

Journal of the  
**GRACE**  
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"Faith Alone In Christ Alone"



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# **WHY CONFESS CHRIST?**

## **THE USE AND ABUSE OF ROMANS 10:9-10**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

While it may not be in scholarly vogue, let me begin this rather theological article with a hypothetical story. Bob, a middle-aged salesman, was on a business trip in another state. Things have not been working well with his marriage. In fact, to his utter shock his wife had informed him a few hours before his flight that she was filing for divorce and leaving. The papers were in the process of being finalized. To make matters worse, after Bob arrived at his destination he discovered that his most substantial client had not responded to his business calls as expected. Bob was on the verge of losing this highly significant account.

In his motel room that evening, in a state of extreme despair, Bob remembered how his Christian friend had spoken of the unusual change that Christ had worked in his life when all else seemed hopeless. Just as Bob had suspected from the numerous times he had spent in a motel, a Gideon Bible was neatly tucked away in the drawer of his motel lampstand. Cautiously pulling it out, he searched for help from his despair. Some notes in the inside cover suggested he read the Gospel of John, chapter three.

He knew about the death and resurrection of Jesus from attending church as a young boy. He was even able to find the Book of John without great difficulty. After reading and rereading the story of Nicodemus, he placed his trust in Christ's death and resurrection for his eternal destiny and fell asleep knowing that he had eternal life. But the stress and pressure of the emotional events of the last twenty-four hours had taken their toll. Bob suffered a massive heart attack and died in his sleep in his motel room.

In light of the often-used verses in Rom 10:9-10, this hypothetical but nevertheless real-to-life situation provokes several pragmatic questions. What seems clear is that Bob "believed in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead" (Rom 10:9b). But, on the other hand, did he really "confess with his mouth Jesus as Lord" (Rom 10:9a)? In fact,

we must face the down-to-earth inquiry as to whether at his death Bob went to heaven.

## II. PREVAILING INTERPRETATIONS OF ROMANS 10:9-10

There are numerous options given to us by commentators and theologians for the Rom 10:9-10 passage to help explain what might have happened in Bob's experience. 1) In order for salvation to be complete, the sinner must publicly confess Christ as Savior and Lord. "Believing with the heart" is insufficient in itself for eternal life.<sup>1</sup> 2) "Believing with the heart" is more-or-less synonymous with "confessing Jesus as Lord." When the sinner believes in Christ, he is at the same moment confessing that Jesus is his Savior and Lord. To believe in Christ *is* to confess Christ.<sup>2</sup> 3) When one truly "believes with the heart,"

<sup>1</sup>"The two requisites for salvation mentioned in this verse are confession and faith." Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), 341. "That is, in order to salvation [sic], we must not only secretly believe, but also openly acknowledge that Jesus is our prophet, priest, and king." Ibid., 343. Sanday and Headlam link confession to baptism, so their perspective seems best taken as favoring two actions for salvation. "What is demanded of a Christian is the outward confession and the inward belief in Him, and these sum up the conditions necessary for salvation." William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 290. Seemingly in agreement, William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, revised ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 139. "This second part goes with the first, so that (in one sense) it is as necessary to confess Christ as Lord and Savior as it is to believe on him." James Montgomery Boice, *Romans 9-11* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 3:1209. "These are the two conditions of salvation." F. Godet, *Commentary to the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), 383.

<sup>2</sup>Ironside holds this interpretation: "The confession here is not, of course, the same thing as where our Lord says, 'Whoever shall confess Me before men...' This is rather the soul's confession *to God Himself* that he takes Jesus as Lord" (*italics added*). H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1928), 131. Others come close to this viewpoint. "To confess Christ as Lord and to believe in his resurrection are not two different things; they are basically one and the same." Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), 383. Cf. also



he or she will eventually “confess Jesus as Lord.” This will be the evidence that genuine faith has been exercised. What takes place in the heart in faith eventually reaches the lips. True Christians publicly identify with Christ.<sup>3</sup> In Bob’s case, only God knows whether the faith in his heart was real. If it were, Bob would have confessed Christ publicly had he not died.

