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"Faith Alone In Christ Alone"

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"Faith Alone in Christ Alone"

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HOW DEEP ARE YOUR SPIRITUAL ROOTS?

Luke 8:11-15

ROBERT N. WILKIN

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

I. Introduction

Have you ever tried to grow a potted plant? I have and frankly I haven't done very well. It can be very tricky to keep them growing. Don't give them too much water. Don't give them too little water. Watch the light. Too much will kill them. Too little will too. Make sure you have the right kind of soil. Make sure the pot is big enough for the roots. When the roots get too big for the pot, transplant it so that it doesn't become root bound.

You don't just leave a plant alone and expect it to do well. Without care, plants will suffer and ultimately die.

I grew up in Southern California. Along with Florida, California is the leading producer of fruits in the United States. Down the street from us a family had an avocado tree which produced literally thousands of huge, beautiful avocados. We ourselves had lemon and pomegranate trees which produced excellent fruit.

We also had some other fruit trees which bore some fruit, but never mature fruit. For example, we had a banana tree, and it only grew small, green immature bananas about the size of your pinkie. We had a peach tree, and it bore fruit, but it was small and hard and never came to maturity.

Even in California, there was variation in the productivity of fruit trees. Some didn't produce any fruit. They simply withered and died. Some produced fruit each year, but not mature fruit. And some produced good, mature fruit.

In a sense, this is also true with people. People need care if they are to grow to the point where they are mature and act like it. If you

are a parent, you know this quite well. Children don't raise themselves. If left to their own devices, they will be very immature.

This is especially true in the spiritual realm. Baby Christians don't automatically grow into mature, spiritual believers. If you are a church leader, you know that it takes considerable care to help new believers grow to maturity. The church exists, in part, to oversee the spiritual growth and development of the believers in the church. "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, *for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account*" (Heb 13:17). "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able" (1 Cor 3:2).

Believers can only bear fruit if they continue to walk in the faith. And they can only bear mature fruit if they become mature. Since each believer should be concerned about his or her fruitfulness, and, since our faith is crucial to fruit bearing, we should all be concerned about our faith in Christ.

The Parable of the Sower makes this point well:

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are those ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."

—Luke 8:11-15

II. Overview of the Parable: Luke 8:11-15

The seed is the Word of God, including especially Jesus' guarantee of eternal life to all who simply believe in Him for it (see v 12). The soils represent the hearts of four different types of people and show how they respond to the Word of God.

This parable is four snapshots, not a video. It gives snapshots of four types of people we see in ministry. Obviously, we all encounter unbelievers who reject the good news of Jesus Christ. If you have ever led anyone to faith in Christ, or if you have watched the progress of new believers in your church, you quickly notice that not all grow at the same speed. Some grow slowly but steadily. Some grow slowly, then backslide. Some grow quickly at first, and then settle into slow steady growth.

The Lord divides the responsiveness of people in four categories. One group rejects Christ and never comes to faith. A second group comes to faith and then later falls away from Christ. A third group comes to faith and maintains their Christian profession till the end, but have limited fruitfulness in their Christian life. And a fourth group maintains their Christian profession to the end and bring forth much mature fruit.

Obviously the fourth soil is most desirable. Bringing forth fruit to maturity is the result that pleases God the most. There is an evident progression from least desirable to most desirable in the four soils.

It is important to recognize that there are two different issues involved in this parable: salvation and approval. The ultimate concern of the parable is over Christ's approval. However, in order to have approval, a person must also have salvation. Unsaved people will never be approved. So as we consider these soils we will consider their spiritual condition, saved or lost, and their quality of service, approved or disapproved.

Let's begin by considering the first soil.

III. The Wayside Soil: No Salvation or Approval Luke 8:12

All commentators recognize that the first soil represents unbelievers. This is not surprising since the Lord specifically identifies them as such: "Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, *lest they should believe and be saved*" (Luke 8:12, emphasis added).

One thing commentators often *fail* to notice about these people; however, is that they *never* believe. The Lord makes it clear here that whoever believes is saved. Satan snatches away the seed before it can germinate since once it germinates a person has eternal life and is secure forever. There would be no need for Satan to snatch away the seed to keep people from being saved if he could also later snatch it away and take away that salvation. Since Jesus gives *eternal* life, once a person has it, no power in heaven or anywhere in the universe can take away that gift. Not even Satan.

Those who fail to come to faith in Christ do not have eternal life and will not have Christ's approval at His Judgment Seat, for they won't even be at that judgment. The Judgment Seat of Christ is reserved for believers only (2 Cor 5:9-10; compare Rev 20:11-15).

IV. The Rocky Soil: Salvation, But No Approval Luke 8:6, 13

"A sower went out to sow his seed...some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture" (Luke 8:6). "But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a

while and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13). A shallow root system meant the plant lacked sufficient strength to survive in tough conditions.

That this person is a believer is clear. "It sprang up" refers to germination of the seed. Germination symbolizes the start of life. This is one who has received eternal life. This is confirmed by the fact that these type of people "believe for a while."

A. Temporary Faith

Unfortunately, this very verse has led to an odd theological postulation. Some suggest that there is such a thing as *temporary faith*. Well, the text is clear that some believe only for a while and later fall away. So if that is what theologians meant by *temporary faith*, there would be no problem. However, by *temporary faith* some theologians mean *a substandard type of faith* that is really not faith at all. Referring to the heart of the rocky-soil person, one author states:

This kind of heart is enthusiastic but shallow. It responds positively *but not with saving faith*. There is no thought involved, no counting the cost. It is quick, emotional, euphoric, instant excitement without any understanding of the actual significance of discipleship. *This is not genuine faith*.¹

How can this be squared with the text? The Lord Jesus says they believed. The fact that it was "for a while" does not negate the fact that they believed. Of course, one might argue that what they believed was not the saving message. That argument is unsupportable, however, in light of verse 12. Remember why Satan snatched away the seed? "Lest they should believe and be saved." The Lord Jesus made it clear that if they believed, they were saved, or born again, at

¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Revised & Expanded Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, 1994), p. 129, italics supplied.

the moment of faith. When He says in verse 13 that this second group “believed for a while,” we are forced to conclude that they believed the saving message for a while.

So there are only two possibilities here, and both include the fact that these are people who were saved at the moment of faith. First, they were saved as long as they believed, but once they fell away, they lost their salvation. Second, they were saved forever at the moment of faith, and once they fell away, they remained saved (but lost out on things like present joy, approval at the Judgment Seat of Christ, eternal rewards, etc.).

The first possibility is actually an impossibility, for eternal life is eternal. Compare John 6:35-40. Once anyone eats the bread of life or drinks the water of life, he will never hunger or thirst again. Jesus will never cast out anyone who comes to Him. He loses none of those whom the Father has given Him.

There is no time requirement on saving faith. That is, at the very moment of faith a person is born again. Even if he only believes for a short time, he is secure forever.

Say a person hears and believes the gospel while driving and listening to Christian radio. Then, moments later, that new believer dies in a car crash. He would go directly into God’s presence. No one questions that.²

Well, what if that person lived instead of died and months or years later stopped believing? Would he then go to hell? If so, wouldn’t that mean he would have been better off dying in the crash? That, of

²Possibly I am overstating the case here somewhat. I suppose some well meaning but confused people would say something like this, “Well, I hope he *really* believed before he died. But we can’t know for sure, since he didn’t have time to produce enough good works to show us that he probably really did believe. In fact, even if he had lived and produced what seemed like good works for years and then died, we still couldn’t be sure, because God alone knows what are truly good works and what are not.”

course, is a ridiculous conclusion. While we are surely grieved when we hear of believers who fall away from the faith, we cannot change the gospel in order to eliminate such defections.

Even *temporary* faith results in *eternal* salvation.³

B. Falling Away in Time of Temptation

The reference to “time of temptation” is vague. We can envision many different types of temptations that might cause a person to fall away from the faith, to cast off their Christian profession and stop going to church. These could include the influence of agnostic or atheistic college professors or friends, illnesses, accidents, family problems, etc.

Withering away refers to loss of spiritual vitality. The believer with shallow roots is one who is spiritually anemic. When tough times come and people or circumstances challenge their beliefs, they wither under the pressure. They aren’t strong enough to handle it. They fall away from the faith. That is, they stop believing in Christ. This is why the text says, “they believe *for a time*...and in time of temptation *fall away*.”

The word used for *falling away* is *aphistēmi*. It is used 14 other times in the NT. Anna didn’t “*depart*” from the temple (Luke 2:37). After he tempted Jesus, the devil “*departed*” from Him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). Jesus will say to unsaved legalists at the Great White Throne Judgment, “*Depart* from Me, all you workers of iniquity” (Luke 13:27). Paul spoke in 1 Tim 4:1 of the fact that in the

³To conclude otherwise is to change the promise Jesus made. “He who believes in me *has* everlasting life” is a promise that at the very moment of faith in Christ, one is born again and eternally secure. Those who say that faith which later fails never really was faith in the first place are playing a dangerous game in which they read their theology into the text, rather than allowing the text to determine their theology.

latter times “some *will depart* from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrine of demons...” In this context it refers to departing from previously held beliefs and practices.

We are probably not thinking here of someone who continues to go to church and who adopts a false gospel (e.g., a person who comes to believe in Lordship Salvation and still professes to believe in Christ). Such people still profess to be Christians. And they have not completely withered. They would most likely fall in the third soil category.

This is an apostate—one who has renounced what he once believed and who has stopped going to church. He has fallen away from the Christian faith.⁴

The passage does not tell us what negative things happen to these apostate believers. That is beyond the point of the parable.⁵ The point is, we should certainly strive to be the good soil and to avoid being rocky soil.

The second soil fails to bring fruit to maturity because the plant that germinates has very shallow roots⁶ and it withers and falls away

⁴ Compare 1 Tim 1:18-20 (“some...concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck”) and 2 Tim 2:17-18 (“they overthrow the faith of some”).

⁵ From other Scriptures—and I’m thinking here of passages like 2 Cor 5:9-10, Heb 10: 23-25, 2 Tim 2:12, and Matt 6:19-21—we can learn the following: Here and now the apostate loses the joy he had when he received the word; here and now he falls under God’s judgment; forever he will miss out on the privilege of ruling with Christ (Heb 10:23-25; 2 Tim 2:12); and he will only gain treasure in heaven for any treasure laid up prior to the time when he fell away (Matt 6:19-21). Thus, since he only believed for a short time, he will be a relatively poor person forever in eternity. He will be unable to give a lot to others and to serve the Lord as fully as he would certainly like.

⁶ The NKJV’s translation, “and these have no root,” is technically accurate, but this is a place where supplying words like “depth of” would have been good, since that is surely implied in the context. “These have no [depth

when tough conditions come. Since the plant has withered away, there obviously can be no fruit. And since Christ will only approve of those believers who are professing Him and who are bearing some fruit, these believers will miss out on Christ's approval.

V. The Thorny Soil: Salvation Plus Partial Approval Luke 8:7, 14

Here we have a snapshot of a plant that does much better than the rocky soil plant, and much worse than the good soil plant. This soil does endure to the end. It does not depart from the faith. The problem here is that the person's vitality is sapped by inferior things that grab its attention: cares, riches, and pleasures. As a result, it fails to bring forth mature fruit.

"And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it" (Luke 8:7). "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14).

The Lord said that this type of person fails to bring "fruit to maturity." He didn't say that they fail to bring forth fruit of any kind. This type of believer does bring forth fruit; hence he will be rewarded for that at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The problem is that

of] root" is clearly the point since the seed sprang up (v 6) and the only way that could happen is if there were some roots below the ground. The rocky soil envisions the situation where the plow missed a rock layer several inches below the soil. Compare the Matthean parallel: "Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth" (Matt 13:5).

the fruit is stunted and immature, just as would be the case with a fruit-bearing plant hindered by weeds.

We are probably thinking here of someone like the second servant in the parable of the minas. See Luke 19:13-19. That parable concerns the believer's service until Christ returns. All servants in this parable receive the same amount of money, a mina, to invest until their Lord returns. This suggests that they each had the same amount of giftedness and opportunity.

The first servant invests his one mina and when the Lord returns, he has ten minas to give to his Lord. Here is what he hears from his Lord: "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in very little, have authority over ten cities" (19:17). This surely represents the good soil type of believer. Note that he receives strong commendation, "Well done, good servant," and maximum reward, "have authority over ten cities."

The second servant does not maximize his gifts and opportunities. He falls far short of the servant who gained ten minas. The second servant gains only half as much. Yet, he does endure in his Christian profession and he works for his Lord and brings about an increase. This is akin to the thorny-soil believer who fails to bring forth fruit *to maturity*. Here is what he hears from his Lord: "You also be over five cities." Note that he did not receive the strong commendation that the first servant did. There is no "Well done, good servant." He also doesn't receive maximum reward. He will not rule over ten cities. Instead, he will reign over five cities.

Surely there is a lot of grace here. The Lord could have chosen to exclude from rulership all but the good soil type of believer. Yet He recognizes accomplishment, even if it is far less than that which the person was capable.⁷

⁷ Compare 2 Tim 2:12 and Heb 10:23-25. Enduring in our profession of faith in Christ, both verbally and in terms of assembling together with other believers as a public expression of faith, is rewarded with rulership. Nothing

VI. The Good Soil: Salvation Plus Full Approval Luke 8:8, 15

This soil is clearly the ideal. Unlike the second soil, this soil *endures* in faith. Unlike the third soil, this one brings forth *fruit to maturity*.

As just discussed, this person is surely to be likened to the first servant in the parable of the minas (see Luke 19:12-17). There even appears to be a “bonus” for this type of servant. Not only does he get what he earned, but he gets even more. He is given the one mina from the faithless, rocky-soil, servant (see Luke 19:24-26).

Some have tried to support the interpretation that only the good soil represents believers by appealing to the fact that the good soil yielded different results, “some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matt 13:23). They argue that “true believers” all endure and yield mature fruit, though at varying degrees of productivity.

That suggestion is fatally flawed. First, in the Lukan parable we are told that *all* plants in the good soil yielded a hundredfold (Luke 8:8). When the Lord told this parable in the way Luke records,⁸ He did not focus on different amounts of ability or production in the good soil.⁹

is said in those or other passages of the need to maximize one’s life in order to rule with Christ. Note, however, that willful departure into the far country of sinful rebellion disqualifies one for rulership even if he were to somehow maintain his profession, which is unlikely (compare Luke 15:11-32; Gal 5:19-21).

⁸He taught the same parables on more than one occasion, and in slightly different ways with different emphases.

⁹The same difference in emphasis can be seen by comparing the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27), where all servants get the same amount to

Second, the context makes it crystal clear (see above) that soils 2, 3, and 4 all contain actual plants. The seeds have germinated. Life has begun.

It seems quite likely that James was thinking of this passage when he wrote James 5:7-9.

Therefore be *patient*, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious *fruit* of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be *patient*. Establish your *hearts*, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold the Judge is standing at the door! (emphasis supplied).

There is repetition of the three main elements found in Luke 8:15, patience (*hupomone* in Luke 8 versus *makrothumeo* in James 5), fruit (*karpos*, 8:8 and Jas 5:7), and heart (*kardia*). The parable of the four soils has everything to do with the coming of the Lord. First, a person needs to come to faith in Christ. However, that is not the end of the matter. That is merely the beginning. Second, once a person is born again, he needs to cultivate or *establish* his heart so that he is responsive to the Word of God and ready for the soon return of his Savior—and *Judge!*

VII. Why Lordship Salvation Says That All Christians Are the Good Soil

One of the main reasons why Lordship Salvation exists is because for many it is inconceivable that the work of God in regeneration does not always result in perseverance and the production of much mature fruit.

invest, and the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30), where the servants receive differing amounts to invest.

Nearly everyone in the world, including unbelievers, would like all people to be good and loving. Surely pastors and theologians wish that all believers were mature and productive. Lordship Salvation is able to bring this about by labeling all believers who either fail to persevere or to produce mature fruit as *false professors*. Thus the production of mature fruit at the coming of the Lord becomes the test of whether one is truly saved or not.

This leads advocates of Lordship Salvation to misinterpret the parable of the four soils. Though the text indicates that the seed germinated in all but the first soil, they only see the fourth soil as possessing life.

Lordship Salvation arrives at its faulty interpretation of this passage because one of its premises is unbiblical:

Major premise:	All true believers endure and produce much mature fruit.
Minor premise:	The middle soils don't endure and produce much mature fruit.
Conclusion:	The middle soils do not represent true believers.

Now if the major premise is correct, then the conclusion is as well, for the minor premise is taken directly from the text. However, the text itself makes it very clear that the major premise is wrong. When we see that, the Word of God should cause us to change our syllogism.

Major premise:	All who believe in Christ have God's life.
Minor premise:	The middle soils have God's life.
Conclusion:	The middle soils represent believers in Christ.

We need to realize that believers may not endure; and, if they do, they may not produce mature fruit. Anyone who has been involved in pastoral ministry knows this. It should not cause us to consider leaving the ministry, or to change our view of the gospel. It should motivate us to urge all in our flocks to be attentive to God's Word so that they can be good soil and ready for the Lord's soon return.

There are lots of ways the falling away represented by the second soil could happen: agnostic professors in college or graduate school.¹⁰ Agnostic friends. Ceasing to walk in fellowship and gradually drifting away from church and Christian friends.

There are also many ways the stunted fruit of the third soil can occur: focusing too much on making money, retirement accounts, stock prices, pleasures, riches, cares. One certainly need not be wrapped up in overt sin to fail to bring forth fruit to maturity.¹¹

¹⁰My second year at Dallas Theological Seminary I was working construction with another seminary student. I found out he had gone to Illinois State University. He told me an odd story how the previous year, his senior year, he had gone to witness to one of his philosophy professors. The man was an agnostic, but he quoted the Bible a lot. So my friend started his witness by saying, "I've been accepted for seminary next year." "Oh, really," the professor said, "where will you be going?" My friend said, "Dallas Theological Seminary." His agnostic teacher totally surprised him with these words, "Really. I am a Th.M. graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary." Somewhere along the line after his seminary days that man lost his faith. While I don't know the particulars, I imagine his secular philosophy education led to his falling away from the faith.

¹¹"Pleasures of life" might include watching morally acceptable television, playing softball or bowling in leagues, surfing the internet, reading the classics, attending operas and symphonies, hunting, fishing, boating, skiing, running, swimming, hiking, etc. These things, while not sinful, can drain one's time and lead to a diminution of one's service for Christ.

So, we should accept the Lord's teaching even if we find it unpleasant. Whether we like it or not, all Christians aren't good soil. This should drive us to our knees, and to the Word of God. Since perseverance and the production of mature fruit is far from automatic, we are responsible for how we respond to God's Word.

VIII. How Can We Put Our Roots Down Deep And Keep the Weeds from Choking Us?

Following this parable is another one that sheds more light on the application of this parable.

¹⁶"No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. ¹⁷For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸*Therefore take heed how you hear.* For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

—Luke 8:16-18, italics added

Note verse 18: "Therefore, take heed how you hear."¹² We do have a role to play in receiving and assimilating the Word of God. We are to "take heed how [we] hear" the Word of God.

Roots are receptors that take in water. They symbolize the heart of the believer which is to take in God's Word. We should all pray regularly for God to enlighten us as to the meaning of His Word. We should pray for His strength and help in carrying out His commands.

