primacy*" (p. 72). But how can true faith always issue forth in perseverance of love, yet at the same time require continual pastoral nurture? Or how can anyone know for sure that he is saved at any given point of time if the "obedience of faith" is "perseverance motivated by love" (p. 68)? Garlington reads too much into the expression "obedience of faith," rather than simply accepting it as trusting in Christ for salvation. To believe the Gospel is to obey

the Gospel. To add perseverance, love, and good works to this expression is reading into the text.

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"The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine," John Jefferson Davis, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, 1991, pp. 213-28.

This article provides a brief though reliable survey of various opinions on perseverance throughout church history. Covered are Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Trent, the Anglican creeds, Arminius, Dort, Westminster, Wesley, American Baptists, Dispensationalists, and the conclusions among modern scholars. I highly encourage this as reading for the individual needing a concise, sweeping introduction to the subject.

The doctrine of perseverance deeply concerns the Grace Evangelical Society, and because I did my master's thesis on this subject it interests me as well. It is a difficult doctrine, and we believe it has been unfortunately equated with the doctrine of eternal security. As one may see from Davis's article, it was an almost universal assumption, even in Calvin, that perseverance in faith and good works was necessary for eternal salvation. Augustine deviated from previous theologians by asserting God determines that *some* of the regenerate will persevere by an additional gift of grace. I found interesting Davis's comment that "the first extensive discussion of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is found in Augustine" (p. 213). It would be more accurate to say that a belief in guaranteed perseverance was non-existent before Augustine. And as Davis shows, Calvinism deviated from Augustine by becoming the first movement in church history to extend this gift of grace to all the regenerate. But we beg to differ on two counts. First, we insist that the eternal security of the redeemed does *not* rest on their faithfulness to God, but on His faithfulness to them. As Paul asserted, "If we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2 Tim 2:13). And second, we reject the idea that the regenerate invariably persevere to the end. The sin unto death (1 John 5:16-17), God's ultimate chastening of His children, goes

far to establish that the regenerate may die unrepentant.

Davis also asserts that "Dispensationalist interpreters reflect the Calvinistic point of view in the matter of perseverance and eternal security" (p. 225). Davis's summary, supported by appeals to Chafer and the Scofield Reference Bible, overlooks the many modern dispensationalists who reject perseverance, but who would nevertheless consider themselves Calvinists. This includes the chairman of the theology department of Dallas Seminary (traditionally the bastion of dispensationalism), who is a theologically gifted individual trained by the respected Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. It also embraces most of those within the Grace Evangelical Society.

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"Understanding the Lordship Controversy," J. I. Packer, *Table Talk* 15, May 1991, pp. 7-9.

This short article is fascinating and well worth reading by anyone interested in clear Gospel proclamation.

There are four major methodological difficulties with this article.

First, Packer chose in this article only to interact with the views of Zane Hodges. While Hodges is surely a leader of the Free Grace movement, one wonders why Packer did not make reference to others in the Free Grace camp who hold different views on certain issues (e.g., Ryrie on repentance).

Second, the author's treatment of Hodges does not reveal the utmost of care. Indeed, Packer's treatment of Hodges could be described as heavy-handed.

For example, Packer claims that Hodges's view of saving faith is identical to that of Robert Sandeman (whom he calls "eccentric"—a pejorative term aimed at Hodges and all of us who hold the Free Grace position) and even Karl Barth! The latter suggestion is ludicrous. Packer says of Barth's view, "[saving] faith is simply believing that because of Christ's death and resurrection one is already justified and an heir of eternal life, as is everybody else" (p. 8). Yet Packer fails to show any proof

that Hodges believes or has ever taught that. In actual fact Hodges never has believed or taught that all are justified and that all are heirs of eternal life! This is pure fabrication.

Indeed, aside from one sentence in which he cites three isolated phrases—and then without giving any source references (p. 8), Packer never even quotes Hodges. Instead, he states what he considers to be Hodges's views without any proof. This is very poor scholarship to say the least.

Third, Packer rarely supports his points. Only once did he cite a text (and then only in reference to its use in the Westminster Confession of Faith [p. 9]). He seems to assume that the readers will blindly accept his assertions as true.

Consider some of the points which he dogmatically proclaims with no proof whatsoever:

"The pastoral effect of [Hodges's] teaching *can only be to produce what the Puritans called 'Gospel hypocrites'*—persons who have been told that they are Christians, eternally secure, because they believe Christ died for them, when their hearts are unchanged and they have no personal commitment to Christ at all" (p. 9, italics mine).

"To say the least he [Hodges] fails to convince [that repentance is not a condition of eternal salvation]" (p. 9).