Identifying the exact position of commentators is rather problematic.<sup>4</sup> For some commentators and theologians, there is an indistinguishable blending of the options above without perspicuous logic. Many other writers vacillate between speaking of two conditions (confessing and believing) but also insist that the righteousness/justification and the salvation of 10:9-10 are interchangeable.<sup>5</sup> Option 3 or combinations of 3 with 1 or 2 above are associated with a traditional Lordship Salvation approach to justification and new birth.<sup>6</sup> John MacArthur argues that Rom 10:9-10 with its emphasis on the lordship

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Moo: “Paul’s rhetorical purpose at this point should make us cautious about finding great significance in the reference to confession here, as if Paul were making oral confession a second requirement for salvation. Belief in the heart is clearly the crucial requirement, as Paul makes clear even in this context (9:30; 10:4, 11).” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 657.

<sup>3</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 55-57; William B. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 318-19; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 609.

<sup>4</sup>Those authors listed as holding to a particular view above may be placed under another option, depending on which statement from their commentary is stressed.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 38b: 609.

<sup>6</sup>“One passage of Scripture used probably more than any other in support of lordship salvation is Romans 10:9.” Livingston Blauvelt Jr., “Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 143 (Jan 1986): 39. At Rom 10:9-10, Boice (*Romans 9-11*, 3:1197-1204) takes eight pages to discuss what he calls the “Dallas doctrine” (which is given this label because of the prominence of a Free Grace teaching at Dallas Seminary, beginning with Lewis Sperry Chafer, its founder).

of Christ is one of the “two clearest statements on the way of salvation in all of Scripture.”<sup>7</sup> For this reason, responses given to any one of the options below may likely apply to one or both of the other two viewpoints as well.

## A. TWO CONDITIONS FOR ETERNAL LIFE

None of these interpretations escapes serious difficulties. The first option above is rather honest with the clear-cut statement of the text. On the surface, Paul does seem to be presenting *two* conditions for salvation (faith and confession) and not just one. In verse 9, Paul directly states that believing *and* confessing are both essential for salvation. In verse 10, while believing and confessing are now set apart into two separate clauses, confession is still declared to result in salvation. The Greek word *homologeō* (“confess”) in the NT is most naturally used of public confession.<sup>8</sup> Confession in this context cannot be as easily explained as that which takes place in the heart as a private act before God as might be implied by interpretive option 2 above. In using the term “mouth,” Paul must imply a public confession. God does not need one to “confess with the mouth” for his benefit. He can see into the

<sup>7</sup>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), 34. Given MacArthur’s viewpoint on Rom 10:9-10, it is hard to understand why so little exegetical discussion is devoted to these verses. Even in his sequel to *The Gospel According to Jesus* (*Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* [Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993]), which treats Romans at length (much of pp 87-138), the verses are only mentioned in passing (25, 206, 210).

<sup>8</sup>The words *homologeō* and *exomologeō* commonly imply public expression. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), §33.221, 274, 275. Several verses using *homologeō* confirm that a public viewpoint is mostly in mind: 1Tim 6:12, “...and have confessed the good confession *in the presence of many witnesses*”; Acts 23:8 “For Sadducees *say* that there is no resurrection...; but the Pharisees confess both”; Matt. 10:32 “Therefore whoever confesses Me *before men*...” [All italics added]. 1 John 1:9 appears to be one exception, since the confession of our sins is directed to God. Most commentators affirm a public confession in Rom 10:9-10: Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 607; Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 290; Moo, *Romans*, 657; Schreiner, *Romans*, 607.



heart to discern our faith, and grant us justification at the very moment of faith.

Yet the vast majority of NT passages mention faith (or believing) as the only condition for eternal life. It is a well-known fact that the Gospel of John alone uses *pisteuō* ("believe") approximately 98 times, most to describe the response of the heart that brings eternal life. "Confessing that Jesus is Lord"<sup>9</sup> is never mentioned in the NT as a means of gaining eternal life unless one appeals to the statement by Christ in Matt 10:32 (par Luke 12:8): "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven."<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the Matthean verse, several brief observations can be made. First, if the verse speaks of justification, new birth, or eternal life (all basically synonymous terms in the NT), Christ (and/or Matthew) is certainly unclear in his language. What Christ actually confesses when He says, "him I will also confess before My Father," is not distinctly specified. From the text as it stands, it is just as likely that Christ will confess us to be faithful believers as it is that He will confess us to be eligible for heaven.<sup>11</sup> Second, the Christian does not have to wait for some confession before the Father in the future to discover he or she is bound for heaven. Eternal life is a present reality

<sup>9</sup>According to Wallace, the Greek structure favors a definite use of the anarthrous *kurios* meaning, "Jesus is *the* Lord." That is, Jesus is the Yahweh of the OT as is evident from the quotations Paul cites, such as Rom 10:13, "For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD (Gk., *kurios*) shall be saved.'" Wallace also concludes that the grammar points to an object-complement construction for the double accusative ("confess that Jesus is the Lord") rather than a single object with "Lord" being in apposition to "Jesus" (NKJV, KJV, "confess...the Lord Jesus."). This is attested by similar constructions in confession passages (1 Cor 8:5; 12:3; Phil 2:11). Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 188.