We should also pray for other Christians to take heed how they hear God's Word. If we see a Christian whom we think may be a rocky soil type of believer, one whom we fear is in danger of falling

¹²Of course, if all "true" believers automatically heed God's Word, then there would be no need for this exhortation.

away from the faith, what can we do? Well, their "root problem" is that their heart is flawed before God. They need a transformation of their heart/mind (Rom 12:1-2).¹³ Thus we can pray for them and encourage them to pray, asking God to change their heart and to give them a heart that seeks God and delights in pleasing Him.

We might encourage them to read God's word prayerfully, asking God to open their eyes to it as they read. We should encourage them to go to a solid Bible teaching church (Heb 10:23-25), to be honest and open with God (1 John 1:9), and to avoid false teachers (Gal 1:8-9).

If we see a believer whose productivity is being choked by cares, riches, and pleasures, we might remind them of Christ's return, and of the Judgment Seat of Christ,¹⁴ and encourage them to pray for a good heart, for insight, and for strength to carry out God's commands.

The key to maximizing our lives and bearing mature fruit at harvest time, if there is such a thing as a *key*, is found in Gal 2:20, "living by faith in the Son of God." The more we walk in faith, the stronger we become spiritually.

This is not the place for an extended discussion of the faith walk. Suffice it to say that the faith walk has the Lord Jesus Christ as its constant focus. The person walking by faith in Christ is convinced (i.e., believes) that Jesus Christ will guide him into greater and greater

¹³Those who say that believing in the heart is good and believing in the mind or head is bad overlook passages like this one. Paul urged the Roman believers to "be transformed by the renewing of *your mind*." The Bible does not distinguish between believing with the heart or mind. All belief is *internal*. See my discussion of "Head Faith, Heart Faith, and Mind Games" in *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), pp. 12-14.

¹⁴Compare 1 John 2:28; 4:17-19. The purpose of eschatology is to motivate godly behavior in light of Christ's soon return.

holiness as long as he looks to Him in prayer, confessing his sins, and asking for help to understand and deal with his shortcomings.

The faith walk is not lived by focusing on the commands.¹⁵ It is not a matter of gutting it out. While there is effort involved, the effort must be channeled God's way, through faith in Christ. The focus must be on our loving Lord. To please God in our Christian lives we must fall more and more in love with Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us.

IX. Conclusion

Could this withering and falling away happen in people to whom you minister? Absolutely. Could it happen to one of your children? Yes. Could it even happen to you? Yes. No Christian this side of glory is immune from this danger. We must all "take heed how [we] hear" until we go to be with Him.

Could the productivity of people to whom you minister, or even your own productivity, be choked out by cares, riches, and pleasures? You bet.

Can the people to whom you minister, and you yourself, endure in faith and overcome the dangers and bring forth fruit to maturity? Yes, sure.

The key is our heart, our responsiveness to God's Word. If we are concerned about behavior and bringing forth fruit to maturity—and we should be, then our goal should be to cultivate our hearts to the Word of God. With a good heart, the fruit will follow. Without a good heart, mature fruit will never come.

¹⁵ See, for example, Rom 7:13-25.

WHY LORDSHIP FAITH MISSES THE MARK FOR SALVATION¹

CHARLIE BING

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The late comedian, George Burns, used to joke that a good friend invited him to join a country club. He said he wasn't interested. This friend said, "What do you mean you're not interested? This is an exclusive club." And Burns said, "I would never join a club that would have me as a member."

We in the Free Grace movement are accused of lowering the standards for getting into heaven. We are accused of "easy believism." We are charged with a view that is "no-lordship." John MacArthur refuses to even acknowledge us as the "Free Grace" movement. He calls us the "no-lordship movement."²

Are we going to let these terms go unchallenged? You know sometimes if you are allowed to frame the question you win the debate, right? It's kind of like if I ask you "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?" How do you answer that? You lose either way. Pastors often face this type of dilemma. We answer the phone and someone asks, "Are you a *full gospel* church?" When I get this question I'm always tempted to say, "Well no, we're a *half gospel* church. Our budget is kind of tight this month." Or how about this one: "Are you a

¹ This article is from a message originally delivered March 30, 1999 at the Grace Evangelical Society's fourth annual conference. It has been edited slightly for publication.

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 56.

Spirit-filled church?" "No, we're the *carnal* church in town. We're just kind of struggling along in the flesh right now."

We can't allow Lordship Salvation to frame the question and swing the debate. So what are *their* standards for salvation if *we* teach "easy believism?" Are their standards for salvation even attainable by people? Charles Price, in his book *Real Christians* recounts an occasion where a fellow went to an evangelistic meeting and heard and responded to the message. Afterwards he spoke to an evangelist who said that, "In light of all that we have talked about this evening, can you think of any reason why you should not become a Christian tonight?" The young man sat for a few moments thinking and he said, "No I cannot think of any reason." Then the evangelist said, "Then let me give you some." And for the next few minutes he began to explain the cost of being a Christian. He talked about the young man's need to surrender his whole life, his future, his ambitions, his relationships, his possessions, and everything that he was, to God. And only if he was prepared to do this, he explained, could Christ begin to work effectively in his life. And then the evangelist leaned even closer toward him and said, "Can you still not think of any reason why you shouldn't become a Christian tonight?" And the man said, "I can think of some now." So the evangelist said, "In that case, do not become a Christian until you have dealt with every one of those reasons and are willing to surrender everything to Christ."³

There's a lot at stake in this whole debate about faith and its meaning. What is endangered, of course, is the clear gospel, our confidence in sharing the message, our assurance of salvation, our Christian life, growth, joy, and happiness. But let's not forget the main thing at stake is not theology, but the souls of people who can be misled.

³ Charles Price, *Real Christians* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1987), 55-56.

I. Lordship Faith Includes Works

How does Lordship Salvation understand faith?⁴ Kenneth Gentry, a leading proponent of Lordship Salvation, has a classic definition. He says,

The Lordship view expressly states the necessity of acknowledging Christ as the Lord and Master of one's life in the act of receiving Him as Savior. These are not two different, sequential acts (or successive steps), but rather one act of pure trusting faith.⁵

So according to this definition, when we come to Christ as Savior, we also come submitting to Him as Lord. It is not two acts; it is one act; and that is called faith. Lordship Salvation disagrees with the Free Grace understanding of faith as being convinced and persuaded that something is true.

According to Lordship Salvation, saving faith includes submission to Christ. Richard Belcher says, "True saving faith includes in it a submission to the Lordship of Christ."⁶ Lescelius adds, "Saving faith is trust in Christ himself. It is a commitment of self in submission to all of Christ that is revealed."⁷ John MacArthur agrees, saying, "Saving faith, then, is the whole of my being embracing all of Christ. Faith cannot be divorced from commitment;" and, "The call of the

⁴ For further information see Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), GraceLife edition (Burleson, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 1997).

⁵ Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976): 52.

⁶ Richard P. Belcher, *A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990), 2.

⁷ Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 24.

gospel is to trust Him (cf. John 5:39-40). That necessarily involves some degree of love, allegiance, and surrender to His authority."⁸ Bailey Smith asserts that "...saving faith is not mere intellectual assent, but it involves an act of submission on our part."⁹

Many authors state essentially the same thing, that faith includes submission; submission that goes beyond our need for eternal life, to recognizing, acknowledging, and committing ourselves to Jesus Christ as Master of all of our lives.

But the Lordship Salvation definition of faith not only involves submission, it involves obedience. "Disobedience," MacArthur says, "is unbelief. Real faith obeys."¹⁰ You'll notice how carefully he couched that. Disobedience is unbelief, but he doesn't say that faith is obedience. But he also says, "True faith is humble, submissive obedience;" and, "...faith encompasses obedience...faith is not complete unless it is obedient."¹¹ Later on, after facing a lot of criticism, he softened his language somewhat in the second edition of *The Gospel According to Jesus*.¹²

Another writer says, "The opposite of saving faith is disobedience."¹³ Saucy concludes, "... we have to acknowledge some aspect of

⁸ MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 45, 50.

⁹ Bailey E. Smith, *The Grace Escape: Jesus as Savior and Lord* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 77.

¹⁰ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 140, 173.

¹² For example, "True faith is humble, submissive obedience" in the first edition (p. 140) became "True faith produces a heart that is humble, submissive, and obedient" in the revised and expanded edition (p. 148).

¹³ Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation*, 24.

obedience as inherent in saving faith as well."¹⁴ And then Mueller says, "Faith is synonymous with obedience."¹⁵

And so Lordship Salvation faith goes beyond trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior. Lordship faith includes obeying Him as Lord as a condition of eternal salvation. They have included obedience in their definition and understanding of faith. Therefore, Lordship faith requires works as a necessary condition of faith. MacArthur said, "The true test of faith is this, does it produce obedience? If not, it is not saving faith."¹⁶ And Mueller says, "The true faith that saves (justifies) is the faith that also produces appropriate works (sanctifies)."¹⁷

We know that the Roman Catholics teach that we are saved by faith *plus* works. Lordship Salvation teaches that we are saved by faith *that* works. But do not both definitions include works as a condition necessary for faith to be valid, for faith to be effectual? Either way, works are a necessary condition of eternal salvation.

But I have a problem with that. It confuses justification with sanctification. Justification as the forensic legal declaration that we are righteous in our position before God, is confused with sanctification, the outworking of that righteousness in everyday practical living. Now we know that justification and sanctification are related. But we also must keep them distinct lest we confuse the Gospel itself and undo the Reformation. If we make works a necessary condition of salvation, we contradict the words of Rom 4:4-5, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to

¹⁴Robert L. Saucy, "Second Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James' by John F. MacArthur, Jr.," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 47.

¹⁵Marc Mueller, "Lordship Salvation Syllabus" (Panorama City, CA: Grace Community Church, 1981, 1985), 20.

¹⁶MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 47.

¹⁷Mueller, "Lordship Salvation Syllabus," 22.

him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." The apostle Paul is teaching us that faith does not mix with works in any way. Just as you cannot mix oil with water, faith is opposed to works for salvation.

Didn't Jesus teach this also in John chapter 6? Many Jews came to Him and followed Him across the lake after having been fed the fish and the bread. Jesus saw how earnestly they were seeking Him and heard them ask, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28). Here the Jews were exposing their pharasaical theology and the baggage that they had from the Pharisees made up of the minutia of laws, and the extrapolations of laws, and thousands upon thousands of man-made interpretations. And Jesus gives an interesting reply, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). Now notice that Jesus uses the same word they started with, *work*, but He puts it in the singular. He says this is the *work* of God. "You want to talk about works. That's how you're conditioned." Jesus says this is the *work*, with a play on words. What is that work? That work is to believe. But of course, believing isn't a work at all, is it? In other words, this is what God requires of you, not works, but one thing, that is to believe.

Then He goes on in John chapter 6 to explain what it means to believe. He uses the analogy of eating and drinking. It's interesting that He would choose that kind of word picture to illustrate what faith is: a passive appropriation of something. Not doing, not working, not an active work, but a passive appropriation. That's the essence of faith. How can anyone call eating or drinking hard work? If eating and drinking is hard work, some of us need to take a break!

To make works a necessary condition of faith confuses grace with merit. The Scriptures are clear that we cannot confuse grace with merit lest we boast (Eph 2:8-9). It confuses *Christ's* work with what *we* are required to do. We are required to believe in order to be saved.

Who did the obedience for our salvation? It was Jesus Himself who obeyed. Romans 5:19 says, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by *one Man's obedience* many will be made righteous" (italics added). It's not *our* obedience that saves us, it's *Christ's* obedience that saves us. We are the recipients of the blessing of the work that He has done for us. The only command for an unbeliever to obey is the command to believe the gospel.

II. Lordship Faith Must Be Quantified

So I have a problem with works as a necessary condition of faith. But Lordship proponents also require of faith that works must be *quantified*. For example, MacArthur says, "The fruit of one's life reveals whether that person is a believer or an unbeliever. There is no middle ground."¹⁸ Also in his book he says that fruit has to be abundant and obvious. You can't go scrounging around looking for it.¹⁹

I have a problem with that too. When we look for fruit as proof of one's salvation, that immediately turns us into fruit inspectors who must inspect each person's fruit with arbitrary standards. I don't feel comfortable in that role, do you?

I have a question for those who want to inspect fruit to prove salvation: Who has the list of appropriate works that qualify somebody as a Christian? If they were to show me a list, I would like to ask them a second question: Who wrote the list? Where did you get this? I see no list of fruits or works listed in the Scriptures that prove one is a Christian. I think it's a rather presumptuous attitude for any believer to think that they can judge by a person's outward works whether or not that person is saved.

¹⁸ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 178.

¹⁹ Ibid., 127.

You see, it's a slippery thing; it's a relative thing, fruit is. What may be fruit in one person's life may be different to another. We have different starting points when we become believers. Some of us start way down on the scale. Fruit for us might be just breathing out a short prayer before we go to bed at night. On the other hand, fruit for someone who has been in church all of his life might be a more intense prayer life. How can anybody measure what God is doing in the inner workings of our heart and soul, and how He is prompting us in and through His Word? How can anyone know what someone is doing in secret as far as prayer and Bible study or good works is concerned? I think it's quite a presumptuous attitude to think that we can look at somebody and judge them by their fruits. I don't think that's comparing apples with apples, if we can extend the analogy a little bit.

When we look to fruits as proof of faith, it necessarily breeds insecurity and doubt. Am I doing enough? Do I have enough fruit? Is my fruit ripe enough? There are problems with quantifying our faith.

III. Lordship Faith Must Be Qualified

Their definition of faith also requires that faith must be *qualified*. Not only quantified, but qualified. And so you will read Lordship Salvation teachers using a lot of terms to qualify faith, sometimes to disqualify faith with negative terms like "spurious faith," "counterfeit faith," "intellectual faith," "false faith," "insincere faith," "pseudo faith," "emotional faith," and "head faith." Yet none of these expressions is found in the Bible. On the other hand they will want to qualify faith, in a positive way, with words like "true faith," "authentic faith," "saving faith," "personal faith," "real faith," "efficacious faith," and "heart faith." None of those expressions are found in the Bible either.

Now there is a convenience to using terms like *saving faith* to know what we're talking about. Sometimes the debate forces us to

talk about *free* grace, which is a redundancy; *saving* faith, which is a redundancy; and things like that. But they want to say that there are different *kinds* of faith, and I have a problem with that. When we talk about different kinds of faith, we are distracted from the object of our faith to having faith in our faith. That's an unhealthy introspection. Am I having enough faith? Am I having the right kind of faith? Is my faith deep enough, strong enough? When we look to our faith instead of to the object of our faith, we are necessarily distracted from that which actually saves us. Even Benjamin Warfield, the Presbyterian, who probably would not have put himself in our camp, said that "the saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith, or the attitude of faith, or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith."²⁰

It's like our eyesight. Eyesight is nothing apart from the object of our sight. We may as well close our eyes and look inside to see whether we have sight, as to look inside to see whether we have faith. Faith means nothing without an object, as sight means nothing without an object.

So Lordship Salvation talks about different kinds of faith, forcing unfortunate folks to examine what kind of faith they have. The truth is, technically, we're not saved *by* faith anyway. We're saved *through* faith. Faith is the instrumental means; grace is the efficient means, of our salvation. We're saved by Jesus Christ. We're saved by His grace. We're saved through faith. You would know what I meant if I said to you "I put the fire out with the hose." Now hoses don't put out fires. But hoses are the channels for water that puts the fire out. The hose is the instrumental means; the water is the efficient means. Faith is the instrumental means by which we are able to access our salvation through Jesus Christ, His grace, His death, His resurrection.

²⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Faith," in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1952), 425.

So there's an unhealthy emphasis on faith that causes an unhealthy introspection. When we emphasize the quality of one's faith, we automatically de-emphasize the object of one's faith. I heard the story of a man who went to an evangelistic meeting. He responded to the message, and afterwards spoke to a counselor. The counselor told him that to be saved he must believe in Jesus. The man went to the meeting the next night, heard another message, responded to the message again, and talked to a different counselor. This counselor told him that to be saved he must believe in Jesus. Later the man was giving his testimony on how he had been saved while talking to that second counselor. And the first counselor came up to him afterwards and said, "I'm a bit confused. Can you tell me, what did the second counselor tell you that I didn't tell you?" And the man said, "Well, you told me to *believe* in Jesus." He told me to "believe in *Jesus*." There's a difference, a big difference. It is the object of our faith that saves us.

Genuine faith in a worthless object is useless. You can sincerely believe in an error. I have a friend who was given a penicillin shot with the sincere belief by the doctor that it would make her well. It almost killed her. The object of faith was untrustworthy in that case. We are not to look at the kind of faith we have. We are to make sure we are looking to the right object. Faith in the right object will save us.

If we grant to Lordship Salvation that faith must be qualified, that there are different kinds of faith, we surrender objectivity to subjectivity. And assurance becomes impossible. To have faith in one's faith is to detract from faith in a Savior. There is only one kind of faith. There are many objects to faith, but what saves us is Jesus Christ as the object of our faith.

IV. Lordship Faith Is Inaccessible to Most

Now the Lordship Salvation definition of faith also requires that faith must be a gift of God. For example, MacArthur says that faith is a “saving energy” that is “divinely produced.”²¹ He believes it is different from other kinds of faith. He calls it “a supernatural ability to apprehend spiritual reality invisible to the eye of flesh.”²² If it’s a supernatural ability, if it’s divinely produced, if it’s a saving energy, it must be God’s gift. And you see how all this fits together. If faith includes obedience, then it must be a gift of God. He gives it to us, so we automatically obey. It’s all kind of a package deal. MacArthur says, “the faith God begets includes both the volition and the ability to comply with His will (Philippians 2:13). In other words, faith encompasses obedience.”²³

Now I know that there are people who are Free Grace who believe that faith is a gift of God. I have a little problem with that interpretation, though, when I understand what faith is. I think it confuses grace with faith, again, the efficient means of salvation with the instrumental means of salvation. And in Eph 2:8-9 where it talks about “by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it* is the gift of God,” *it* refers to salvation by grace through faith, that process, that opportunity, what God has given in allowing us that salvation. I don’t think Paul is talking about just faith.

If faith is a gift of God, it nullifies our human responsibility. Think about that. God requires us to believe in order to go to heaven. If we do not believe, we will be condemned. John 3:18 says, “He who

²¹ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 28, 172-73.

²² John F. MacArthur, Jr., “Faith According to the Apostle James,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 23.

²³ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 173.

believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." God condemns those who do not believe. But we can't believe unless we have God's gift of faith. God condemns those to whom He does not give the gift of faith? That is unjust and unfair. You see, it just doesn't make sense to me. And we know that God enlightens us to the truth, that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment. God draws us to Himself by illumining us to His Word, His truth. But ultimately it is faith that responds to God's revelation of Himself. So I don't believe that faith is a gift of God, or anything supernatural. There's only one kind of faith. To believe something is to be persuaded that it is true. What differs is not faith itself, but the object of faith.

V. Conclusion

As a pastor and as one with the heart of an evangelist, I am distressed that what Lordship Salvation has done is taken salvation, which God intended to be accessible, and made it inaccessible. After all is said and done, what we know is that God loves people and wants to see them saved. And because He wants to see them saved, He wants to make it simple. He did the hard work, so that we could bring a simple message to people, so that they could be saved.