"The effect of regeneration is that now one *wants*, from the bottom of one's heart, to know, love, serve, trust, obey, and honor the Father and the Son, so that obedient devotion and discipleship spontaneously spring up where there was only resentful hostility to God before" (p. 9, italics his).

Fourth, Packer twice cites the Westminster Confession of Faith as though that proved that his points must be correct (pp. 8, 9).

Are we to understand by this that the Westminster Confession is the standard of our faith?

I found it very interesting that Packer accused Hodges of holding a view of saving faith which "recalls the old Roman Catholic conception of believing what the church teaches" (p. 8). Is that not what Packer himself does in his own article by citing the Westminster Confession as though it were the standard of our faith? And, what evidence of this is there in Hodges's writings? Packer gives us none. Indeed, one of the things Hodges is often criticized for is that he fails to adopt *traditional* interpretations!

The end of the article has two gems in it.

The first diamond is that Packer testifies that he once believed what Hodges teaches (p. 9)! For two years Packer by his own admission held to the Free Grace position! That is quite a statement. I find it interesting that a number of leading Lordship Salvation teachers are what we might call apostates of the Free Grace position. Fortunately for them, those who depart from the true Gospel are still saved—at least according to the Free Grace view!

The second diamond is that the author indicates that Hodges and all of us who believe the Free Grace Gospel are lost and are bound for hell. He writes, “If I seem harsh in my critique of Hodges’ [sic] redefinition of faith as barren intellectual formalism, you must remember that *once I almost lost my soul through assuming what Hodges teaches*, and a burned child always thereafter dreads the fire” (p. 9, italics mine). If Packer would have lost his soul for believing what Hodges teaches, so too would anyone else.

This may not seem like a diamond to some. It does to me since such a statement will drive many to become concerned about the Gospel. Many who read his words will search the Scriptures to see if he is right. I am confident that those who do so with diligence will come to the Free Grace position since God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6).

According to the Free Grace view many of those holding to Lordship Salvation are saved people who have become confused and have deserted the true Gospel—just as the Galatian believers were beginning to do (Gal 1:6-7). However, according to the Lordship view, all in the Free Grace camp are unsaved since they do not believe in the gospel of Lordship Salvation.

The Lord taught that we are blessed when men persecute us and revile us and say all kinds of evil against us falsely on His account (Matt 5:10-12; see also 1 Pet 4:13). Ironically, Packer’s vitriolic attack upon Hodges and those who hold the Free Grace Gospel will pay eternal dividends for those whom he is attacking if they bear up under it well!

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“‘Works of Law’ in Paul,” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Novum Testamentum* 33:3, July 1991, pp. 217-44.

This article is an excellent rebuttal to current interpretive trends which relate Paul’s argument against “works of the law” to Jewish exclusivism. Although no consensus exists for how the phrase “works of law” should be interpreted in Paul, some NT scholars have departed from a traditional evangelical understanding, namely, that Paul argued against “works of law” as a basis for obtaining salvation on account of the inadequacy of the law to save and the inadequacy of man’s efforts to obey the law. As opposed to the notion that it was impossible to fulfill the requirements of the law, many today argue that Paul’s concern was with the *external symbols* of the law which kept Jew and Gentile distinct and which limited salvation to members of the Jewish community.

Schreiner’s article surveys the major trends and opinions on Paul’s meaning of “works of law” (*erga nomou*) and then defends his view. Schreiner’s position is summarized as follows: “Paul rules out righteousness by ‘works of law’ because no one can obey the law perfectly. He does not in principle oppose obeying the law. What he opposes is the delusion of those who think they can earn merit before God by their obedience to the law, even though they fail to obey it” (p. 244). This view would be acceptable to most *JOTGES* readers.

Schreiner surveys five different views of what Paul means when he rejects “works of law” as a means of attaining justification. The first view is that Paul objects to “works of law” as part of justification, because “1) no one can obey the law perfectly and 2) it is legalistic to try to gain righteousness by doing good works” (p. 218). Both notions are equally emphasized in this view. Proponents would include John Calvin, W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, E. D. Burton, C. K. Barrett, D. Guthrie, L. Morris, and C. E. B. Cranfield.

The second view is that the “works of law” relates to an attempt to justify oneself by works so that one can boast before God—which is idolatry. Proponents include R. Bultmann, E. Kasemann, H. Conzelmann, G. Klein, G. Bertram. The difference in this view is the emphasis on man’s intent to gain merit before God which, *in itself*, is sin, even if man could obey the law perfectly.

In the third view, the problem lies in *man’s inability* to obey the law perfectly, not his attempt to gain favor by good works. Proponents include U. Wilckens, S. Westerholm, F. Theilmann, J. Lambrecht.