<sup>10</sup>Only a very few references could even be made to imply that confessing Christ publicly was essential to the reception of eternal life (John 12:42; 1 Tim 6:12; 1 John 2:23; 4:2-3, 15; 2 John 1:7). John 12:42 will be discussed below. The word itself is only used 23 times in the NT.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. R. Larry Moyer, *Free and Clear: Understanding and Communicating God's Offer of Eternal Life* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 267, who suggests several possible ways in which the Son confesses us before the

able to be known firmly when we place our faith in Christ alone (1 John 5:11-13). However, in the Matthean record Christ's confession awaits the future world. Third, the climax of Jesus' teachings to the disciples in Matthew 10 confirms that future rewards have been in view, not eternal life (Matt 10:41-42).<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, Carson reasons that one's eternal fate is determined by Christ's confession before the Father. He states, "In view is his [Christ's] special filial relationship with the Father, by which the final destiny of all humanity depends solely on his word..."<sup>13</sup> The difficulty with this reasoning is that the parallel found in Luke 12:8-9 has Christ making the confession and denial before the angels. Yet, they have no part in determining our final destiny. Fifth, except for Judas, the disciples already possess eternal life<sup>14</sup> and are the ones addressed in both the Matthean (10:1, 5, 16) and Lukan (12:1) passages.<sup>15</sup> This discipleship outline was a training process involving time (cf. the reference to the pupil becoming like his teacher, vv 24-25). Serious persecution was certain (10:16-17, 22-23) and martyrdom was possible (vv 21-22, 28). Those who endured with a firm faith to the end of life will be "saved" (v 22).<sup>16</sup> But this "salvation" must be joined with v 39 where Jesus

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Father for future reward: 1) He may grant us honor in the kingdom (John 12:26); 2) He may grant us a position of service or responsibility in the kingdom (Luke 19:17, 19).

<sup>12</sup>These verses contain three of Matthew's ten uses of the word *misthos* ("reward"), a NT word for "wage, pay," implying works. This cannot be the free gift of eternal life. Note this obvious nuance of the word in Matt 20:8.

<sup>13</sup>D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 8:490. Cf. also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 33a: 289.

<sup>14</sup>According to John 2:11, the disciples had believed in Christ. For the Gospel of John, eternal life is the immediate possession of all who believe in Jesus (3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 20:31). One needs to remember that the incident of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) was one of the earliest events in the ministry of Christ.

<sup>15</sup>It is true that the word "whoever" broadens the application of the warning by Jesus as Hagner (*Matthew 1-13*, 289) suggests. Nevertheless the warning must first be understood in light of the original hearers.

<sup>16</sup>Dillow is accurate to interpret this "salvation" (in the parallel verse, Matt 24:13) as the privilege of joining the Messiah in his messianic reign.



alludes to the “saving of the life.” (Matt 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; cf. Luke 17:33; John 12:25)—a concept related to future rewards and not the gift of eternal life.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the similarity both verbally and structurally with 2 Tim 2:11-12 must be given full weight.<sup>18</sup> Contextually, believers are addressed, and Paul includes himself in the potential denial, “if we deny Him” (v 12b). Structurally, vv 11-12 form a *chiasmus*, as shown in the following outline:

- A For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. (v 11b)
- B If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. (v 12a)
- B<sup>1</sup> If we deny Him, He also will deny us. (v 12b)
- A<sup>1</sup> If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (v 13)<sup>19</sup>

In the chiasm, A<sup>1</sup> parallels A and B<sup>1</sup> parallels B. Each line must be interpreted in conjunction with its counterpart. With this in mind, denying Christ is regarded as the converse of enduring (= to the end, cf. Matt 10:22).<sup>20</sup> Carrying the parallelism farther, since the reward for

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Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 127, 384.