Salvation is not meant to be an exclusive club. It is meant to be broad in its appeal and accessible to everyone. You know I've recently changed my perspective on John 14:6, where Jesus says "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." I used to be apologetic about that verse. People would say "That's such an exclusive verse, such a narrow religion, such a narrow view of heaven." I started thinking about that and I decided that it is an *inclusive* verse. You see, anybody can come to Jesus. Not everybody can keep the five pillars. Not everybody can do the five steps. Not everybody can keep the law, or all the other systems that the religions of

the world offer, but *anybody* can come to Jesus. I will never ever again “apologize” for John 14:6. It makes the way of salvation accessible to anyone.

If you want somebody to be rescued, delivered, or saved, you make it simple for them. You make it as simple as possible so that as many as possible can be saved. That’s why we don’t make flotation devices out of Teflon. That’s why in emergencies people simply dial 911, not 911-10-10-321, or whatever. God wants people to be saved. And He designed His gospel that way, so that even a child can believe. A man on his deathbed can believe. A thief on a cross can believe. What did the thief on the cross promise Jesus when he said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”? And Jesus replied, “Today you will be with Me in paradise.” Could the thief walk an aisle? No, his feet were fastened to a cross. Could he raise his hand? No, his hands were tied or nailed to the cross. Could he be baptized? No, the cross would have floated. Did he promise Jesus anything? No. Did Jesus demand anything of him? No. Salvation by grace through faith means there is hope for a dying man, for someone who can do nothing for himself.

I had a person in my congregation whose father was dying of cancer. I asked him if he had talked to his father about how to have eternal life. He said that he had talked with him, but he said that at the end of his life it wouldn’t be fair for God to forgive him of all he had done now that he was dying. I told him to show his father the story of the thief on the cross. Since when is grace ever fair? Grace is not fair, it gives us what we don’t deserve. By definition, grace is not fair.

Let me tell you about another thief I met. On my first visit to Ghana, West Africa, to teach the Bible at a Bible College, I was working on a car in our compound one day when I heard a commotion that was working itself down a dirt road. I immediately recognized what it was because I had seen it before—they had caught a thief.

Now in Ghana when you catch a thief you take justice into your own hands because you have very little provisions and the police are corrupt. And so what they usually do to a thief is beat him severely and let him go. I went out to the gate of the compound and looked there at fifty or sixty young people with smiles on their faces like they were having a big old time. They carried sticks, clubs, machetes, axes, and rubber hoses. And there in the middle was a rather tall fellow, blood streaming down his face, a large gash in his head, and a tire around his neck. And when I came to the gate of the compound, they all stopped and looked at me because we were the only *obruni*, or white folks in the area. They were wondering what I would do, if I would stop the proceeding. But you know, when you're in another culture you really don't know what to do sometimes. You don't want to interfere with their system of justice. And so I just turned and went back to my work figuring that they would give him a severe beating and that he would learn his lesson.

When I went back to work a missionary who was living on the compound that we shared came over to us. Now this missionary was from a different denomination that really believes a different gospel. We just happened to make his acquaintance for the summer. And he said "Hey did you see the thief?" And I said that I had seen him. He told me they were going to burn him. When I asked what he meant, he told me that the tire around his neck was filled with kerosene and they were going to light it and burn him. That friends, is called a "Nigerian necklace" over there. That's when I knew we had to do something. We walked to the other side of the compound where they had looped around. When we went out that gate, there he was collapsed in the mud. He still had the tire around his neck and was thoroughly drenched in kerosene. There was a young teenager standing above him with a can that had contained the kerosene, and another teenager was standing above him getting ready to strike a match. We worked our way through the group and asked if we could talk

to the man. We told them we were *sofu*, which means *preacher*. My missionary friend began to ask the crowd if there were any accusers or witnesses. There were none. And as he did, I knelt down to talk to this fellow. I said "What is your name." He said "Benjamin." I said "Benjamin, can you understand English?" He said "yes." I said "Benjamin, I may not be able to help you and save you, but I can tell you how to have eternal life. Do you understand?" He said "yes." In the precious few seconds I had with him I explained to him the Gospel of grace and the way of salvation.

To make a long story short, we were able to get him up amidst the protests of the crowd and get him off to a hospital from which he later fled, because if you saw that hospital you would have fled too. I don't know if I'm going to see Benjamin in heaven, but the point of my story is that I had a message for a dying thief in the mud that no other religion in this world could have brought him. Do you understand that? Do you understand that the gospel of grace through simple faith is a message for a young child, for a dying thief on a cross, a dying thief in the mud, a pagan Philippian jailer? It's the only message of hope. It's the only message of certainty, the only message of security that brings assurance. I don't apologize for the gospel of faith. God has made salvation available to anybody, anywhere, anytime. Selah.

HOW TO ENERGIZE YOUR FAITH: RECONSIDERING THE MEANING OF JAMES 2:14-26

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I. Introduction

The members of a small group Bible study gather to discuss personal evangelism, none of whom have ever persistently shared their faith. How passionate do you suppose their conversation will be? The members of another small group Bible study also meet to discuss personal evangelism. But in this group, each Christian is taking bold steps to win others to Christ. They are actually doing evangelism, not just talking about it. It is not too difficult to visualize how differently each group might present their beliefs about reaching the non-Christian for the Savior. Nor is it too complicated to understand how one's belief in evangelism might be energized by the work of evangelism. Good works bring vitality and spirit to our faith. At the risk of oversimplification, this elementary but dynamic principle is what pervades Jas 2:14-26.

Because of various theologies and dogmas, evangelical exegesis of James 2 has unfortunately maintained a fixed focus that has obscured its perception of the chapter. In fact, I find that the traditional perspective of James 2 is so ingrained in our thinking that it is difficult for us to examine the passage with freshness and openness. The major traditional perspective on James 2 that stands out as a barrier to exegesis is the proposition that true faith always results in *consistent* good

works in a believer's life.¹ James 2 is most often used as the proof text for this conception.² According to this viewpoint, James 2 is addressing the problem of people who falsely profess to have faith.³ False faith, it is reasoned, is merely an "intellectual" faith inadequate to produce the necessary good works that prove that such a person is a true

¹The word *consistent* is a vital element in this statement. Note that we are not suggesting that true faith can exist without ever producing good works of any sort. See my article, "The Faith of Demons: James 2:19," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 8 (Autumn 1995): 39-54. Cf. also Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989), 215.

²Many authors find this viewpoint in James 2. James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 120-24; Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 49-51, 120-21; Edmond D. Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 43-45; Robert V. Rakestraw, "James 2:14-26: Does James Contradict Pauline Soteriology?" *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (Fall 1986): 31-50; John Polhill, "Prejudice, Partiality, and Faith: James 2," *Review and Expositor* 83 (Summer 1986): 395-404; R. E. Glaze Jr., "The Relationship of Faith to Works," *The Theological Educator* 34 (Fall 1986): 35-42. The list of sources for this viewpoint could be greatly extended.

³This approach to the book overwhelmingly dominates theological thinking. For example, in the opening paragraph to his entire commentary, Hiebert remarks, "The author's central aim is to challenge the readers to test the validity of their faith." D. Edmond Hiebert, *James*, 13. MacArthur writes, "His entire epistle consists of tests of true faith..." John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, 'Follow Me'?* revised and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 252.

On the contrary, James addresses his readers as Christians, employing the term "brothers" (*adelphoi*) 19 times. Three of these uses are found in the

Christian. Support for this definition of faith is thought to be resident in the statement of Jas 2:14, "Can such faith save him?" (NIV), or that of 2:17, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Further support is garnered from the mention that *even the demons believe* (2:19)—a supposed example of false faith. In the final analysis, dead faith is equated with no faith at all. It is a false faith.

If this is James's purpose for 2:14-26, one of two primary responses surfaces. First is the response of complacency. I might say to myself, "I know I'm a Christian and bound for heaven. By God's grace, I have enough good works in my life to show it. These verses have no application for me because they are addressed to people who have false faith."

A second response is that of an unhealthy questioning of my salvation. I might say to myself, "I've trusted Christ as my Savior and thought I was a Christian. But now I'm not sure if I really have enough good works to prove it." Regardless of which response is the result, complacency or unhealthy introspection injures the Christian spiritually and the real impact of the passage is neglected.

James is one of the NT books that is extremely relevant for the twentieth-century church. Like American evangelicals, the Jewish Christians to whom James addresses his challenges are ensnared by worldliness (1:27b; 4:4) and are idolizing economic prosperity (2:2-4; 4:13). Their desire for material gain has prevented them from caring for the practical needs of others less fortunate (1:27a; 2:15-16).⁴ But

intimate address, "my beloved brothers" (*adelphoi mou agapē toi*). In the epistles, only 1 Corinthians has a greater use of the term "brothers" (39 times). Romans and 1 Thessalonians tie with James for 19 uses.

⁴It must be admitted that the situation of 2:15-16 is a realistic possibility for genuine believers ("one of you says to them," v 15a [italics added]). Since

much of the strength of James's rebuke of worldly Christians goes unheeded. The blame for this may well lie at the feet of the true-faith-versus-false-faith theology that has been made to override all other concerns in James 2 and the epistle as a whole.⁵ In my opinion, the primary purpose of the latter half of James 2 is to incite within the *Christian* reader the need to be active in doing more good works that

an epistle must be read in light of the occasion for writing (the life situation of the audience), it is highly likely that James is addressing a life situation that is actually taking place among his readers. By beginning his description with "If a brother or sister" (2:15), James confronts the relationship of one believer to another. Any attempt to find in 2:15-16 so-called "false believers" is gratuitous. Since these Jewish Christians had been scattered either throughout Palestine or other nations (1:1), additional burdens were placed on their finances. Lacking the kind of generosity that characterizes the very nature of God Himself (1:5, 17; 5:11), these Christians found ways to treat those with material needs rather mercilessly (2:2-6; 12-13).

⁵Note how MacArthur transforms James's appeal for Christians to repent of worldliness into an address to non-Christians: "One of the most comprehensive invitations to salvation in all the Epistles comes in James 4:7-10." MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 252. If this passage is a "comprehensive invitation to salvation," one wonders why there is an absence of such words as "faith" (*pistis*), "believe" (*pisteuō*), "(eternal) life" (*zōē*), "forgiveness" (*aphesis*), "forgive" (*charizomai*), "save" (*sōzō*), "salvation" (*sōtēria*), and other terms that might invoke the thought that an invitation to salvation was being offered. To make matters worse, "Christ" or a related term is not mentioned in the passage, and His death and resurrection are not found in the entire book. Scholars have noticed the absence of these truths in James. Simon J. Kistemaker, "The Theological Message of James," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (March 1986): 56.

meet practical needs.⁶ That kind of exhortation is radically lost if we force on the unit a false faith/true faith purview.

The very heart and method of James's appeal in chapter 2 is to arouse acts of mercy from those who *know they have already received* the mercy of God.⁷ James simply does not question the fact that his readers are true Christians. He appeals to them based on the reality of their new birth. Perhaps the most transparent statement to this effect is 2:1, "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, do not show favoritism" (NIV).⁸ All that James has to say is designed to shake us "as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" from the comfort of worldliness and challenge us to meet the practical needs of others such as the needs of an orphan or a widow (1:26). He does so without ever finding it necessary to scrutinize our experience of salvation.

⁶James is generally recognized to be a very practical book with less of a theological intent. Donald W. Burdick, "James," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 12:164; William Dyrness ("Mercy Triumphs Over Justice: James 2:13 and the Theology of Faith and Works," *Themelios* 6 [April 1981]: 12) remarks, "Most would agree with him [M. Dibelius] that James does not contain a developed theology." It is puzzling, then, why the heavy theological emphasis is seen to dominate James 2. A practical approach is much more in harmony with the nature of the rest of the book.

⁷James 2:12 is sufficient evidence that a key motivational technique for the author is to base his exhortation on the very fact of their assured conversion. N.B., the NLT's free rendering of 2:12b, "remember that you will be judged by the law of love, the law that set you free." Such statements are inappropriate for unbelievers or so-called "false Christians" who have never been set free.

⁸Here the NLT ("how can you claim that you have...?") and the NRSV ("do you with your acts of favoritism really believe...?") read the Greek prejudicially.

Many other Scriptures contradict the proposition that “all true Christians will produce good works that are pleasing to God.” For example, the teaching of 1 Corinthians 3 must be brought into the discussion. Concerning the future evaluation of a Christian, Paul explains that each believer must stand before the Lord Jesus Christ one day to have his works examined. At that time all of our deeds will go through a “fire” that tests their quality. In some cases a believer’s works may appear to be “good works” to others. But his inner motives may be impure (cf. Matt 6:1-18; 1 Cor 4:5; Heb 4:12), making the quality of his works unacceptable to God and therefore “burned up.” Of this person Paul says, “He shall suffer loss, yet he himself will be saved” (1 Cor 3:15). This is an undeniable case of a Christian who is bound for heaven but does not produce enough good works to ultimately please the Lord and be rewarded.⁹ Like 1 Corinthians 3 and the Corinthian church, the pages of Scripture contradict the idea that genuine Christians will consistently yield fruit that pleases the Lord. The Bible is filled with commands directed to true believers to be busy in doing good deeds (Col 1:10; 2 Thess 2:17; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10; 6:18; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:13, 8, 14; Heb 10:24; Jas 3:13; 1 Pet 2:12). It never presumes that good works will be done just because true faith exists.

⁹It is the quality (1 Cor 3:10) and motives (1 Cor 4:5; Heb 4:12-13) of a believer’s works that are evaluated. It follows logically, then, that some Christians will *appear to us* to be doing consistent good works that prove they are saved, while *the Lord* views them as disobedient Christians like the worldly Corinthians (1 Cor 3:1-3).

II. Three Central Teachings from James 2

There are three correct perspectives that arise from James 2. First, James is teaching that *speaking* our faith without *doing* our faith cannot meet practical needs. We see this illustrated in Jas 2:16 by a brother or sister who is without clothing, in need of daily food. James continues, “and one of you [i.e., one of you Christians] says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” Seeing a fellow Christian in need of food and clothing, this believer *says* to the destitute one, “Go, and may you be well cared for.” “What good is that?” James replies. The point is that faith (i.e., true faith, if the term is needed for some) by itself, without works, cannot meet the practical needs of a person. Faith just cannot do that. But deeds can.

A second correct perspective in James 2 is that by its very nature faith is invisible, but can be seen through our good works. It cannot be concluded from this that good works must be present for true faith to exist. Nevertheless, works make visible to other people the faith that is visible only to God. An imaginary opponent challenges James by saying, “You can’t see faith. Show me, even though I know you can’t.” James responds by declaring, “Indeed, you can see faith! You can see how Abraham trusted God when he offered Isaac on the altar. His faith and works were cooperating so that his faith became visible through his works.”¹⁰

¹⁰The second person singular form of *blepō* (“you see”) is used in Jas 2:22, making it evident that James is personally responding to the objector’s comments and is arguing for the visibility of faith.

A third correct perspective in this section is that when good works are added to our faith, our faith in Christ is matured. This is exactly the experience of Abraham. "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith *was made perfect* (i.e., matured; Greek: *teleioō*)?" (2:22). Abraham's faith was matured when he added works to it.¹¹ Certainly James is not suggesting that Abraham's work of offering his son Isaac in sacrifice proved his faith was genuine.¹² The sacrifice of Isaac took place as much as thirty-five years after Abraham's justification by faith. Were there not many other earlier events that could validate Abraham's faith just as clearly? The point of v 22 is not the substantiation of faith but the maturation of it. Romans tells us that Abraham initially trusted in the God of resurrection, i.e., that God could bring life to his dead body (Rom 4:17-20). But when he offered up Isaac, Hebrews tells us (11:17-19) that he believed that God would resurrect his son from the dead.¹³ His belief in the resurrection was put to the test (cf. Gen 22:1) and as a result of his works, his faith was matured.

III. Hermeneutics, the Epistles, and James 2

It is now common to view an epistolary introduction as an authorial device that announces the central themes of a letter.¹⁴

¹¹Cf. Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension*, revised and enlarged ed. (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1992); 34.

¹²*Contra* Kistemaker, "Theological Message of James," 58; and Glaze, "Relationship of Faith to Works," 41.

¹³Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 34-35.

¹⁴Robert W. Funk, "The Letter: Form and Style," in *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 257, 269; Paul Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings*

Like the growth of a flower, the prologue of an epistle is the thematic bud and the body of the epistle is the full blossom. Further, the conclusion and the introduction will often be joined with verbal and conceptual links that form a harmony of ideas, confirming the themes.¹⁵ These two hermeneutical principles form a check and balance system for interpretation. If I find in the body of an epistle several basic themes that are not found in the prologue or the epilogue, my exegesis may likely be faulty.

Traditional approaches to James 2 flounder against these hermeneutical tests.¹⁶ The issue of true faith/false faith does not appear in the introduction or conclusion of the letter. Nor does the introduction concern itself with a conception that true faith results in consistent good works. The opening of the epistle reveals that the saints to whom James writes are undergoing trials that are testing their faith (1:2). While some are convinced that this test is designed to separate genuine faith from spurious faith, such thinking is not readily evident. On the contrary, the testing process itself is a mark that one is within the family of God. As an OT believer, Abraham faced a test of his faith when he was commanded to offer up his son Isaac (Gen 22:1; Heb 11:17)—a test that forms the essential backdrop to the

(Berlin: A. Topelmann, 1939), 25-26, 76-77. I have argued this in another article as it relates to the exegesis of Phil 1:6; "Does Philippians 1:6 Guarantee Progressive Sanctification? Part 1," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 9 (Spring 1996): 37-58.

¹⁵Technically, this harmony of the prologue and epilogue forms an *inclusio*.

¹⁶Dyrness cites Dr. Newton Flew (the bibliographic information is not mentioned) as suggesting that James 1:1-10 (but especially vv 2-4) "lists all the topics James will cover in his letter" (the quote belongs to Dyrness). Dyrness, "Mercy Triumphs Over Justice," 15, n. 17.

mention of this incident in Jas 2:22. The Father is in the business of putting his children into situations that will develop their trust in Him.

The potter does not examine defective vessels...What then does he examine? Only the sound vessels...Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, tests not the wicked but the righteous, as it says, "The Lord trieth the righteous."¹⁷

What the introduction does present is a contrast between a mature faith and immature faith. James reminds his readers that trials can lead to endurance, and endurance should be permitted to "have its perfect [*teleios*] work, that you may be perfect [*teleios*] and complete, lacking nothing" (1:4).¹⁸ The same Greek root used in 1:4 is employed by James in 2:22 (*teleioō*) to describe the maturing of Abraham's faith. If the believer will respond to trials with joy and allow endurance to have its perfecting (maturing) work, he will develop a mature, complete character.¹⁹ Since immediately following the Jas 2:14-26 context the

¹⁷These words are taken from Rabbi Jonathan, *Gen. Rab.* 55:2, cited with agreement in Peter H. Davids, "Theological Perspectives in the Epistle of James," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (June 1980): 98. Cf. also Ps 11:5; Jer 20:12, where the Lord tests the righteous, but not the wicked.

¹⁸The NIV of 1:4 states, "so that you may be *mature* and complete" (italics added).