The fourth view originates with L. Gaston, who suggests that “works of law” should be regarded as a subjective genitive, that is, “works which

are produced by the law, and as such, these works are evil. The law produces wrath, brings a curse, and causes guilt. Therefore, it cannot, by its very nature, be a way to justification.

A fifth view suggests the problem of "works of law" is that it erected a barrier between Jew and Gentile, which Paul was trying to tear down to produce a unified Church. This view has attracted a growing number of scholars, including E. Lohmeyer, J. B. Tyson, J. D. G. Dunn, P. Sanders, F. Watson, and J. M. G. Barclay (cf. also D. B. Garlington's article reviewed in this issue of the Journal). These scholars suggest that Paul criticizes the "works of law," not because he thinks it impossible to fulfill them or that it is wrong to seek salvation by obeying the law, but rather it is because such works restrict the people of God to the Jews. Yet the death of Christ has made salvation available to all mankind, Jew and Gentile.

Unfortunately, this interpretation seems to be gaining popularity in NT circles.

Schreiner effectively argues against all these views, and suggests a *sixth* view, which closely resembles the *first* view. According to Schreiner, it was not wrong that the Jews sought to find righteousness by keeping the law, because Paul commends the Jews for their zeal towards the law (Rom 10:2-3). Paul's real objection to the law was that no one could obey it completely: Gal 3:10-12; 4:21-24; Rom 3:19, 20, 23.

This easy-to-read article is an excellent starting place for those wishing to understand the current debate of Paul's attitude towards the Mosaic Law. Schreiner does a good job in critically evaluating the various interpretations and concludes with a clear defense of his own view.

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A HYMN OF GRACE

FRANCES A. MOSHER

Dallas, Texas

NOT WHAT THESE HANDS HAVE DONE

Not what these hands have done
Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne,
Can make my spirit whole.

Not what I feel or do,
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers, or sighs, or tears,
Can ease my awful load.

Thy work alone, my Saviour,
Can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
Can give me peace within.

Thy love to me, O God,
Not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest,
And set my spirit free.

No other work save Thine,
No meaner blood will do;
No strength save that which is divine,
Can bear me safely through.

Thy grace alone, O God,
To me can pardon speak;
Thy power alone, O Son of God,
Can this sore bondage break.

I bless the Christ of God,
I rest on love divine;
And with unfaltering lip and heart
I call the Saviour mine.

—*Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)*

Christians convinced of the truth of salvation by grace through faith frequently focus on the point of salvation—the once-for-all transaction in which grace through faith in Christ alone forever removes the believer from the power of sin and death and objectively assures his eternal life as a redeemed child of God. “Not What These Hands Have Done” leaves no doubt that its author, Horatius Bonar, held a scripturally sound view of this transaction. The first stanza’s declaration that the works of our hands and the toils of our flesh cannot save us has scriptural basis in Titus 3:5 and Rom 4:5. Bonar further asserts in the third, fifth, and sixth stanzas that God’s grace by way of Christ’s blood atonement provides our only deliverance from sin, a view supported by 1 John 1:7 and Eph 2:8.

However, some phrases in the hymn seem to address spiritual issues beyond the initial point of salvation. The third stanza’s references to being eased of “this weight of sin” and receiving “peace within,” and the fourth stanza’s mention of being rid of “this dark unrest” may speak less of the settled fact of the author’s salvation than of his present experience and enjoyment of it. This, too, he proclaims, is by grace, rather than by fleshly effort. Passages such as Gal 5:22 and Phil 4:7 support the concept that, just as he could not be saved through legalism, neither can the Christian experience God’s peace and joy after salvation through adherence to legalistic systems.

This is one of the more than one hundred of Bonar’s hymns still in use. Bonar was born in Edinburgh, Scotland. He became a minister in the Church of Scotland, but later joined the Free Church and became Moderator of the General Assembly. Besides publishing several volumes of religious verse, he also edited two religious periodicals: *Border Watch* and *Journal of Prophecy*.¹

The traditional musical setting for “Not What These Hands Have Done” is a hymn tune by James McGranahan (1840-1907). Those who read the “Hymn of Grace” feature in the Spring 1991 issue of *JOTGES* may be interested to know that McGranahan assisted Ira Sankey in publishing several volumes of *Gospel Hymns* following Philip Bliss’s death in 1876.² In McGranahan’s setting, the third stanza is used as a refrain repeated after each of the other stanzas. A more recent setting of the lyrics is the hymn tune “Aurora,” composed by Norman Johnson in 1979.

¹ Phil Kerr, *Music in Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 192.

² William Jensen Reynolds, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody* (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963), 106.