<sup>17</sup>For further study on this phrase besides Dillow (previous note), see Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1985), 28-33.

<sup>18</sup>Structurally, Matt 10:32-33 has an ABAB (Carson, “Matthew,” 255) pattern while 2 Tim 2:11-12 is chiasmic (ABBA pattern). Hagner relates Matt 10:32 with both 2 Tim 2:11-12 and Rom 10:9-10. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 288.

<sup>19</sup>A chiasmic structure seems all the more relevant in light of the fact that the unit is one of the “faithful sayings” in the pastoral epistles (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Titus 3:8) as well as the fact that each line begins with a condition “if.”

<sup>20</sup>There is absolutely nothing to suggest that anyone but believers are in view when Paul speaks of denying Christ. Briefly, 1) Paul includes himself: “If we deny Him, He also will deny us” (italics added). 2) Peter, as a believer, denied Christ. 3) First Timothy 5:8 is a touchstone: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” One cannot be an unbeliever and

endurance is reigning with Christ, then the penalty for denying Christ must be the loss of reigning together with Him. The loss of reigning with Christ, however, cannot be identical with eternal punishment for several reasons. Any thought of losing eternal life for the one who has died with Christ contradicts the promise in v 11b: one who has died with Christ *will* live with Him both now and in future resurrection.<sup>21</sup>

But additionally, the believer's death with Christ (v 11b) is explicit Pauline teaching about our Spirit baptism into the body of Christ (Rom 6:1-14).<sup>22</sup> As previously noted, A<sup>1</sup> (v 13) is the complement to A (v 11b) in the chiasm: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (v 13). Like its counterpart in v 11b, v 13 declares the inviolability of Christ's promise to us of eternal life. But Paul's thought may go deeper. Since we have been joined to the very body of Christ through Spirit baptism into his death and resurrection (A), it is impossible for us to think that Christ would be unfaithful to His own body (A<sup>1</sup>)—and *we* are His body! He cannot and will not dismember a part of His own body. While there is a promise of our eternal protection in 2 Tim 2:11-12, there is no promise of our temporal perseverance. Eternal life is certain for the believer; discipleship and endurance are not.<sup>23</sup>

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be worse than an unbeliever at the same time! Cf. Knight, without exegetical warrant, finds professing believers who deny Christ in 12b, and slightly unfaithful believers to whom Jesus is faithful in v 13. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 405.

<sup>21</sup>Some needlessly restrict the thought of living with Christ to the present rather than the present and future. Ralph Earle, "2 Timothy," *1, 2 Thessalonians, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 175; Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 404. To "live with Christ" is a function of eternal life. Although including our present experience the phrase, "live with Christ," cannot be limited to the present (cf. 1 Thess 5:10). If only the present was in view, one might expect verbs that are both aorist, rather than an aorist and a future. In English, this would read: "If we have died with Him, then we *have come to life* (not, *will live*) with Him."

<sup>22</sup>Note in particular Rom 6:8 and its similarity to 2 Tim 2:12: "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him."

<sup>23</sup>A valuable study of the passage in more depth can be found in Brad McCoy, "Secure Yet Scrutinized—2 Timothy 2:11-13," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 1 (Autumn 1988): 21-33.



## B. FAITH AND CONFESSION ARE SYNONYMOUS

Regarding the second interpretation that faith and confession are rather synonymous terms for the same response, nothing in the text directly implies that to “believe with the heart” is essentially the same as “confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord.” Those holding this view are forced to depreciate Paul’s mention of confession. Several Free Grace advocates seem to blend the two conditions of the passage by insisting that these verses merely suggest that one must come to recognize by faith that Jesus is God (deity).<sup>24</sup>

One apparent support for this interpretation could be the parallelism of verse 10.<sup>25</sup> The statement that “with the heart one believes unto righteousness” appears to exist in parallelism with the clause “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”<sup>26</sup> But if words mean anything, then the apostle has carefully chosen “heart” as the location of faith, but “mouth” as the place of confession. It is exegetically unwise to blur such distinctions. Since one does not believe “with the mouth,” why should we reconstruct the passage to read as if the confessing takes place “with [in] the heart”? If then, the heart and mouth are distinguishable, so is the belief and confession, and the righteousness and salvation.

Further, the two verses of Romans 10 are chiasmic.<sup>27</sup>

- A that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus (10:9a),
- B and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (10:9b).