¹⁹The words *teleios* and *teleioō* are regularly used to denote maturity (1 Cor 2:6; 3:1; 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12; Heb 5:14). William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated by Walter Bauer, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), *s.v.* *teleioō* and *teleios* 809-810.

author brings up the thought of maturity again (3:2), there is no reason to think that the concept should not be given much greater weight in the James 2 unit than any conception of a so-called false faith.²⁰

III. The Analogy of the Body and Spirit

If we were to construct an analogy between the body and the spirit and the words “faith” and “works,” how would we normally state the analogy? Invariably, our first response would be to say that “faith” corresponds to spirit and “works” corresponds to “body.” Our reasoning would be that faith forms the inner motivating force and any good work must have faith behind it in order for it to be a valid good work, pleasing to God.

Such a theology is precisely what Paul teaches (Gal 5:16b; 1 Thess 1:3). Unfortunately, this is one of the causes of our misguided views of James 2. Paul’s thoughts are erroneously superimposed on James. But James actually affirms the very opposite correspondence in the analogy. He summarizes this whole section (2:14-26) by saying, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”²¹ It should be carefully observed that “body” corresponds with

²⁰Of all NT books, the Epistle of James uses the words *teleioō* and *teleios* second in frequency (6 times) only to Hebrews (11 times). Other uses besides those mentioned above include 1:17 and 1:25.

²¹Hodges suggests that this summary or conclusion to 2:14-26 might be a starting point for understanding the passage. Zane C. Hodges, *Dead Faith: What Is It? A Study on James 2:14-26* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1987), 7-8.

“faith,” and “spirit” corresponds with “works.” A body without the spirit is analogous to faith without works.

James is teaching that faith without works is simply a cold orthodoxy, lacking spiritual vibrancy. Practically speaking, we might think of a “dead church.” This is not to say that those gathering as part of this assembly are not Christians. As noted earlier, James’s concerns are more practical than theological. The real issue for these believers is the absence or presence of a freshness, vitality, and energy in their faith. When a Christian engages in practical deeds to benefit others, James says our faith comes alive.

IV. Objections to This Interpretation of James 2

A. The Salvation in 2:14

In rethinking James 2 with these insights, several objections may be raised against the overview presented so far. One might object by asking, Does not Jas 2:14 refer to a false faith that does not save? After all, it says, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”²² This

²²To this might be added the thought that James states that the man only “says” he has faith (2:14). But with the use of *legētis* (“someone says”), there is no inference that the claim is devoid of reality. Plummer notes this fact: “St. James is not insinuating that the man says he has faith, when he really has none. If that were the case, it would be needless to ask, ‘can his faith save him?’ The question would be, ‘can his profession of faith save him?’” Alfred Plummer, *The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude*, in *Expositor’s Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897), 137. Dibelius correctly interprets: “One cannot read into the words should claim [to have faith]...that what is meant here is a false faith, one which is only alleged.

objection is balanced on the unstable assumption that “save” (*sōzō*) in the verse is to be interpreted as a deliverance from eternal damnation. An exegetical conjecture as foundational as this must be proved as the intent of the author rather than assumed by the interpreter. There are numerous places where the NT (as well as the OT) refers to “saved” or “salvation” but the reference is not to justification or eternal life.²³ Lexicographically, the nature of the salvation or deliverance cannot be found in the Greek words *sōzō* (“save”) or *sōtēria* (“salvation”) themselves. Instead, it must be determined from context. This exegetical-hermeneutical consideration must be allowed to bear on Jas 2:14.

Some versions have tried to assist the reader by translating 2:14, “Can *that* faith save him?” (NASB, italics added) or “Can *such* faith save him?” (NIV, italics added). Each of these translations have no clear justification from the Greek. They may also lead to the erroneous

James certainly never sets correct faith over against such an alleged faith.” Martin Dibelius, *James*, ed. by Helmut Koester, translated by Michael A. Williams, revised by Heinrich Greeven (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 152. In addition, the exhortation to “so speak and so do” in 2:12 along with the tacit reference to boasting in 2:13 (*katakauchatai*) set the stage well for a contrast between words and actions as stated above—a contrast clearly surfacing in the parable of 2:15-16 and the diatribe of 2:18-19. Cf. the similar argument of Roy Bowen Ward, “The Works of Abraham: James 2:14-16,” *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (1968): 283-84. Exhortations against evil boasting, both explicit and implicit, surface within the epistle regularly, showing the addressees struggled with this sin (1:9; 2:13; 3:14; 4:16).

²³See, for example, Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 111-33.

conclusion that there is a kind of faith in Christ that brings eternal life ("true faith") and another kind of faith in Christ that does not bring eternal life ("false faith").²⁴ In the Scripture, however, faith placed in Christ always results in eternal life. The Bible only mentions two responses to Christ: faith and no faith. What is labeled as false faith must be categorized biblically either by faith or unbelief. If the response envisioned is unbelief, then the word "faith" should not be used. In Jas 2:14, the NKJV, KJV, NRSV, and RSV are fully correct to translate simply, "Can faith save him?"²⁵

²⁴Radmacher points out that the multitude of adjectives used by proponents of perseverance theology to describe faith (e.g., false faith, genuine faith, intellectual faith, etc.) are never found in the Bible. Earl D. Radmacher, "First Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James,' by John F. MacArthur, Jr.," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 37.

²⁵The article appears with faith (*hē pistis*). Wallace argues against Hodges (*Gospel Under Siege*, 23) that the article is anaphoric rather than simply used with an abstract noun. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 219. Hodges has in his defense the uses of the article with faith (*pistis*) in the following context (2:17, 18, 20, 22, 26). Wallace still insists that the article in 2:14 is anaphoric and speaks of two kinds of faith. But even if the article were anaphoric, this use of the anaphoric article merely points back to an antecedent use of the word "faith." (Cf. Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, in *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ed. James Hope Moulton [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, LTD, 1963], 3:173.) The anaphoric article would be adequately translated like the RSV, "Can *his* faith save him?" (italics added). This rendering avoids reading into the verse any theological ideas about the nature of the faith under discussion. Cf. also A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 755.

If James is asking "Can faith alone get a person to heaven?" a serious contradiction exists with other Scriptures because the question posed in the Greek of 2:14b demands a negative answer: "Faith cannot save him, can it?" Without a doubt, Paul declares that faith alone justifies us before God (Rom 1:17; 3:22, 26, 28, 30; 4:3, 5; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:8). Evangelical attempts to impose a true-faith-produces-works solution on the passage are not helpful.²⁶ However, could it be that James is *not* talking about being saved from hell? Resistance to this possibility is strong. At least two objections are raised. First, some think that the merciless judgment mentioned in 2:12-13 must be the final judgment. As a result, the "save" in 2:14 must relate to eternal life.²⁷ But surely this exegesis cannot avoid the charge of a works salvation since according to 2:13 the doing of mercy (= works) will bring mercy in judgment (= forgiveness and eternal life).

The reading of Jas 2:12-13 as a reference to our eternal destiny in heaven or hell also confuses the NT teaching on the Judgment Seat of Christ for the believer (2 Cor 5:10) with the final judgment of the unbeliever (Rev 20:11-15). If space permitted, a more detailed analysis

²⁶The popular ditty "Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone," is attributed to the Reformed preacher John Owens. Although it is rhythmic enough to sound noteworthy, in actuality it is self-contradictory. Rephrasing the aphorism, we might say, "Faith without works saves, but the faith that saves without works is never without works." If the faith that saves is *never* alone, i.e., faith and works are "inseparable," it seems as if works will need to accompany the initial faith by which we are first born again. But that conclusion sets itself squarely against Paul and the NT teaching on justification by faith alone.

²⁷Gale Z. Heide, "The Soteriology of James 2:14," *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1992): 82-83.

could be presented to show the need to separate the Christian's judgment from the judgment of all unbelievers. Instead, two observations from the text will be sufficient to remove the objection. A judgment of believers must be in view in 2:12 because James challenges his readership to act like those who have been forgiven and freed from guilt.²⁸ But unbelievers or false believers cannot act like they have been freed from guilt. Additionally, 2:12-13 corresponds to 3:1 as an *inclusio*. Therefore, the judgment mentioned in 3:1 corresponds with the judgment mentioned in 2:12-13. But in 3:1, James himself states that he will experience this judgment, and that it will involve greater strictness for him and for all teachers. Can anyone suppose that James thought of himself as appearing before God to determine his eternal destiny? Was heaven held in the balance for him? Absolutely not! But James did realize that even as the half brother of the Lord his life would inevitably pass through a scrutinizing evaluation by his Savior.

A second objection is raised against revisiting the "save" in 2:14. It is argued that "save" and "salvation" in the NT are so frequently used of deliverance from eternal destruction that it is nearly impossible that James uses the term differently. Schreiner writes, "[To take 'save' to refer to a deliverance from physical death] is an astonishing move since salvation and justification are typically associated in the New Testament with entering heaven."²⁹ Schreiner demonstrates a common

²⁸See note 7 above. For an understanding of the "law of liberty," see Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 44, 56.

²⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, "Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and a Proposal," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2 (Spring 1998): 45. Cf. also

error in exegesis, namely, making exegetical decisions based on the major use of a word rather than context. Applying this “majority-use” principle, the *spies* (Greek: *angeloi*, “messengers, angels”) that Rahab protected (Jas 2:25) would be *angels* rather than men, and the Christian believers to whom James writes would be gathering together in a Jewish *synagogue* (2:2, Greek: *sunagōgē*) rather than a Christian *assembly*.³⁰

But even more serious under this “majority-use” principle is the fact that Jas 5:15, “the prayer of faith will *save* [Greek: *sōzō*, italics added] the sick,” must also have reference to entering heaven. But as it stands, I am aware of no evangelical that equates the “save” of 5:15 with eternal life.³¹ By far the predominant view is that the “save” of 5:15 speaks of a physical healing, i.e., a deliverance from physical death. The exegetical lesson to be learned is this: Jas 5:15 makes it

Robert L. Saucy, “Second Response to ‘Faith According to the Apostle James’ by John F. MacArthur Jr.,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 43-47.

³⁰The Greek word *angelos* is used 175 times with only six or seven uses that are not translated as “angel(s).” Out of 56 uses of *sunagōgē* in the NT, only one (Jas 2:2, NASB) or two (Jas 2:2; Acts 13:43, NIV, NKJV) are translated with a word besides “synagogue.”

³¹Translators are so conscious of the fact that *sōzō* in 5:15 does not refer to eternal life that no modern evangelical version uses the word “save.” NASB uses “restore,” and the NIV and NLT translate, “make well.” “Save” is used in such versions as KJV, NKJV, NRSV, NJB, RSV, Phillips. Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *James*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 181; Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 194.

thoroughly apparent that in his short epistle the author is fully capable of using the word “save” of something other than deliverance from eternal damnation.

In fact, the word “save” is used five times in James (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15, 20) and there are *no* clear-cut cases where the word simply means, “to be delivered from hell.” In James 4:12 we read of the “Lawgiver, who is able to save [Greek: *sōzō*] and to destroy.”³² We may be tempted to read the verse as a description of the Lord’s power over heaven and hell. But in the following verses (vv 13-15), the focus centers on one’s temporal life. James addresses a person who plans a future business deal in another country without taking into consideration how long he might live. “For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’” (Jas 4:14b-15). James is clear: “Life is fleeting! It is best that you include God in your plans, for He alone has the power to preserve your life or to take it.”

The final two uses of “save” in the book of James (1:21; 5:20) both use the phrase, “save the soul,” perhaps better translated “save the life.”³³ Studies on this phrase have been developed by Dillow and

³²A parallel may be found in Mark 3:4: “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save [Greek: *sōzō*] a life or to kill?” Cf. Deut 32:39. Mark 3:4 uses the identical Greek phrase (to “save the life” or to “save the soul”) found in Jas 1:21 and 5:20.

³³James 1:21, 5:20, and 1 Pet 1:9 (using the noun phrase, “salvation of the soul”) are the only verses where the NT phrase is translated other than “save the *life*” (cf. Matt 16:25; Mark 3:41; 8:35; Luke 6:9; 9:24).

Hodges,³⁴ and do not need to be repeated here. The following conclusions can be drawn. First, in the LXX, the phrase means “deliverance from physical death,” and *never* relates to eternal salvation. Second, the NT continues to use the phrase in the identical sense (Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; cf. 9:56, Majority Text and the TR). Third, building on the literal meaning of the phrase (deliverance from physical death), Jesus taught a metaphorical meaning of the term “save the life.”³⁵ Fourth, in Jas 5:20, it is a fellow believer (“Brethren, if anyone *among you*,” italics added; 5:19) whose “soul [life] is saved.”³⁶ To further clarify that physical death is in view, the verse adds the words, “from death.”³⁷ The fifth point is an observation not directly made by Dillow

³⁴Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*, 116-22, 189-91; Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 26-27; *Absolutely Free*, 120-21.

³⁵The metaphorical meaning cannot be developed here. It appears to carry the meaning of “a life delivered from being wasted on temporal pursuits and therefore eternally rewarded” (Matt 8:35; 16:25; Luke 9:24). See Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1985), 28-33. It is not impossible that this meaning is to be found in Jas 1:21 and 2:14.

³⁶Only theological prejudice can find false believers in this text. James 5:20 sets forth a scenario of someone among the Christian readers who “wanders from the truth” and then another brother “turns him back.” If James is entertaining the thought of a so-called (false) Christian, how can such a person wander from the truth that he has never embraced? How also is he to be “turned back” to something he never had in the first place?

³⁷Physical death rather than eternal death is demanded by the verse because 1) the Christian’s eternal destiny is secure, with no threats of eternal damnation. Yet they can be subject to the death of 5:20; 2) James’s first mention of death resulting from sin can only be understood as physical death since sin “when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (1:15). The death under consideration results from the maturation of sin, not the inception of

or Hodges. The use of the phrase, “save the life” in 1:21 and 5:20—the first and last use of the word “save”—constitutes another *inclusio* in the book. Like parentheses around written material, it appears that James intended to use this *inclusio* to mark out a controlling theme for the intervening material and the remainder of his uses of “save.” We conclude, then, that there are very good reasons why James 2 may be saying, “Can faith alone save you from the devastating consequences of sin, ending in physical death?”³⁸

At first, the thought of being saved from physical death seems rather insipid.³⁹ However, James’s Jewish readers would have been

sin. Such a maturation is not necessary for either spiritual death in the life of the believer (broken fellowship) or eternal death for an unbeliever.

³⁸For a similar treatment, see R. Larry Moyer, *Free and Clear: Understanding and Communicating God’s Offer of Eternal Life* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 72-77. There are at least two other options for the salvation of 2:14 that do not take the word to speak of eternal life. First, Kendall suggests that the “save” relates back to the “poor man” of 2:6 and that the context (2:15-16) focuses on the needs of the poor. Since this is the case, 2:14 expresses the impossibility of faith alone to save the poor man. R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 216.

Another option is to understand the “salvation” to relate to the Judgment Seat of Christ described in 2:12-13. Hodges advises that this meaning is not likely. Among several reasons, he points out that Scriptures do not teach elsewhere a salvation related to the Judgment Seat. Hodges, *James*, 61. He may be right. Yet, it is attractive because of the contextual closeness of 2:14 with 2:13. The flexibility of the word “save” lends itself to thinking this way. James could be arguing that faith without works cannot deliver a person from a merciless evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This would reflect the metaphorical use of the phrase, “save the life.” See note 35 above.

³⁹“But with this interpretive construct Hodges unknowingly renders James’s argument from Abraham completely irrelevant (the issue in the

steeped in the OT. According to the OT, sin naturally leads to an early physical death. Even the one commandment that contains a promise ("Honor your father and mother") promises a long life on the earth (Eph 6:2). It is a clear fact that sin tends to shorten one's life. James's point is that just because someone believes in Christ does not mean he is going to escape the devastation of sin and its ultimate consequence of physical death. New Testament Christians must realize that physical death is still a serious penalty for sin (1 Cor 11:30).

B. The Faith of Demons (2:19)

The second major objection to our approach to James 2 is this: Does not Jas 2:19 demonstrate the nature of a false faith when it mentions the faith of demons? Since I have dealt with this verse more thoroughly in another article,⁴⁰ I will summarize the salient arguments

patriarch's case is obviously not the preservation of his physical life)." R. Fowler White, "Review of Zane Hodges's *The Gospel Under Siege*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (Fall 1984): 428. The illustration of Abraham (2:21-22) comes after the objector's challenges (2:18-19) and therefore moves beyond the focus of 2:14 alone. Abraham is most appropriate to demonstrate justification by works and the visibility of faith in works. But it must also be admitted that death surrounds all of James's illustrations. Faith cannot preserve the life of a fellow Christian without food (2:15-16). By his obedience, Abraham preserved the life of his son. If the Lord sought to kill Moses for his disobedience in circumcising his son (Exod 4:24-25), then perhaps Abraham also averted his own death by his obedience in sacrificing Isaac. Rahab also preserved her life and the life of her family by her works.

⁴⁰Hart, "The Faith of Demons: James 2:19," 39-54.

that respond to this objection. Three factors militate against using Jas 2:19 as evidence of a false faith. First, the content of the faith described in 2:19 is not Christ but monotheism. The text says, "You believe that there is one God...Even the demons believe." No one has ever been justified before God by faith that God is one. So then, using Jas 2:19 to compare false faith to true faith is a proverbial "comparing apples to oranges." If the passage said, "You believe that Jesus is the Christ and your Savior; the demons also believe that," then *perhaps* we could draw a theological lesson on the nature of faith.⁴¹

Second, it is theologically unsound to compare any kind of faith (true or false) expressed by demons with faith in Christ exercised by people. Where faith is concerned, the spirit world cannot be compared with the human world simply because there is no salvation for demons even if they did believe (Heb 2:16).

Third, it is highly likely that the words of 2:19, which include the phrase "the demons believe," are not the teachings of James.

⁴¹Some hold that demons do indeed believe in Christ. Yet there are no passages that use the word "believe" (*pisteuō*) of demons other than Jas 2:19 (cf. Matt 8:29, par Mark 5:7, Luke 8:28; Mark 1:24, par Luke 4:34; Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41). The emphasis does not fall on faith but on knowledge ("I know who You are," Mark 1:24; par Luke 4:34). Demons certainly know that Jesus is the Christ in the same way they know the authority of Paul as an apostle (Acts 19:15). In my opinion, however, demons do not believe in Christ because in the NT faith is always a personal appropriation of the truth of Christ's death. In other words, for a demon to believe in Christ would mean that he would trust that Christ died for *his* sins. But demons understand that Christ did not die for the spirit world.

Instead, they are the words of the imaginary objector that James introduces in v 18.⁴² It is surprising for some to discover that serious confusion exists on how far the objector's words should extend. In an examination of varying English versions, the ending quote marks of the objector's speech can be found in four different locations.⁴³ How far, then, do the objector's words extend? In 1 Cor 15:35-36 and Rom 9:19-20 where an imaginary objector is introduced, the apostolic reply is initiated with a statement about the foolishness of the objector. James 2:19 is very parallel with the censorious address, "O foolish man." Verse 20, therefore, begins James's reply and v 19 originates in the mouth of the objector.

Time and space limitations prevent further exegetical details. But what can be said (though without further proof) is that the objector denies the visibility of faith in someone's works, while James insists that it was clearly seen in the works of both Abraham and Rahab. So then, for the three reasons listed above, Jas 2:19 must be eliminated as a support for a false faith/true faith theology.