<sup>24</sup>Blauvelt Jr., “Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?” 39-41; Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 70-73; Everett F. Harrison, “Matthew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 112; J. Ronald Blue, “Go, Missions,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (October–December 1984): 347-49.

<sup>25</sup>Nygren, *Romans*, 384; Rudolf Bultmann, TDNT, 6:209.

<sup>26</sup>“No special point should be made in verse 10 over the dual use of ‘heart...righteousness,’ with ‘mouth...salvation.’ Alan F. Johnson, *The Freedom Letter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 151. To the contrary, Godet writes, “Paul, in expressing himself thus, is not swayed as DeWitte believes, by the love of parallelism. There is in his eyes a real distinction to be made between *being justified* and *being saved*” (italics original). Godet, *Romans*, 383.

<sup>27</sup>James R. Edwards, *Romans*. New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1992), 254.

B<sup>1</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness (10:10a),  
 A<sup>1</sup> and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (10:10b).

Since this is the case, the confession of A is best paralleled with confession of A<sup>1</sup>, not with faith/belief.

### C. CONFESSION IS THE EVIDENCE AND OUTCOME OF TRUE FAITH

The third interpretive option also does not present much of a solution to the dilemmas already suggested. There are no hints in the passage that one who places faith in Christ's resurrection will eventually confess Him as Lord.<sup>28</sup> If such an idea is theologically correct, it must be brought from another passage to Rom 10:9-10 as a theological aid to exegesis. Paul certainly does not state such an idea in the two verses under investigation. Like the second interpretation, this exegesis subtly reverses the text to say, "if you are saved, you will confess that Jesus is Lord." Instead Paul declares, "if you confess that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved." Hodges correctly observes, "Not only does this verse not say that confession is the *result* of salvation, it states instead that 'salvation' *results from confession*, while righteousness *results from faith!*" (italics original).<sup>29</sup> We must honestly and directly face Paul's assertion as it is rather than adjust it to meet our preconceptions.

What is more, the Gospel of John, written for the precise purpose of clarifying the condition for receiving eternal life (20:30-31), nowhere states that one's eternal destiny is determined by "confessing with the mouth." In fact, John writes the very opposite—that one can trust Christ for eternal life (and actually receive it),<sup>30</sup> but fail to confess the Lord

<sup>28</sup>Everyone who takes this position must also admit that the confession in Rom 10:9-10 is therefore done by a believer, not an unbeliever. This is exactly what will be stressed in the following pages of this article.

<sup>29</sup>Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989), 197.

<sup>30</sup>Despite some theologies that are forced to find in John's comment a reference to "false faith" (e.g., Boice, *Romans 9-11*, 1208), John's Gospel knows nothing of this. If "false faith" is no faith at all, then it seems incongruous that John would use the word "believe" to mean both faith and non-faith. John would then be using the same word to mean within the same book two concepts that are diametrically opposed. Instead, John 12:42 uses John's characteristic



publicly. He writes, “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess [*homologeō*] Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue...” (12:42).<sup>31</sup> John knows of those who did not openly identify with Christ for fear of persecution and rejection, yet they had come to faith that brings eternal life.

### III. AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO INTERPRETATION

#### A. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN ROMANS

To find Paul’s meaning in Rom 10:9-10, a further investigation of the book itself is needed. In Romans, it is undeniable that Paul’s favorite term for redemption is the heavily theological word, “justification” (*dikaioσunē*). It is well agreed that justification for Paul is a legal or forensic term referring to the imputed righteousness the believer receives at the moment of faith. Paul has discussed justification in great detail in 3:21–5:11, climaxing his treatise with a discussion of a few of its marvelous blessings (5:1-11). Paul’s thorough treatment of justification has been completed in chapters long before he arrives at the Rom 10:9-10 argument.

In the 3:21–5:11 unit, Paul makes absolutely no mention of “confessing Jesus as Lord” in order to receive justification. In these early chapters, the apostle has repeatedly stressed the need for faith alone, just as the Reformers had discovered. It seems rather strange that in chapter 10 Paul would add to justification by faith the need for “confession”—a concept he completely excluded in the early chapters of his epistle. In fact, Paul never mentions confession as a requirement for justification in *any* of his other epistles.<sup>32</sup>

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expression (*pisteuō eis*) for faith found 34 times in his book, including many passages where no one debates its salvific meaning (1:12; 3:16, 18, 36; 6:35, 40). Contextually, this phrase is used of true faith in 12:44, 44. For further help on this verse, see Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 31-36.