C. Justification by Works

A third objection centers on the concept of justification by works in James 2. The question is often asked, Is not James implying that if

⁴²While the opponent is imaginary, the content of his objection probably represents the opinion of several teachers within the assembly. Cf. 3:1. The rebuke of v 20, "do you want to know...?" ("When will you ever learn...?" NLT) reflects their desire to teach but their unwillingness to learn—a blemish that must be conquered by all teachers and preachers.

⁴³Hart, "The Faith of Demons: James 2:19," 48-49.

someone is truly justified by faith, he will do good works? Appeal may be made to v 24 for support: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" (NIV). In answer to this objection, it may be helpful to discover that in Scripture, justification means "to be declared righteous." But there are three kinds of justification in the Bible. First, there is a justification by faith alone, which is a justification before God. Paul is clear in teaching that justification by faith is in the sight of God (Rom 3:20; 4:2; Gal 3:11). The good news of the gospel is that at the first moment of faith, the new believer is forensically declared to be just as righteous as Christ is righteous!

A second kind of justification is a justification by works (or faith and works) before God. That kind of justification is always presented in Scripture as heresy as is evident by Paul's discussions in Romans and Galatians (Rom 3:20, 28; 4:2, 6; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10). But a third kind of justification in the Scriptures is a justification by works. James specifically mentions the phrase "justified by works" three times (2:21, 25, 26).⁴⁴ Justification by works is in the sight of *people*, not God.⁴⁵

⁴⁴It is significant that James never uses phraseology such as "justified by faith that produces works," "justified by faith and works," or any such combination. It is strictly, "justified by works."

⁴⁵Works are transparently the means of the primary "justification" with which James is concerned. (He does, of course, make reference to justification by faith.) Any attempt to read James as if he were redefining Pauline justification by faith is fully misdirected. The NLT and TEV have no grounds for repeatedly adding to James the phrase "with God." For example, "our ancestor Abraham was declared right with God because of what he did" (NLT, v 21), effectively puts Paul at odds with James. The rendering, "we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone" (NLT, v 24), brings inerrancy into question and denies the sole condition (faith) for eternal life. Cf. also v 25.

This is the logical conclusion given the fact that James is responding to an objector who holds that faith cannot be seen. James calls on him to “see” (*blepō* v 22; *horaō* v 24) how Abraham’s works justified him.⁴⁶ Paul, in full harmony with James, considered the possibility of Abraham being justified by works “but not before God” (Rom 4:2).⁴⁷

With this in mind, one can better approach the meaning of v 24. The traditional understanding labors, unsuccessfully in my opinion, to harmonize the verse with Paul by insisting that saving faith will inevitably produce good works. Far too much must be read into the verse to satisfy objectivity. A greater harmony with Paul is achieved by understanding the verse as delineating two kinds of justification.⁴⁸ Several translations (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NJB) of v 24 utilize the word “only” rather than “alone”: “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (NKJV). This translation opens the door to the alternative that James is referring to two different kinds of justification. His readers need to comprehend that justification by

⁴⁶In like manner, to the teachers (or anyone else) who wish to talk their faith rather than do it, James commands that wisdom be shown (*deiknumi*) rather than spoken (3:13).

⁴⁷Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 33-34.

⁴⁸Calvin agrees. “That we may not then fall into that false reasoning which has deceived the Sophists, we must take notice of the two-fold meaning of the word *justified*. Paul means by it the gratuitous imputation of righteousness before the tribunal of God; and James, the manifestation of righteousness by the conduct, and that before men, as we may gather from the preceding words, ‘Shew to me thy faith,’ &c. In this sense we fully allow that man is justified by works...” (italics original). John Calvin, *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles*, translated and ed. by John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 314-15.

faith is not the only way a person is “declared righteous.”⁴⁹ The world is watching and it is good works that justify in the eyes of others.

D. Dead Faith

What then does James mean by “dead faith” (2:17)? The only definition James offers is that dead faith is a faith that “does not have works” and is “by itself.” For Paul, that is the very faith that brings justification before God (Rom 3:28; 4:5-6; Gal 2:16). Evangelicals have been content to interpret dead faith as a false faith. The closest syntactical parallel to Jas 2:17 is found in Rom 7:8b, “For apart from the law sin is dead” (NASB).⁵⁰ No one would suppose that Paul intended to say that apart from the law sin was “false sin” or an unreal sinfulness.⁵¹ Sin is still real and true sin, even apart from the law. The thought is that sin lies dormant and unrecognized until the law arouses

⁴⁹The grammatical issue is whether the Greek *monos* (“only,” “alone”) is used adverbially or adjectivally. Adjectivally, it would modify the noun “faith,” and be translated “and not [justified] by faith alone.” Adverbially, it would modify the verb “justified” and be translated, “not [justified] only by faith.” Hodges argues that in most cases when an adjectival use is employed, *monos* has a grammatical agreement with the noun. But in Jas 2:24, the normal adverbial form is used; Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 159, n. 12. Therefore, James says (reordering the clauses), “A man is not justified by faith only, but [also] by works.”

⁵⁰This parallel is all the more impressive when the Greek of the Majority text of v 20 is read, “...that faith without works is dead.”

⁵¹“That sin was ‘dead’ does not mean that it did not exist but that it was not as ‘active’ or ‘powerful’ before the law as after.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 437. In the same way, “dead faith” does not mean that (true) faith did not exist.

it to action. In the same way, faith apart from works is true and real faith. But works have a way of enlivening faith and arousing it from abeyance.

If the Critical Text of 2:20 is accepted, faith without works is considered “useless” (*argos*). But regardless of the reading in v 20, James has implied this uselessness of faith without works by calling into question its “benefit” (*ophelos*, vv 14, 16). James, however, does not insinuate that faith without works cannot give eternal life. His interest resides in pragmatic matters. He has prepared for the thought of a useless, “dead” faith in 1:26-27. In those verses he faulted a devotion to the Lord that did not control the tongue or care for the needy. He concludes that, “this one’s religion is useless (*mataios*).” If a Christian does not bridle his tongue, is that reason to question his conversion? Said politely, such an interpretation misses the point.⁵² James is declaring that religious devotion that does not act mercifully to the needy or does not speak mercifully to others is devotion that is impractical.

It is valuable to return to the themes of the epistle introduced in the opening remarks of the book. After James reaffirms that endurance can mature our faith, he admonishes us to ask God for the wisdom we lack. But we must “ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who

⁵²Again, we insist that the *Christians* to whom the book is written do *not* have control of the tongue. If this is not the case, then most of the exhortations in the book are inchoate. On the one hand, these believers blessed God; but they also criticized their fellow brothers and sisters with the same mouth (3:9). A judgmental spirit flourished among them (2:3-4; 4:11-12). Other sins of speech are mentioned directly or indirectly (1:17; 2:14, 16, 18; 3:14; 4:1, 13, 16; 5:9, 11).

doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind" (1:6). In this context, there is no impression that those who lack faith in prayer are false Christians. To the contrary, the terminology identifies an immature believer.⁵³ While the readers trusted God for their eternal life, they doubted He would give them wisdom.⁵⁴ The result of this lack of faith is that the believer's life becomes unstable and immature (1:8). This theme of immaturity is carried further in 2:5 where James affirms that the economically poor believers are "rich in faith." The tacit contrast is between a poor (weak) faith and a rich (mature) faith, not a true faith and false faith. Finally, the elder as a righteous man can offer a "prayer in faith" (5:15) for the sick. To do so is to offer a prayer that "works" (5:16; Greek: *energeō*). Once again, it is ludicrous to suppose that James contrasted a prayer offered in true faith with some sort of prayer offered with false faith. But he does imply that not all Christians are able to offer such mature, powerful prayer. All of these factors lead to a single conclusion: "dead faith" for James is an immature, weak faith and not a false faith as so many have supposed.

⁵³Cf. the Lord's rebuke of the disciples, "you of little faith" (*oligopistoi*), used five times in the gospels (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Luke 12:28). Cf. also *oligopistia* ("small faith"; NKJV, "unbelief") in Matt 17:20.

⁵⁴The error in the thinking of these Christian readers was their view of God. Specifically, they doubted God's generosity and goodness to give wisdom (1:5-7), or for that matter any good gift (1:17-18). Being deceived about His character (1:16), the trials that came upon them were thought to be God's enticement to evil (1:13). With such thinking, it was natural to be bitter at God. Having misunderstood His compassion and mercy (cf. 5:11), they failed to express mercy to the poor (2:6, 13; cf. 3:17). God is a giving God (1:5; 4:6), but they would not imitate Him (2:16). All of this evidences their immature faith.

V. Conclusion

We have discovered three central lessons in this passage. First, *speaking* our faith without *doing* our faith cannot meet practical needs. It is easy for us to talk our faith yet not do it. We are sometimes of the opinion that if we have talked about it, we have done it. If we have talked about the crisis pregnancy center and our stand against abortion, we think we have done it. We gather together in a prayer meeting and talk about prayer, so we think we have done prayer. We talk about evangelism, the poor, and other issues, yet we still avoid the effort of acting on our faith! The end result is a self-deception about how well we are doing in our dedication to God (1:22, 26).

There is one group of Christians who are most susceptible to the self-deception of talking our faith and not doing it. Notice that immediately following Jas 2:14-26, James directs his attention to the subject of the tongue (3:1ff). In the very first verse of this new unit, he describes the ones who most easily fall prey to talking faith but not doing it: teachers of biblical truth! The irony of this is that we evangelical teachers and preachers who need to learn this truth most desperately are the very ones who have obscured it the most. By reducing James to a theological treatment on the nature of faith, it is easier for us all to avoid the real unsettling challenges of James to help others like the poor. Even my own writing on the obligation to move beyond merely talking our faith does not go beyond talking my faith. While I may find a sense of fulfillment from the Lord in exhorting others to do good works, I am not by that writing and teaching released from the obligation to be engaged in good deeds myself.

Second, faith that is invisible can be seen through good works. You can see a person is trusting God by their works. If we do not see the good deeds, he or she may still be a Christian. But his or her faith

is not visible. Yet when good works are there, we can say, "Yes, I can see that that person is trusting God."

Third, when good works are added to our faith, our faith in Christ is matured. We cannot move on to maturity until we actively participate in meeting the needs of the unfortunate, such as the care of widows and orphans. The way that I energize my faith, then, is to act on the real thrust of James 2. I must add to my faith the good works that will meet practical needs.

R. T. Kendall has an incisive observation about the James 2 passage that makes a very relevant conclusion. He writes:

What startles me is the number of people who insist that one must have works to show he is saved but who themselves have virtually nothing of the very works James has in mind! They wish to use James as a basis of "assurance by works" but not the kind of works James has in mind—caring for the poor. I have yet to meet the first person who holds (or preaches) that giving another "those things which are needful to their body" must follow faith to show that it is saving faith indeed. We prefer to be selective in our use of James.⁵⁵

We who hold firmly to the truth that faith alone brings justification without works of any sort must not be guilty of Kendall's criticism. Let us lead the way in good works flowing from love and the power of the Spirit. Let us energize our faith to its fullest.

⁵⁵R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved*, 212.

A Voice from the Past:

DISCOVERING THE GOSPEL¹

LANCE B. (DOC) LATHAM²

(1894-1985)

I. Introduction

There is something within the heart of a man which constantly presses to make a perverse addition to the sole basis of our salvation, the work of Christ on the cross. Constantly pressed by the sin of pride, the mind of the natural man is ever reluctant to admit its sinful, helpless condition.

Many who understand the gospel refuse to come to Christ because they will not admit that they lack a shred of goodness, righteousness or desirability within themselves that God can accept.

Religious leaders try to add baptism, church membership, faithful living, personal sacrifice or some other human work to the work of Christ to the hope of salvation for the believer. Such philosophies may have filled the coffers of religion but have confused the issue of salvation and thus damaged countless souls.

One who discovers the gospel will instantly realize that the sole basis of his salvation is the work of Christ on Calvary's cross. Saving faith depends alone on the value of Calvary. All other possible sources for the assurance of salvation are counterfeit.

¹ This article is taken from a chapter by the same name from *The Two Gospels* (Rolling Meadows, IL: Awana, 1984), 43-47.

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II. Invitations to the Unsaved

The *gospel* is the *good news*. It is not a new set of obligations or duties to be performed—new strivings—more agonizings—but rather an announcement of *what has been done* for us. We do not present the *claims* of the gospel. We present a wonderful *free offer* by God Himself to the sinner who *believes*.

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19).

We find the fearful need for salvation in Rom 1:18 through 3:20. The Lord came “not to call the righteous, but sinners.” For unless the person seeking salvation realizes his desperate need, he will not flee “for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb 6:18).

Then there follows the need of a *scriptural invitation*. A great passage in Rom 3:18 through 4:8 has often been called the core of Romans and of the entire Bible—this is the *one place* in the Bible where the way of justification is set forth and explained (it is *defended* in Galatians). And there are many *instances* of salvation in the Gospels and the book of Acts.

Let us look closely at a few of the “invitations” listed at the beginning of this chapter.³

³Latham here is referring to the invitations he listed on p. 41 of *The Two Gospels*. They include: “Give your heart to Christ,” “Give your heart to Jesus,” “Surrender all,” “Pray the penitent’s prayer,” “Turn the direction of your life over to God,” “Put your all on the altar,” “Make Jesus Lord of your life,” “Confess all your sins,” “Forsake all your sins,” “Take Jesus into your heart,” “Ask Jesus to come into your heart,” “Make the great commitment,” and “Follow Jesus.”

A. "Give Your Heart to Christ"

As William Reid so well says in his *Blood of Jesus*, "'Give your heart to Jesus' is law rather than gospel."⁴ Salvation is not my gift to God, but His gift to me. This also applies to like invitations such as, "Give your life to God," "Give your heart to Christ," "Surrender all," "Put your all on the altar," and "Ask Jesus to come into your heart."

On what Scripture does this invitation rest? We find in Prov 23:26, "My son, give me thine heart." Surely there is no justification for an invitation so generally given in this one verse! It is addressed to "*my son*," an already established relationship, with no reliance on Calvary.

B. "Forsaking All Your Sins"

This means that the sinner must promise to live perfectly from now on. I read in Rom 8:7:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

God accepts us as *ungodly, as we are*, when as sinners, we trust in Him and His redeeming work on Calvary. Then, *once we are justified*, "*He shall save His people*, from their sins."

C. "God Be Merciful to Me a Sinner"

This is commonly used in rescue missions, and doubtless God saves many, in spite of such an incomplete invitation. And do you notice what usually is added, "And save me for Jesus' sake." We quote the faithful note in the Scofield Bible regarding Luke 18:13:

⁴William Reid, *Blood of Jesus* (np: Liberty Bell Press, 1969).

Greek *hilaskomai*, used in the Septuagint and N.T. in connection with the mercy-seat. As an instructed Jew the publican is thinking, not of mere mercy, but of the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat. His prayer might be paraphrased, "Be toward me as thou art when thou lookest upon the atoning blood." The Bible knows nothing of divine forgiveness apart from sacrifice.

D. "Surrender All"

William R. Newell teaches us, "to preach *full surrender* to an unsaved man as the way of salvation will just make a hateful Pharisee out of him."⁵ And, from Dr. Ironside's tract, "Another Gospel":

When anyone comes promising salvation to those "who make full surrender" of all that they have to God, and who "pay the price of full salvation" he is preaching another gospel, for the price was paid on Calvary's cross and the work that saves is finished. It was Christ Jesus who made the full surrender when He yielded His life on Calvary that saves us, not our surrender in any way to Him.⁶

The great conclusion of Rom 3:19-28 is, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by *faith* apart from the deeds of the law." Apart from our living! The matter of my *continuing in sin* is not brought up until Romans 6, after the matter of my justification is well settled. I am justified freely by His *grace* through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, as stated in Rom 3:25, "through faith in His blood."

⁵Ed. note: There was no bibliographic information given in the article for this work.

⁶Ed. note: We were unable to obtain bibliographic information for this tract.

E. "Believe in Jesus"⁷

Ask any Roman Catholic, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" and he will answer, "Of course." Is this man therefore saved? The real question is, "Where is your hope?" Are you *depending* upon Christ and what He has done at Calvary alone, or is your hope in penances performed, masses, baptism and so forth? This is not faith in Christ and His work; this is faith in *your* own works, faithfulness to church, and therefore cannot *save!*

Hebrews 6:18 describes people with saving faith as those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

The climactic exhortation in Rom 12:1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice" is addressed to *believers*, those already saved. The basis for that appeal is "the mercies of God," the wonderful possessions we have in Christ presented in the previous chapters of Romans. Having this apply to unbelievers getting saved robs God of the great victory that grace, and grace alone can win.

F. "Make Jesus Your Lord"

This is just another variation of the "surrender all" invitation. Surely we must recognize *who He is*, or we will die in our sins (John 8:24). But this is vastly different from making Him your Lord in your life, in other words, promising to obey the rest of your life. This latter is preaching "works." His mercies, with all His graciousness to us, *will lead* us to making Him Lord, and that out of a heart of love and appreciation of Him.

⁷Ed. note: Latham is here rejecting an unbiblical profession of faith in Christ. One who says he believes in Christ, yet believes that more than faith in Him is necessary to be saved, doesn't "believe in Him" in the biblical sense. Compare John 11:25-27.

We feel that those who propose this way of salvation change the obvious meaning of Rom 10:9 to justify this:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.⁸

This *cannot* be made to say, “make Him Lord of your life.”

⁸Ed. note: The author does not give his understanding of Rom 10:9-10. He seems to imply that he understands confessing with one's mouth the Lord Jesus as *recognizing* His deity (see the first paragraph under “Make Jesus Your Lord”). Dr. John Hart has written an article on Rom 10:9-10 that is slated for publication in the next issue of *JOTGES*.

Grace in the Arts:

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: SO NEAR, YET SO FAR

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I. Introduction

The only occasion as a child when I nearly stayed up all night long was when I had gotten behind on the deadline for my elementary school book report. Thankfully, the book I had chosen was riveting, adventure-filled, and unforgettable. It was Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. To this day the tap-tap-tapping of Blind Pew's cane, as he approached the lonely-locationed Admiral Benbow Inn, is etched on my mind.

Many seminary graduates who have received a traditional evangelical education are familiar with the name of Alexander Whyte, the Scot who wrote two volumes on Bible Characters. Whyte had been introduced to Robert Louis Stevenson's books by a man named Patrick Campbell. Campbell was present one evening when young Alexander Whyte was introduced to the father and mother of Stevenson. "I can never forget the astonishment of the father when he heard the unstinted praises of his son from [this] serious-minded young clergyman," said Campbell.¹

Was the famed Stevenson a Christian? How did the Bible influence his writings? These and related spiritual issues will be surveyed in this article.

¹Patrick W. Campbell in *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson* ed. by Rosaline Masson (Edinburgh: W. and R. Chambers, Limited, 1922), 15.

II. Literary Laurels

One measure of greatness is the appraisal given by contemporaries in one's own field of specialization. If that is the case, then the tributes paid to RLS by the literary lights of that time speak for themselves. Edmond Gosse called him "the most beloved of all the authors of our time"² Sir James Barrie (author of *Peter Pan*) claimed that the initials "'R.L.S.'" were the best-loved initials in the English language."³

Though the two authors never met, Rudyard Kipling thought of Robert Louis Stevenson as "his idol."⁴ His friend and faithful correspondent, Henry James, called RLS "the only man in England who can write a decent English sentence."⁵ Jack London wrote, "His *Treasure Island* will be a classic to go down with [DeFoe's] *Robinson Crusoe*, [Lewis Carroll's] *Through the Looking Glass* and *The Jungle Book*[of Kipling]."⁶ The inventor of Sherlock Holmes, A. Conan Doyle, wrote to RLS of "all the pleasure you have given me during my lifetime—more than any other living man has done."⁷ British Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone stayed up all night reading *Treasure Island*.

Stevenson (1850-1894) wrote four plays, books of essays, short stories, poetry (including poems for children), five travelogues, and a

²Ibid., 73.

³James P. Wood, *The Lantern Bearer: A Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Pantheon, 1965), 171.

⁴Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling* (New York: Random House, 1978), 130.

⁵Frank Wadsworth in *The World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago, IL: World Book Inc., 1988), vol. XVIII, 705.

⁶Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1993), 203.

⁷Ibid., 472.

biography, but he is best remembered for his adventure yarns such as *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. In his forty-four years of life he authored more than thirty books.

III. A Brief Biography from a Spiritual Standpoint

G. K. Chesterton noted that "Stevenson was born of a Puritan tradition, in a Presbyterian country where still rolled the echoes...of the theological thunders of [John] Knox."⁸ Calvinism, Catechism, Covenanters, and "Cummy" (RLS's nursemaid Alise Cunningham)—these are the most formidable factors of formation in the little Robert Louis (or "Smout" as he was affectionately called. It meant "small fry"). RLS's maternal grandfather—the boy's namesake—was a Church of Scotland minister whose parish was a few miles from Edinburgh. RLS's favorite childhood game was to pretend that he was a church minister and to preach from a makeshift pulpit.

At age 3 RLS asked, "Why has God got a hell?" At age 3 he also commented to his mother, "I have drawed a man's body; shall I do his soul now?" At age 6 he dictated to his mother a history of Moses (complete with drawings of Israelites carrying portmanteaus across the Red Sea and smoking cigars!)⁹ Obviously this was a theologically precocious child.

Stevenson's father, Thomas, was a staunch Calvinist. In one photograph he looks like Gregory Peck's version of Captain Ahab in the movie rendition of *Moby Dick*. While Thomas loved his only son in

⁸G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1928), 46.

⁹Jenny Calder, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 32-33.

his own way, RLS never fully came to terms with his heavenly Father as mirrored for him by his human father. Even in his last book *The Weir of Hermiston* (unfinished at the time of his death) Stevenson was still struggling with his father concept. In *The Weir of Hermiston* RLS depicted an upright-uptight Calvinist father who is a judge to whom the son cannot emotionally relate. Father and son in the story have an irreparable falling out, as did the author and his father (over the same issue RLS did with Thomas).

Perhaps even more determinative for Stevenson's spiritual situation—for good or the reverse—over the years was the influence of his nursemaid "Cummy." Hunter Davies reported, "Cummy had read him the Bible, from start to finish, three times before he himself could read."¹⁰ Obviously, *Smout* had a phenomenal introductory biblical literacy. RLS himself later owned, "About the very cradle of the Scot there goes a hum of metaphysical divinity."¹¹

RLS's later-in-life friend (and posthumous critic), W. E. Henley (who wrote the poem "Invictus"), epitomized Stevenson in his immortal pen portrait as possessing:

"A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,
...and something of the Shorter Catechist!"¹²

After Henley captured the sprightliness and impishness of RLS (J. Addington Symonds called him "Sprite") by conscripting two character-names from Shakespeare ("Ariel" and "Puck"), the poet

¹⁰Hunter Davies, *The Teller of Tales* (New York: Interlink Books, 1996), 7.

¹¹Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (London: Chatto and Windis, 1887), 15.

¹²Irving S. Saposnik, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), 18.

Henley immortalized RLS's Presbyterian-Calvinist component by calling him "the Shorter Catechist." Young RLS was drilled on his Scottish Presbyterian catechism.

Despite early, heavy theological training, however, RLS evidently ended his life merely as a vague theist. Why? In addition to the too-harsh father figure, which was a turn-off for him, Cummy overdosed the small child on the subject of hell. This imbalanced presentation promoted a dim-and-grim atmosphere for a small child. Cummy was more of a fundamentalist than his parents were, for she taught him that playing cards and theater going (which his Calvinist parents did) were sins.

A child's terror of hell is revealed in RLS's following quotation: "I would lie awake to weep for Jesus, but I would fear to trust myself to slumber lest I was not accepted and should slip, ere I awoke, into eternal ruin."¹³ This quotation seems to me eminently sad, for it apparently illustrated defective teaching on the part of Cummy and RLS's contemporary church scene. One wants to ask: has this small child not been taught about the overarching love and mercy of God in Christ? Has he been helped to understand there is assurance to be found in Acts 16:31? In short, was the Church of Scotland at that time and place, as well as his nursemaid, clear in its preaching on the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ? At any rate, it was the dour and melancholy spiritual mood which hung over RLS's childhood and gave him problems to the end of his life. The poet Keats, upon touring Scotland, remarked, "The kirkmen [= churchmen] have done Scotland harm. They have banished...love and laughing."¹⁴ Or as the adult RLS put it, "One thing is not to be learned in Scotland, and that is the way to be happy."¹⁵

¹³Davies, *The Teller of Tales*, 8.

¹⁴Doris Dalgleish, *The Presbyterian Pirate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 190.

¹⁵Ibid.

The child of this Calvinist context actually did little in the way of formal schooling. Eventually he attended the University of Edinburgh. Interestingly (compared to our times) in order to get a college degree in law, RLS had to pass an exam on Ethics and Metaphysics.

The young Stevenson was frequently truant from university classes and loved to prowl the Edinburgh streets at night. There seems little doubt that he visited prostitutes, and RLS biographers frequently posit a romantic relationship with one particular prostitute, Kate Drummond. (Later RLS would name his most famous fictional heroine Catriona Drummond—in *Catriona*.)

During his university years RLS read David Hume (*On Miracles*), Herbert Spencer, Spinoza, and Charles Darwin (among other naturalists). After RLS's rift with his father, Thomas wrote to Sidney Colvin, "I lay all this [infidelity] at the door of Herbert Spencer. Upsetting a man's faith is a very serious matter."¹⁶

Unfortunately, there is a tremendous amount of wished-for information concerning RLS that floats in the realm of ambiguity. The nature of RLS's unbelief and beliefs isn't always made as explicit as a modern analyst would wish.

Stevenson entered into a spiritual crisis in 1872-1874, which was a turning point for his life. In 1872 RLS presented a paper to the college's Speculative Society on "2 Questions on the relationship between Christ's Teaching and Modern Christianity." His Cambridge-educated cousin, Bob (later Professor of Fine Arts at University of Liverpool), had founded the L. J. R. (Liberty, Justice, and Reverence) Club, which advocated atheism and had as a constitutional rule that members should disregard all they had been taught by their parents. When RLS's father came across this document, the volcano erupted.

¹⁶McLynn, *Stevenson*, 169.

Thomas Stevenson was an avid reader of theology and had even authored a booklet on the defense of Christianity (*Christianity Confirmed*). RLS dubbed him “the family theologian.” Undoubtedly the son had his father in mind under the guise of the too-strict biblicist father in his play *Admiral Guinea*. (Thomas read his son’s play and accused it of vulgarity.)

In January of 1873 the explosion came. When Thomas Stevenson came across the pro-atheist, anti-parent document of the L. J. R. Club, he grilled his son on his current beliefs. In a February 2, 1873 letter to Charles Baxter, RLS pinpointed the fallout: “The thunderbolt has fallen with a vengeance now. On Friday evening...my father put me one or two questions as to [my] beliefs, which I candidly answered.”¹⁷ RLS continued: “I am not (as they call me) a careless infidel,” and “I do not think I am thus justly to be called ‘horrible atheist.’”¹⁸ So the twenty-three-year-old RLS sported himself as a youthful atheist, which created no end of emotional havoc for him on the home front (for several years). His father would even pray for him—in his presence—out loud at family devotions.

Other key players in the drama of RLS’s life soon walked onto the stage. Fleeming Jenkin was professor of engineering at the University of Edinburgh. Doris Dalgleish calls Jenkin a “virtuous Victorian agnostic,” yet he and RLS had many discussions about Christ, Darwin, etc.¹⁹

The young RLS fell in love with Fanny Sitwell, who was twelve years older than he was, and separated from her clergyman husband. Fanny Sitwell would later marry RLS’s longest-term supporter and

¹⁷*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson* ed. By Sidney Colvin (New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1969), vol. I, 61-62.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Dalgleish, *The Presbyterian Pirate*, 94-95.

his John the Baptist (or herald)—Sidney Colvin (who was Professor of Fine Arts at Cambridge University and then Curator of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum).

The father of writer Virginia Woolf, Leslie Stephen, introduced RLS to W. E. Henley (who wrote, “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul”). Though Henley’s life was saved (from death by tuberculosis of the bones) by Dr. Joseph Lister, he had to have his left foot amputated (and so became RLS’s prototype for the pirate John Silver in *Treasure Island*).

RLS passed his University of Edinburgh law exams on July 14, 1875—and never ever practiced law! In a French art colony he fell in love with Fanny Osborne, a woman then separated from her American husband. He was 30 and she was 41. Though her father had been a committed (U. S.) Presbyterian and she had been baptized by the famous Henry Ward Beecher, Fanny Osborne was a dabbler in the occult.²⁰ Her daughter-in-law called her “clairvoyant.”²¹ She was a chain smoker, as was RLS (who had weak lungs and, as time went on, recurring hemorrhages). Eventually, Fanny drove a wedge between RLS (who soon became her husband) and virtually all of his long-time friends. Margaret Mackay’s biography of Fanny is entitled *The Violent Friend: The Story of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson*.²²

Soon RLS traveled some 6,000 miles to California to marry Fanny Osborne. The trans-Atlantic and cross-country trip nearly killed him. RLS became a world traveler, living in England, Switzerland, and New York state. Eventually he and his family yachted across the ocean to the South Sea Islands, where he visited at least thirty-five of them, including a Hawaiian leper colony.

²⁰McLynn, *Stevenson*, 29, 108, 195.

²¹*Ibid.*, 120-121.

²²Margaret Mackay, *The Violent Friend: The Story of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968).

On Samoa RLS built a \$20,000 house called Vailima (meaning "five rivers [or streams]") several miles from the port town of Apia. RLS owned 314 acres and at one time had nineteen servants.²³ He was well loved by the South Sea islanders, who built a road up to his house. It was called "The Road to a Loving Heart." The natives called him Tusitala (the Storyteller).

When RLS died in Samoa at age 44, had he begun a spiritual safari back to his religious roots? Certainly most biographers agree that his overarchingly optimistic outlook began to take on a more somber slant toward the end of his life. (Of course, RLS was plagued by increasing financial strain, a wife who experienced temporary insanity for over a year, a stepson who was increasingly revealed to be a lazy leech, as well as political turmoil and battles on the islands.)

While RLS lived on the Samoan Islands, he knew at least five Christian missionaries—W. E. Clarke, S. J. Whitmee, Arthur Claxton (who were all from the Anglican's London Missionary Society), James Chalmers, and Dr. Brown of the Wesleyan Mission. By his initial expectations RLS was ready to write off Christian missions as having a dire effect on islanders. However, personal experience changed his mind. RLS recorded: "Those who have a taste for hearing missions, Protestant or Catholic, decried, must seek their pleasure somewhere else than in my pages. Whether Catholic or Protestant...with all their deficiency...the missionaries are the best and the most useful whites in the Pacific."²⁴ Of the missionary James Chalmers (author of *Pioneering in New Guinea*) RLS said, "a man that took me fairly by storm for the most attractive, simple, brave and interesting man in the whole Pacific."²⁵

²³McLynn, *Stevenson*, 370, 396, 399.

²⁴John Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1907), 201.

²⁵*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, III, 262.

RLS had similar praise for “the excellent” Reverend W. E. Clarke. He called him “a man I esteem and like to the soles of his boots; I prefer him to any one in Samoa, and to most people in the world.”²⁶ It was Clarke who would officiate later at Stevenson’s burial service.

I came across a source concerning RLS’s spiritual state that I have not seen referred to in any of the critical RLS biographies—due to its out-of-the-way accessibility to secular historians. In a 1939 article in *The Sunday School Times* the anonymous writer refers to a prior article in a 1923 *Atlantic Monthly* magazine by the Samoan missionary S. J. Whitmee, Stevenson’s Samoan interpreter. In this rare article Whitmee told of his conversations with the famed author during the last years of his life. Whitmee recorded concerning RLS: “He was nearly all the time I knew him, reading the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures.”²⁷

RLS published two books that had a specifically spiritual orientation—*Lay Morals* and (the posthumous) *Vailima Prayers*. However, neither reads like an evangelical treatise. For a while in Samoa RLS held family prayers (including a Bible chapter being read, a hymn sung, and the Lord’s Prayer recited), and he also even briefly taught Sunday school. (Some observers thought RLS did this simply to mollify his orthodox Presbyterian mother who lived with them then.) While we will explore later whether RLS ever really returned to his roots, at least he had ventured beyond his days as a youthful atheist.

²⁶Kelman, *The Faith of Stevenson*, 201.

²⁷“R. L. Stevenson and Bible Prophecy,” *The Sunday School Times* (November 18, 1939), 817.

IV. The Bible and His Books

A. Biblical Allusions in RLS's Writings

RLS wrote of another individual that "all day long [he] had dreamed of the Hebrew stories, and his head had been full of Hebrew poetry and Gospel ethics...so that he rarely spoke without some antique idiom or Scripture mannerism."²⁸ What Stevenson opined of another was inimitably true of himself. RLS could reel off scriptural hymns he had learned as a child, and his books are pimentoed with phrases, ideas, and allusions to the Bible. As in the novels of the agnostic Thomas Hardy, one can find hundreds of biblical references in RLS's volumes. (One thinks of how the pirate in *Treasure Island* blanches when John Silver reprimands him for using a page torn from the Bible as the backdrop for the black spot (or death warrant!).

As a sampler of such biblical allusions, consider the four collected volumes of RLS's letters. In them Stevenson mentions "Tophet" (I, 31), "Babylon the Great" (I, 269), "Dagon" (II, 171), "Jordan" (as a reference to death; II, 333), "the linen ephod" (III, 304), "fought with wild beasts" (IV, 22), etc. An entire book could be written on biblical allusions in RLS's writings.

Out of the thirty-plus books RLS wrote, here are a few examples (book by book) from the elaborate mosaic of his biblical allusions: (1) "since Noah put out to sea" (*Treasure Island*); (2) "the wind bloweth where it listeth" (*Kidnapped*); (3) "the Babylonian finger on the wall" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*); (4) "as if a man had risen from the dead" (*The Body Snatchers*); (5) "a sin without pardon" (*A Child's Garden of Verses*); (6) "like Samson, careless in his days of strength" (*Memories*

²⁸Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits*, 85.

and Portraits); (7) “the arrow that flieth by day” (*The Black Arrow*); (8) “salt of the earth” (*The Master of Ballantrae*); (9) “I have entertained an angel unawares” (*Prince Otto*); (10) “nothing new under the sun, as Solomon says” (*Lay Morals and Other Papers*); (11) “be all things to all men” (*Familiar Studies of Men and Books*); (12) “like unbidden angels” (*Underwoods*); (13) “as Jacob served Laban” (*New Arabian Nights*); (14) “Caleb and Joshua brought back from Palestine a formidable bunch of grapes” (*An Inland Voyage*); (15) “Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate” (*The Amateur Emigrant*); (16) “Belial” (*The Wrong Box*); (17) “Out Herods Herod” (*Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers*); (18) “the New Jerusalem” (*The Wrecker*); (19) “drove . . . like Jehu, furiously” (*Memoirs of Fleeming Jenkin*); (20) “like Lot’s wife” (*Catriona*); (21) “into the den of lions” (*St. Ives*); and (22) “like the hills of Naphtali” (*Weir of Hermiston*). One wants to ask: is the average evangelical seminary graduate of today as versed in biblical literacy as was the theist Robert Louis Stevenson?

In the case of one novel (*The Master of Ballantrae*) the plot revolves around a biblical theme—the Jacob-Esau conflict. In the book one brother asks: “Would you trip up my heels—Jacob?” Later we hear: “Ah! Jacob,” says the Master; “So here is Esau back.” Four other times this same fictional treatment refers to “Jacob.”

B. Stevenson’s Book That Sparked Sermons

One critic summarized: “In four years, between 1883 and 1887, [RLS] wrote his four longest and greatest novels: *Treasure Island* (1883), *The Black Arrow* (1884), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *Kidnapped* (1886). The first draft of *Jekyll and Hyde* was written in the space of three days.”²⁹ Even more than Dostoevsky’s *The Double*, Robert Louis

²⁹B. Allan Benthous, ed., *The Black Arrow* (New York: Airmont Books, 1963), 7.

Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is the classic literary commentary on the struggle narrated in Romans 7:13-24.

Stevenson had written a play called *Deacon Brodie* about a respectable citizen of Edinburgh who turned burglar by night. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is an amplified version of this theme. For it RLS drew upon a previous work by James Hogg, entitled *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Richard Burton calls RLS's blockbuster book, which has been made into at least eleven movie versions over the years, "a spiritual allegory."³⁰ Dr. Thomas Bodley Scott observed that the Jekyll-and-Hyde piece "formed the text of an eloquent sermon in St. Paul's Cathedral [in London] directly after [its writing]."³¹

The internal tug of war in Romans 7 emerges in the psychological battle, which eventually submerges Dr. Henry Jekyll, who is regarded as the kind, respectable physician. Jekyll wants to isolate these unpleasant urges by creating a chemical concoction that can separate off his evil tendencies. He speaks of it (in the language of Romans 7) as a "war among my members" or in theological jargon as "my two natures." Eventually, however, Jekyll no longer needs to imbibe the chemical beaker in order to witness himself being transformed into the deformed Mr. Hyde. However one interprets Romans 7, the Jekyll-Hyde split comes in handy illustration-wise for homiletical purposes.

³⁰Richard Burton, *Masters of the English Novel* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1909), 301.

³¹Thomas Bodley Scott, *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Rosaline Masson, 213.

V. A Theist's Theology

A. Stevenson's Theology

Robert Kiely wrote that RLS "has been called a Christian theologian [by some and] an atheist [by others]."³² RLS once remarked that you can't keep Scotchmen from carrying on "theological discussion."³³ In his "Fables" RLS referred to what "mayn't be sound theology."³⁴ The question is: was Stevenson's a "sound theology"?

There are two problems that confront the interpreter of a novelist such as Stevenson. The first is the ambiguity residing in his amplitude of letters. For instance, one could wish for considerably greater detail about the nature of the theological argument between Thomas and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Second, while one can almost quarry enough material in the way of orthodox theological headings to set up the outline for a systematic theology from RLS's novels, that does not solve our problem of understanding. The reason for the mist is that Stevenson is speaking through the teeth of his fictional characters, and they can say whatever they wish to say—without their views necessarily representing those of the author. For example, *The Black Arrow* (set in England's time of the War of the Roses) is highly tintured with Roman Catholicism. Such phrases occur in *The Black Arrow* as "the saints help [us]...and the Blessed Maid protect his words," "St. Michael," "Ave Maria!...Saints be our shield!," "By the mass" (which occurs

³²Robert Kiely, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 66.

³³Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits*, 153-154.

³⁴"Fables" *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson in One Volume* (New York: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1936), 526.

more than twenty-five times), "his breviary," "By the sacristy of St. John's," "I vow a candle to St. Mary of Shoreby," "a huge rosary of wood," "on the steps of the high altar a priest in pontifical vestments celebrated mass," etc. RLS has strung Roman Catholic phrases together like beads, but they do not represent his own personal religious views. Therefore, quotation from his fiction requires caution concerning the conclusions we draw.

In his biographical *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin* (his friend) RLS quotes Jenkin as believing: "All dogma is to me mere form. . .; dogmas are mere blind struggles to express the inexpressible. I cannot conceive that any single proposition whatever is true in the scientific sense; and yet all the while I think the religious view of the world is the most true view."³⁵ Judging by everything RLS penned on the subject, we may assume that his friend's view is his own. RLS's other closest friend, Sidney Colvin, affirmed that RLS viewed creeds as human cravings for the ultimate mystery "rather than cling to any one of them as a revelation of ultimate truth."³⁶ Later RLS wrote to "beware of creeds and anti-creeds."³⁷

B. The Bookman and the Book of Books

S. J. Whitmee, Samoan missionary who talked extensively with Stevenson in later years, claimed concerning RLS: "Of the fact of Divine Inspiration he had no doubt."³⁸ However, most biographers would doubt Whitmee's dogmatic assertion as to RLS having "no

³⁵Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 238-39.

³⁶*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, I, 12.

³⁷*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, II, 367.

³⁸"R. L. Stevenson and Bible Prophecy," *The Sunday School Times*, 818.

doubt." Unless RLS had altered his views in his last years, earlier statements argue to the contrary. Earlier, RLS had written, "All that we know to guide us in this changing labyrinth is our soul with its fixed design of righteousness, and a few old precepts which commend themselves to that."³⁹ Frankly, this statement does not sound like an utterance from anyone who holds to any kind of plenary inspiration of Scripture. My suspicion is that Whitmee heard a great deal of what he wanted to hear. (Why is it Christians are so anxious to label Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Darwin, Lincoln, Dickens, and John Updike as Christians?) By contrast with RLS, his father was known as a strong supporter of the traditional understanding of plenary inspiration.

C. Calvinism

Richard Burton claimed of RLS, "he was a modernized Calvinist."⁴⁰ When RLS was about eighteen years old, William Poustie's parents boarded him for the summer. They discussed "the doctrine of election and kindred subjects. His host and hostess were prominent members of a Church that based its belief on 'Whosoever will' of Revelation, rather than the teaching of the [Westminster] Shorter Catechism, which says, 'Out of His mere good pleasure He elected some to everlasting life.' Stevenson seemed to have favored the lady's views on this matter, for he left to us his own testimony, which is that 'The saints are the sinners who keep on trying.'"⁴¹ (I'm not sure that either a Calvinist or an Arminian would be happy with RLS's definition.)

³⁹Robert Louis Stevenson, *Lay Morals and Other Papers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 43.

⁴⁰Burton, *Masters of the English Novel*, 311.

⁴¹William Poustie, *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Rosaline Masson, 38.

Nevertheless, RLS was writing in 1883 (at age 23): "we are not here to make, but to tread predestined pathways" as he speaks of "the creature judged...by his Creator."⁴²

Frank McLynn has written a recent and most exhaustive biography of RLS. McLynn is inclined to attribute the passivity he sees in David Balfour to the "hand of Calvinism and the doctrine of predestination."⁴³ Similarly, McLynn analyzes RLS's last two (unfinished) novels "as a coming to terms with Calvinism."⁴⁴ In *Virginibus Puerisque* RLS referred to "Calvin...putting everybody exactly right in his *Institutes*."⁴⁵

In the play *Admiral Guinea*, the chief character (using the language of 2 Pet 1:10) states, "I have made my election sure; my sins I have cast...out."⁴⁶ In the introduction to *Catriona* we hear of "some seed of the elect." Unquestionably RLS could not erase the heritage of his early Calvinistic church.

D. Sin and the Devil

One character in *Catriona* (or David Balfour) speaks of "'the guilt of Adam's sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of my whole nature' so much I must answer for, and I hope I've been taught where to look for help."⁴⁷ Are we reading Calvin, Warfield, or Berkhof here? No, this heavy theological jargon is found in the romantic fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson!

⁴²*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, II, 176.

⁴³McLynn, *Stevenson*, 267.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 479.

⁴⁵Robert Louis Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 883.

⁴⁶W. E. Henley and Robert Louis Stevenson, *Three Plays* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 377.

⁴⁷Robert Louis Stevenson, *David Balfour* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 33.

Psychiatrist Karl Meninger's book title asked, *Whatever Became of Sin?* The answer to Meninger's diagnostic question is that the idea of sin was certainly alive and well in the pages of RLS fiction. *The Weir of Hermiston* refers to the "old Adam." Once in his Letters RLS dropped an aside that "I'm a sinner."⁴⁸ Later (in 1883) RLS commented: "I am a great sinner."⁴⁹ In his letters of 1890 he decried: "we are the most miserable sinners in the world."⁵⁰ Back in November of 1873 RLS had spoken of "my low and lost estate, as the Shorter Catechism puts it somewhere."⁵¹ Assuredly, these are the echoes of Calvinism.

However, the following RLS quotation from early in 1878 bears on his views both about sin and about Scripture (in regard to what Rev. S. J. Whitmee claimed for RLS's believing in "Divine Inspiration" of Scripture): "There is more sense in that Greek myth of Pan than in any other that I recollect except the luminous Hebrew one of the Fall...All religions are no more than representations of life."⁵² Obviously Stevenson categorized Genesis 3 as falling within the realm of the genre of myth.

"Thrawn Janet" is a Stevenson story in which a country parson meets the devil. This was "Satan's first entry on the scene of Stevenson's writing," for "there were aspects of humanity that somehow only the existence of the devil could explain," which were implanted in RLS's mind from childhood.⁵³ There are also clear references to the devil in *The Black Arrow* and *The Master of Ballantrae*.

⁴⁸*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, II, 88.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 189.

⁵⁰*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, III, 211.

⁵¹*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, I, 101.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 258.

⁵³Calder, *Stevenson*, 165.

E. Salvation

When it comes to the subject and terminology of salvation, material is not lacking within the Stevenson corpus. The problem is that we have to ask: Is he speaking puckishly (tongue in cheek), pictorially (using similes), or in plain prose? Or, does a Stevenson literary character speak for Stevenson himself?

Even the occult-dabbling Fanny Osborne Stevenson can write of "salvation in the true Jesus."⁵⁴ Furthermore, RLS can speak of a reader who "is on the way to what is called in theology a saving faith."⁵⁵ One might expect from such introductory language that some clear-cut formulation of the biblical doctrine of salvation might be forthcoming in RLS, but alas!

Clearly RLS understood where the true source of salvation was to be found. In his play *Admiral Guinea* RLS has John Gaunt (notice the character's symbolic last name), who had been a slave trader like John Newton was, issue the utterance: "Salvation, Christopher French, is from above."⁵⁶ Here, Gaunt is in unanimous agreement with the Greek *anōthen* ("from above") in John 3:3. Furthermore, in his poem on "Death" RLS averred that "He pardons sinners, cleanses the defiled."⁵⁷ Also, one of the characters in *Prince Otto* indicates that there is no self-salvation when he says, "as for eternity, it's a comfortable thought that we have other merits than our own."⁵⁸

⁵⁴*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, III, 125.

⁵⁵Robert Louis Stevenson, *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 87.

⁵⁶Henley and Stevenson, *Three Plays*, 340.

⁵⁷McLynn, *Stevenson*, 506.

⁵⁸Robert Louis Stevenson, *Prince Otto* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 32.

RLS also was aware that salvation was conditioned upon a response. He wrote that “to appreciate [Walt Whitman’s] works is not a condition necessary to salvation.”⁵⁹ That proposition urges the reader to the implied question: What then is the condition or conditions to salvation? It is at this point that we could wish for a crystal-clear answer from Stevenson.

The following RLS quotation (in a letter of December 26, 1880) is worth quoting at length because of its revealing quality:

The assurance you [mother] speak of is what we all ought to have... That people do not have it more than they do is, I believe, because persons speak... in large-drawn theological similitudes, and won’t say what they mean about... God. I wonder if you or my father ever thought of the obscurities that lie upon human duty from the negative form in which the Ten Commandments are stated, or how Christ was so continually substituting affirmations. The faithful design to do right is accepted by God; that seems to me to be the Gospel, and that was how Christ delivered us from the Law. [It is] by faith and perseverance... that we are to run the race. Faith is not to believe the Bible, but to believe in God; if you believe in God, where is there any more room for terror?”⁶⁰

Does RLS mean that “the faithful design to do right” *brings* acceptance with God? He continues by saying (disturbingly) that “the faithful design to do right... seems to me to be the Gospel.” This seems to be too great a stretch from John 3:16; Acts 16:31; and 1 Cor 15:2-4.

Also to RLS’s statement that assurance lies in simply believing in God, we would want to ask: Is that adequate in light of John 14:1

⁵⁹Stevenson, *Familiar Studies*, 79.

⁶⁰*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, II, 24-26.

("believe also in *Me*")? If confined to the preceding RLS quotation, we would have to conclude that for RLS the "Gospel" is "to believe in God" with "the faithful design to do right." This places one within the parameters of theism, but is insufficient as a formulation of the Christian gospel.

There are other statements in his collaborated drama *Admiral Guinea* that relate to the question of salvation's condition(s). "Admiral Guinea's" (a pseudonym) spiritual advice to a salvation seeker is "repent. Pray for a new heart; flush out your sins with tears; flee while you may from the terrors of the wrath to come."⁶¹ Those who subscribe to the doctrinal position of this journal would say that the "Admiral" has failed to make clear *the single* stipulation to salvation, which is articulated in Acts 16:31 ("Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved"). In fact, we might be prone to quote Augustus Toplady's lines (from "Rock of Ages") to Guinea:

"Could my tears forever flow . . .
These for sin could not atone.
Thou must save, and Thou alone . . ."

In yet another context RLS gives advice that seems to run counter to the genuine nature of salvation. To Adelaide Boodle, who is "going into [foreign] mission work," RLS advises her never to "believe in thaumaturgic conversions. They may do very well for St. Paul, but not for islanders."⁶² If by "thaumaturgic conversions" RLS means wonderfully sudden or instantaneous conversions, then this seems to present problems for the New Testament paradigm. Admittedly, there may be many true believers who cannot necessarily pinpoint an exact moment of their conversion, but surely there must be some

⁶¹Henley and Stevenson, *Three Plays*, 350.

⁶²*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, IV, 323.

turning point when one passes out of eternal death and into eternal life (John 5:24).

RLS was well acquainted with New Testament soteriological vocabulary. In his Samoan experience he spoke of "an expression of my *unregenerate* sentiments."⁶³ He used the language of John 3 figuratively when (in August of 1874) he said, "it is as though I were *born again*."⁶⁴ In December of 1879 he wrote: "I have that peculiar and delicious sense of being *born again* in an unexpurgated version which belongs to convalescence [from sickness]."⁶⁵ In the last two passages RLS seems to be merely borrowing the biblical expression in a metaphorical sense rather than making a salvational declaration of Christianity.

Naturally his characters also know New Testament language. In RLS's very last book he refers to an in-church worship experience where the preacher "continued to expound *justification by faith*."⁶⁶ He also commented that his book *The Ebb Tide* "ends with a *conversion*."⁶⁷ In yet other testimonial phraseology RLS speaks of one who "in the words of my Plymouth Brother...*knows the Lord*."⁶⁸ Thus, Stevenson has certainly rung the changes on the New Testament language of salvation. Indeed, if one restricted himself to an arbitrary selection of passages in RLS, one could very easily conclude that the famous author was a Christian.

Contradicting the surface appearance of the preceding biblical language RLS used, Irving Saposnik wrote that RLS's story

⁶³*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, III, 315.

⁶⁴*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, I, 174.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 301.

⁶⁶Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Two Major Novels* (New York: Bantam Books, 1960), 264.

⁶⁷*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, IV, 174.

⁶⁸*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, I, 300.

"Markheim" is "a glaring example of the doubts that Stevenson had about the possibility of salvation; for in 'A Christmas Sermon' he writes of the necessity to persevere despite uncertainties he could never deny."⁶⁹ Frank McLynn stated RLS's situation much more bleakly: "here is Stevenson at 36, the same age as Markheim, stating clearly that he does not believe in salvation, that all is hopeless, and yet he will endure stoically and even cheerfully."⁷⁰

RLS wrote several works from a Roman Catholic perspective—*The Black Arrow* and "Olalla." In "Olalla" a Catholic says: "The Padre says you are no Christian...behold the face of the Man of Sorrows. He was the inheritor of sin; we must all bear and expiate a past which was not ours; there is in all of us...a sparkle of the divine."⁷¹ The words "we must...expiate" are, of course, troubling to a Protestant for they contradict the New Testament doctrine of salvation by grace.

Another disturbing statement occurs in *St. Ives*. The hero is "of the Catholic religion." He claims that "my Church is the best...but...I belong to it because it was the faith of my house. If it is a question of going to hell, go to hell like a gentleman with your ancestors."⁷² This statement sounds like "My country [or family or church]—right or wrong—but my country!" Obviously Protestants as well as Catholics can be guilty of this tragic mindset.

Yet a third (ambiguous but) disturbing statement is made by RLS after his visit to the Roman Catholic leper colony on Molokai: "my sympathies flew never with so much difficulty as towards Catholic virtues. The passbook kept with heaven stirs me to anger and laughter.

⁶⁹Saposnik, *Stevenson*, 79.

⁷⁰McLynn, *Stevenson*, 247.

⁷¹*The Collected Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 823.

⁷²Robert Louis Stevenson, *St. Ives* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 235.

One of the [Catholic] sisters calls the place ‘the ticket office to heaven.’”⁷³ RLS greatly admired the work done at the leper colony and he despised much of the anti-Catholic sentiment inculcated by Protestants among whom he had grown up. Nevertheless, an important question must be asked about the meaning of “the ticket office to heaven.” Did the Roman Catholic mean that (1) death was the only way out of the colony for its inhabitants, or that (2) those who serve humanity have an automatic ticket to heaven? The latter notion is contrabiblical.

In RLS’s *Travels on a Donkey in the Cevennes* a Roman Catholic Trappist monk quizzed him as to whether he were a Christian or not. Stevenson replied that he was not a believer “or not after his [Catholic] way.” The real question was: Was Stevenson a Christian—period?

F. Heaven and Hell

To Edmond Gosse RLS wrote in 1886, “Yes, if I could believe in the immortality business, the world would indeed be too good to be true; but...the sods cover us, and the worm that never dies, the conscience, sleeps well at last.” Man “can tell himself this fairy tale of an eternal tea-party; and enjoy the notion...that his friends will yet meet him. But the truth is, we must fight on until we die, and...resumption into—what? God, let us say—when all these desperate tricks will lie spellbound at last.”⁷⁴ Certainly in the previous statement RLS was leaning heavily away from believing in immortality. But was this simply a bad and passing phase? Or was this his final conviction on the subject?

⁷³*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, III, 152.

⁷⁴*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson* II, 314-315.

In this waffling the author assuredly contradicts his own boy character (in *Treasure Island*), Jim Hawkins. The pirate Israel Hands asks Jim, "Do you take it as a dead man is dead for good, or do he come alive again?" Hawkins answers the pirate biblically: "You can kill the body, Mr. Hands, but not the spirit."⁷⁵

Concerning the treacherous character for whom *The Master of Ballantrae* is named, Stevenson himself remarked concerning the master's decease: "his soul, if there is any hell to go to, [has] gone to hell."⁷⁶ As we have seen, hell was ultra-real for the child RLS.

It is the conclusion of the major recent biographer Frank McLynn that Stevenson "did not believe in hell—not a lake of fire, anyway, nor in a remorseless, unpleasurable God—and had a most ambivalent attitude to Christianity; if anything he inclined towards Catholicism for its emotional appeal."⁷⁷

RLS frequently referred to Hades or hell in some less-than-literal form, saying in 1885 (for instance) he "is sure he will go to hell (if there be such an excellent institution) for the luxury" in which he lives.⁷⁸

There was none of the prose "if'ing" when RLS wrote the bereaved Robertsons concerning his deceased godson—that "into that zone of quiet the child has gone very straight," or that he had "gone straight home" through "the door where the eternal dwell."⁷⁹ Of course "the zone of quiet" need not be the same as the biblical home of believers—although "the eternal" comes closer to New Testament

⁷⁵Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (Reading, PA: Spencer Press, 1936), 210.

⁷⁶*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson* III, 142.

⁷⁷McLynn, *Stevenson*, 477.

⁷⁸*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, II, 292.

⁷⁹R. A. Robertson in *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Rosaline Masson, 218.

language. In his letters RLS refers figuratively or wistfully to heaven or the New Jerusalem.

VI. Conclusion

God's "desire [is] that no one should perish" (according to Richard Weymouth's translation of 2 Pet 3:9). Surely God's desire should be every Christian's desire as well. At the same time, the overall context of 2 Peter makes it abundantly clear that unbelievers will perish.

Because Robert Louis Stevenson was virtually nursed on the Scriptures in Calvinist country, one could easily count a thousand biblical allusions in his extant letters and fiction. When there is such a preponderance of biblical reference in an author's writing, it is easy for a surface reader to conclude that such an author is a Christian.

However, other considerations seem to weight the scales against the conclusion that RLS was a true believer. First, autobiographically retrospective statements about his childhood acquaint us with his fear of hell, but there seem to be no quotable statements otherwise about any clear assurance of eternal life. Secondly, it is difficult to cite incontrovertible evidence from his fictional characters that RLS understands the way to receive eternal life. In fact, there are numerous murky statements to the contrary. Thirdly, RLS remains iffy on questions of immortality, heaven, and hell. Fourthly, most of his astute biographers, such as McLynn, (while granting his ineradicable Calvinistic conscience) do not conclude that the final Stevenson was unquestionably a Christian.

If RLS was not a Christian, what then was he? It seems best to me to categorize RLS as a religious liberal and theist. Doris Dalglish claimed that "to the end of his life his theology remained what we now call Barthian."⁸⁰ Unfortunately, there remains a good deal of

⁸⁰Dalglish, *The Presbyterian Pirate*, 176.

ambiguity about RLS's explicit doctrinal beliefs (for example, did he believe in the deity of Christ? In His bodily resurrection?).

In the second issue of the *Edinburgh University Magazine* (February, 1871) one of RLS's group wrote,

"Not from Jerusalem alone to Heaven the path ascends; By many devious ways unknown to unimagined ends..."⁸¹

One might gather from this assertion of religious pluralism that this was Stevenson's position by the statement of another contemporary, Dr. Thomas Bodley Scott, who knew RLS and spoke of his "kindly universalism."⁸² It is obvious from his *Vailima Prayers* that RLS did believe in praying to a personal God. Even after his youthful atheism of 1873, he remarked (in 1874), "I have faith after all; I believe, I hope, I will not have it reft from me; there is something behind it all, bitter and terrible as it seems."⁸³ However, this vague belief in believing (in what?) is many miles removed from 1 John 5:1 ("Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God"). Why grasp at a straw in the wind when one can be anchored to the Rock of Ages?

In *St. Ives*, one of RLS's two unfinished novels at his death, he referred to "'Just as I am, without one plea,' a citation from one of the lady's favorite hymns."⁸⁴ Obviously Stevenson must've been acquainted with the lines of the famous evangelistic hymn, written sixteen years before his birth. Let us hope that somewhere in his praying childhood RLS came, just as he was, to Christ in faith for eternal life, whispering, "O Lamb of God, I come."

⁸¹Campbell in *I Can Remember Stevenson*, 16-17.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 214.

⁸³*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, I, 163.

⁸⁴Stevenson, *St. Ives*, 289.

Robert Louis Stevenson co-authored one book (*The Ebb Tide*) with his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne. Presumably, then, the idea for this book sprang from Osbourne, with RLS lending his name, fame, and literary flourishes to it. Though Osbourne is known to have been definitely more irreligious than Stevenson, the book ends with what most people would call a conversion.

The Ebb Tide has four main characters who end up together almost alone on an island. Captain Davis, who had wanted to murder the somewhat cold-blooded "Christian," Attwater (for his pearls), eventually is transformed. Herrick, the gentleman and intellectual unbeliever, comes upon Davis in prayer at the end of the book. To Herrick, Davis announces, "I found peace here, peace in believing." (The readers of this journal would like to know more specifically what Davis had believed.) Davis then pleads with Herrick to "be one of us." He urges: "Why not come to Jesus right away, and let's meet in yon beautiful land [that is, heaven]? ... Just say 'Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief!' and He'll fold you in His arms. You see, I know; I've been a sinner myself."⁸⁵ The next words in the book are "The End."

Given the constraints of literature, the preceding description would seem to qualify as a legitimate account of a conversion experience. The Gospel of John employs the verb "comes" as a synonym for saving faith (see the parallelism in John 6:35). Captain Davis's invitation to "come to Jesus" can certainly be construed as believing in Jesus, since he has just used the term "believing." He was "a sinner," but he has believed in Jesus and now he has "peace in believing" and a hope of heaven. Surely that is salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

⁸⁵Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Ebb Tide* (Cambridge: Stone and Kimball, 1904), 204.

Did Stevenson (under the literary guise of the intellectual gentleman, Herrick) ever do what his character Davis urged Herrick to do? It is our hope that he did. It is our plea to others (with RLS's fictional Captain Davis) to "come to Jesus right away" and find "peace in believing."

BOOK REVIEWS

The Grace Exchange: God's Offer of Freedom from a Life of Works.
By Larry Huntsperger. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995.
192 pages. Paper. \$8.99.

The title is fascinating: *The Grace Exchange*. After reading the book, I'm still not sure what it means. The author seems to mean something like this: by grace, when we submit to Christ—more on this in a moment—God exchanges our sinfulness and unrighteousness with Christ's sinlessness and righteousness.

The subtitle is disturbing. What is "Freedom from a Life of Works"? Surely we have been saved in order that we might produce good works and glorify God (John 15:7-17; Eph 2:10). We do not need, nor should we desire, freedom from a life of works. Evidently what Huntsperger means by the subtitle is that while God gives us "a moral framework" to be obeyed, the Christian life is not centered on that framework, but on the Person of Christ. I can certainly say "Amen" to that, though I cannot to the subtitle.

Huntsperger believes that, "Entrance into the family of God happens only through true heart submission to Christ" (p. 21). He repeats the phrase "submission to Christ" over and over again in the book as the condition of obtaining eternal salvation (see, for example, pp. 21, 22, 31, 41, and 124). Does he believe that "true faith" always includes submission to Christ? Possibly, but he fails to make this point clearly. Does he believe that faith *is* submission to Christ? Again, he isn't clear. He seems to assume that all will accept as biblical the notion that submission to Christ is the condition of eternal life.

Thus, while he often says that we are not saved by our own works or anything we can offer God, he holds up submission as the condition of salvation. He evidently sees nothing contradictory in this.

Another way in which the author seems to contradict himself is on the question of whether believers will necessarily act in a godly manner and persevere in the faith. On the one hand he gives the impression that he understands verses like 2 Cor 5:17 and 1 John 3:9 to refer to the sinless new nature of the believer, not to some guaranteed level of holiness all believers will manifest (cf. pp. 9, 45-46). Yet, on the other hand, he indicates that all true believers have "a new longing to live in a manner pleasing to God...a sensitivity to sin that [they] never had before...[and] a love for other people that was never a part of [their] former life" (p. 46; see also p. 57).

He makes a nice point regarding our physical bodies being the source of our sinful habits and desires. He indicates that when Paul said, "I discipline *my body* and bring it into subjection..." (1 Cor 9:27), he probably literally viewed his physical body as something which he must tame in order to please God.

Huntsperger seems to lack a formal theological system. This is both good and bad. It results in some helpful comments on passages like 1 Cor 9:27, 2 Cor 5:17, and 1 John 3:9. Unfortunately, it also results in some contradictory statements that the author doesn't realize are contradictory and hence sees no need to explain.

Finally, when Huntsperger discusses what he calls our "biblical moral framework," he comes up with five principles (pp. 126-69), all of which are helpful and biblical: the centrality of love (p. 127ff.), the importance of submitting to human authority (p. 141ff.), the exclusiveness and vital significance of sex within marriage (p. 150ff.), the importance of using our tongue to edify (p. 159ff.), and the need to submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit and not to drugs or occult influences (pp. 168-69). One wonders, of course, why there are only these five principles. Certainly many more principles could be drawn from passages like Eph 4:17-34.

There is helpful material here. However, since the book is inconsistent in places, lacks clarity on the condition of eternal salvation, and fails to treat the subject in depth, I recommend looking elsewhere for a thorough treatment on the spiritual life.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Let Faith Change Your Life. By Becky Tirabassi. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 171 pp. Cloth, \$17.99.

The title drew me in: *Let Faith Change Your Life*. You bet. I wanted to see what the author had to say about this important subject. My interest was piqued further by the many glowing endorsements from people like Steve Arterburn of the Minirth Meier New Life Clinics, Coach Bill McCartney of Promise Keepers, and Peggy Wehmeyer of ABC News.

The book, unfortunately, does not do a very good job of answering the expectation raised in the title. An examination of the Table of Contents shows that this is a popular/devotional book. The four subdivisions of the book—A Relevant Faith, A Relational Faith, A Radical Faith, and A Revolutionary Faith—are catchy, but lead one to wonder if the explanations will not be shallow. The individual chapter titles do nothing to allay this. For example, under the Section, “A Relevant Faith,” we find “Meets You Right Where You Are At!” “Meets Those Who Are Successful,” “Meets Those Who Are Intellectual,” “Meets Those Who Are Facing Death,” and “Meets Those with Misconceptions.” The actual text of the book confirms this fear. The

book is long on interesting illustrations and short on meaningful insights.

This book does not appear to be designed to give the reader new insights into faith, saving faith, eternal salvation, or even progressive sanctification. (It is not until the last page of the last chapter [p. 167] that a definition of faith is even offered.) Rather, this is a motivational book in the positive mental attitude style popular in some quarters today.

How is one to let faith change his life? Tirabassi suggests that you should rejoice that God loves you (pp. 41-45), write out your prayers each day in a journal (pp. 49-52), have a daily one-hour appointment with God (pp. 47-75, esp. 52-54), and confess your sins to God (pp. 54-56). These are certainly important. However, what is said about these things keeps coming back to one thing—the importance of having an encounter with God. There is a decidedly experiential leaning of this book. Thus there should be no surprise that Brennan Manning's *The Ragamuffin Gospel* and Robert Shuller's *Prayer: My Soul's Adventure with God*, are two of the books listed in the bibliography.

Finally, JOTGES readers will be disappointed by the definitions of saving faith given at the end of the book. "Faith is a belief of the heart *and the mind* that the person of Jesus Christ lived and died for you, that He was resurrected and lives today" (p. 167, italics hers). "Faith is entering into a personal relationship with an unseen God. Faith completes you, infusing you with purpose for your life on earth and a promise for eternal life with God in heaven. It is supernatural. It is life-changing. It is not only a partnership with God, but also being part of the family of God. This faith brings great change into your life that has a good effect" (p. 167). This is far from clear. How does one know when he has exercised this "faith"? What is "a belief of the heart"? What is "supernatural" about saving faith? What specifically must one believe in order to be saved? The gospel is not clearly articulated in this book.

Let faith change your life? That is a super title and a great concept. However, this book fails to explain from a biblical standpoint either justification by faith alone or sanctification by faith working through love. Faith can indeed transform one's life, but don't look to this book for much help in discovering how it can.

Robert N. Wilkin

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Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Prosperity and the Coming Apocalypse: Avoiding the Dangers of Materialistic Christianity in the End Times. By Jim Bakker with Ken Abraham. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998. 244 pp. Cloth, \$19.99.

Yes, this is the same Jim Bakker who headed the PTL ministry and who went to jail for illegal financial practices. A Prosperity Gospel preacher himself for years, he is an ideal person to respond to this movement.

The good news is that Bakker rejects the Prosperity Gospel as another gospel. He calls Christians to follow Christ so as to please Him, not to gain material prosperity here and now.

Bakker calls the reader to base his beliefs and practices on the Word of God, not on tradition and not on one's experiences. This is, of course, a terrific word in a very pragmatic and existential age.

The bad news is that Bakker is not clear on the gospel. He never addresses what one must do to be saved other than in passing comments. I thought he might get down to this under the heading, "The True Works Gospel" (p. 46). Unfortunately, he used the heading as a play on words and indicated "that the prosperity gospel does not work in the real world."

In passing comments Bakker implies a number of different and even conflicting conditions for eternal salvation. On one occasion he speaks of the false gospel of Gal 1:6-9 as "salvation through legalistic works [combined] with a belief in salvation through Christ alone," (p. 31). He clearly implies that salvation is merely through Christ alone, yet without explaining how we come to Christ. Describing how one couple gained eternal salvation he said they "committed their lives to Christ" (p. 84). He spoke of Tolstoy's conversion, saying he came to realize that Jesus "will tolerate no other gods, no idols, before Him" (p. 86). Yet a paragraph later he said, "Of noble birth, by the time Tolstoy *became a believer*, he had added enormous wealth to his already bulging bank account" (italics added). This is the only place in the book I found him referring to someone as "a believer" (as opposed to a Christian, a disciple, or a follower of Christ).

In a discussion of Rev 3:16-20, Bakker indicates that lukewarm people are "people who have a form of godliness, who can keep up appearances as religious people, but who do not have a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ" (p. 207). A few sentences later he said that those who do have a genuine relationship with Him are "those who open their hearts to Him" and those who "see the life-and-death seriousness of a radical commitment to Christ."

It thus appears that Bakker holds to a mild form of Lordship Salvation, though it is hard to tell.

Another disappointment to me was Bakker's departure from the Pre-tribulation Rapture. When he gave up on Prosperity Theology, he also decided believers will have to suffer during the Tribulation (pp. 117-27).

Space doesn't permit his discussion of Y2K and of comets or meteors striking the earth. There were a lot of pages devoted to topics like these that seemed to be only tangentially related to his topic, at best.

This book is encouraging in that Bakker seems to have genuinely given up on the Prosperity Gospel. Anyone wishing to know precisely what gospel he now believes, however, will have to look elsewhere.

Robert N. Wilkin

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Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

PERIODICAL REVIEWS

“Workless Faith is Worthless Faith,” William Krewson, *Israel My Glory* 57 (April/May 1999), 17-19.

In the middle of an otherwise helpful series of articles on the teachings of the book of James in the April/May 1999 volume of *Israel My Glory*, it was both disheartening and disconcerting to read William Krewson's comments on Jas 2:14-26. While the other articles reflected an understanding of James' audience being Christians, and interpreted their passages as applying to practical Christian living in the face of trials and persecution, Krewson assumes that James suddenly addresses unbelievers in 2:14-26. Worse yet, he suggests that these are people who think they believe, but have their unbelief exposed by their lack of works! Besides being historically doubtful, such a position is destructive to the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. Syncretistic theology has made much hay using Jas 2:14-26, and sadly, it once again appeared in this article. To wit:

1) Krewson identifies the audience of James' epistle as “dispersed Jewish believers who lived throughout the Roman empire” who had a “newfound liberty in Jesus.” Clearly, James envisions his audience as being those who may have faith, but not have works. Does Krewson believe that these Christians can lose their salvation, or is his position that they discover that they aren't really believers because they don't do good works? Is either of these positions that of Friends Of Israel (FOI)?

2) Krewson writes that the false teachers were teaching that “salvation without works of the law meant salvation without any works at all.” If this is false teaching, tell Paul. He wrote, “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him

who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom 4:4-5). Numerous other unambiguous verses echo this clear message (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Gal 2:16; etc.).

3) Krewson reflects an inexcusable lack of knowledge concerning the text on which he is writing. He begins by correctly quoting Jas 2:14 ("Can faith save him?"), only to misquote it at the end of the same paragraph: "Can *that kind* of faith save him?" (italics added). Is Krewson unaware that the words *that kind of* are neither in the text, nor implied by the text?

The problems with Krewson's exegesis and interpretation are so pervasive and numerous that any attempt to deal with each of them would take pages. But the bottom line in his article is very clear: One who does not care for widows and orphans or other church members, or do other good works, is not saved. Why not just change the gospel message, since clearly a person is not saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone?

According to Krewson's interpretation, salvation is also by works. Indeed, if James is talking about eternal salvation in this passage—something entirely foreign to the rest of his epistle—then we are truly saved by works, as v 24 affirms: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."

If, however, we take this passage as a continuation of James's call to believers to live out their faith and not allow themselves to fall into sin leading to death (1:14-15), we see his message much differently. The salvation to which James refers is not justification before God (eternal), but before men (a justification which Paul does talk about but never confuses with eternal life; see Rom 4:2). The results of failing to justify one's life before men is not hell, but temporal judgment either physical, in this life (sickness, cf. 5:14-16; or death, cf. 1:15, and 1:21 with 5:19-20), or before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2:12-13; see Douglas Bookman's comments on p. 16 in the same issue).

Krewson labors to define two different kinds of faith and uses a number of adjectives to describe them: dormant faith, fruitless faith, genuine faith, solitary faith, true faith, cheap faith, demon faith, Christian faith, active faith, dead faith, and workless faith. James, on the other hand, is at no such pains. He never talks about kinds of faith, only faith with or without works. Why not focus on what James focuses on—the presence or absence of works? James never questions the faith or the eternal salvation of his readers. He points to the works that animate their faith, and justify their lives before men. For him, these good works are not a “salvation” (as we normally think of that term, referring to eternal salvation) issue, but a “sanctification” issue.

As a pastor in an area populated by many ethnic groups, many who come from religious backgrounds in which the gift of eternal life has been mortgaged by making it dependent on ongoing good works, I have found this issue to be one of the most vital to new and growing believers. They are very aware of any infringement on the free gift of salvation by grace through faith and so am I. I constantly encourage and exhort believers to live faithful and obedient lives to God’s Word, but not in order to “confirm” or “prove” that they are saved (since the inevitable lack of perfection will lead to “eternal insecurity”). Rather, they should do so out of gratitude to what God has done for them in Jesus Christ (John 5:24).

My hope is that this article was an aberration in an otherwise instructive series, and that FOI stands firm for the gospel of the grace of God. As Paul wrote, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal 2:21).

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"The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl Merchant,"

Mark L. Bailey, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June 1999), 175-89.

Bailey is Vice President for Academic Affairs, Academic Dean, and Professor of Biblical Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary. This article is the sixth in an eight-part series entitled, "The Kingdom in the Parables of Matthew 13."

Bibliotheca Sacra, Dallas Seminary, and Bailey are to be commended for offering such a practical article—and one which deals with gospel issues at that. The trend in theological journals today is decidedly not in that direction. It is refreshing to find an article that does not require you to be a specialist in a certain field to understand it.

The article is essentially an overview of the views of various evangelical scholars on these two parables (found in Matt 13:44-46). Bailey has pulled together information from many commentaries, books, and journal articles. This is helpful for anyone studying these parables. Unfortunately, he gives an ambiguous indication of the point of these parables.

He suggests, for example, that "the central truth of this parable of the hidden treasure is the value of the kingdom of heaven" (p. 184). The two sentences that immediately follow this are puzzling: "The joy in finding it, its potential possession, and the need for sacrifice support the fact that value is the dominant theme. Also sacrifice is involved" (p. 184). In what sense is sacrifice involved? He goes on to favorably quote Sider who says, "the kingdom demands total commitment; this requires that the man pay with everything he has" (p. 184).

This clearly suggests that commitment is necessary to have eternal life and to enter the kingdom. Yet in the article's conclusion Bailey muddies the waters even more. This time he favorably cites Morris: "Again we see that it is well to take decisive action while the opportunity is there, and that no cost is too great when it is a matter of

gaining the kingdom" (p. 189). Then he makes this enigmatic statement, "Therefore all that one has is never too much to give in exchange for absolute dedication to the Lord's rule. Of course neither parable is teaching that a person's efforts or sacrifices will gain him or her salvation. Instead the parables are emphasizing the need for complete allegiance to Jesus and His cause, regardless of the personal cost" (p. 189). This is confusing to say the least.

While Bailey has surveyed many authors, he doesn't consider the possibility that the One who finds and purchases the treasure and the pearl is the Lord Jesus Himself, not sinners needing salvation (see my article in the GES newsletter, "A Great Buy! [Matthew 13:44], September 1991, p. 2). That interpretation opens the parable up so that it is clear and easy to follow. The traditional interpretations are, as Bailey's comments inadvertently show, unclear and lead to the view, despite his denial, that commitment is a condition of eternal salvation.

I recommend this article for those who are well grounded in the Word.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

A Hymn of Grace

I'M A CHILD OF THE KING

FRANCES MOSHER

Pianist

Christ Congregation

Dallas, TX

My Father is rich in houses and lands;
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands!
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,
His coffers are full—He has riches untold.

My Father's own Son, the Savior of men,
Once wandered o'er earth as the poorest of them;
But now He is reigning forever on high,
And will give me a home in heav'n by and by.

I once was an outcast stranger on earth,
A sinner by choice and an alien by birth;
But I've been adopted; my name's written down—
An heir to a mansion, a robe, and a crown.

A tent or a cottage, why should I care?
They're building a palace for me over there!
Though exiled from home, yet still I may sing:
All glory to God, I'm a child of the King.

Chorus:

I'm a child of the King, a child of the King!
With Jesus my Savior, I'm a child of the King!

—Harriett E. Buell (1834-1910)

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

Our Lord’s sacrificial death covers the full penalty our sin deserves and allows Him to bestow the gift of eternal life on all who simply believe in Him. In an act of remarkable grace, the King of the universe raises believers—formerly vile sinners and rebels against His rule and kingdom—to the privileged status of His royal children.

Meditating on this evidence of God’s grace, Harriett Buell, a native of New York state, wrote the words for “I’m A Child of the King” as she walked home from church one Sunday. The lyrics were published in the *Northern Christian Advocate* in February 1877, and were noticed by John Sumner, a music teacher. He composed music for the lyrics without Mrs. Buell’s knowledge, so we can imagine her surprise at hearing her poem sung publicly when she attended a Sunday night service in Manlius, New York!

The believer’s position as a “child of the King” is solely a result of God’s absolute grace. That position is neither initiated nor kept because of any action by the believer. However, in gratitude for our gracious adoption into the King’s family, we should with the hymn writer sing, “All glory to God, I’m a child of the King!”