<sup>31</sup>The NIV has, “they would not confess their faith” (NRSV has a similar phrase).

<sup>32</sup>Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 107. Cf. the epistle to the Galatians and its

Practically speaking but theologically accurate, justification means “to be declared as righteous as Christ is righteous.” If one is as righteous as Christ, it might be asked what more is needed for eternal life? The answer should be evident: nothing more is needed to get to heaven than to be justified in the sight of God (Rom 3:20; 4:2). This is why Paul combines the two concepts in his phrase, “justification of life” in 5:18.<sup>33</sup> For Paul and his epistle to the Romans, there is nothing more needed to get to heaven than to be justified by faith in Christ alone. But nothing in Rom 10:9-10 contradicts this. Romans 10:10a reads, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are *justified*...” (italics added, NIV).<sup>34</sup> In chapter 10, Paul is in perfect harmony with his own teaching in the other parts of his epistle.

As already implied, objections may be raised against forming a strict identity between “justification” and “salvation” in 10:9-10. But this identity is neither necessary nor ideal. What is transparent from the passage is that faith and confession take place in different locations. With a two-fold repetition (vv 9-10), Paul confirms that confession is

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articulation of justification by faith alone; cf. also such classic passages as Eph 2:8-9; Phil 3:9; Titus 3:5. Paul uses *homologeō*, *homologia*, and *exomologeō* only seven times outside Rom 10:9-10. None of these uses seems to be concerned with the requirement(s) of receiving eternal life. The translation of the NRSV (and NIV) of 1 Tim 6:12b comes closest to implying that eternal life is based on confession: “take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and *for which* you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” [italics added]. But the very next verse (6:13) refers to the good confession that Christ Himself made before Pilate—a confession that was certainly not to obtain His salvation. Other translations separate calling and confession, with the obvious potential that confession in 1 Tim 6:12 is a subsequent event to the calling: “take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (NASB). It is also highly likely that the phrase “take hold of eternal life” is not identical to a command to be born again. Timothy is called a “true son in the faith” (1:2) and it is beyond reason to think that Paul was bidding Timothy in 6:12 to become a Christian. For further help, see Dillow, *Reign of Servant Kings*, 136-37.

<sup>33</sup>That justification and eternal life are mutually inclusive terms is evident elsewhere in Romans (1:17; 5:17, 21; 6:23; 8:10).

<sup>34</sup>RSV, NRSV, and NJB all use the word “justified.” KJV, NKJV, NASB all use the word “righteousness.”



with (in) the mouth, but belief is with (in) the heart. Just as the mouth and the heart are two separate locations that should not be identified, belief and confession are also two separate responses that should not be confused.

## B. "SALVATION" IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Solutions for understanding Rom 10:9-10 may be found by reassessing various assumptions brought to the text. These assumptions are compounded by the over familiarity of the verses. The first assumption that needs to be set aside is the identification of "salvation" with justification in Romans. A study of the term "salvation" (*sōtēria*) and "save" (*sōzō*) in Romans corroborates the impression that Paul does not necessarily equate the two.<sup>35</sup> One only needs to read Rom 13:11 where the apostle comments, "for now our salvation [*sōtēria*] is nearer than when we first believed." According to this verse, Paul can speak of a "salvation" that does not come to us at the moment of faith, i.e., when we are justified. In one sense, then, it is fully appropriate in Romans (at least in 13:11) to say that a believer is justified in Christ, but not yet "saved." So then, Paul is certainly capable of using the Greek words *sōtēria* ("salvation") and *sōzō* ("save") of something other than justification. Evangelical Christians recognize this "salvation" by the term "glorification."

It is common in many Christian circles to speak of the "tenses" of salvation as a way of helping us to understand three uses of the terms "salvation" and "save" in Scripture. The "past tense" of salvation speaks

<sup>35</sup>"Salvation" (*sōtēria*) is used five times in Romans, and "save" (*sōzō*) is used eight times. A surprising observation is that the verb is used only one of the eight times (Rom 8:24) in the aorist tense. The other seven uses are future. This is not what we would expect if the salvation of Romans is equivalent to justification. The verb "justify" (*dikaioō*) is used fifteen times, with three occasions using the future (Rom 2:5; 3:20, 30). With the possible exception of 2:13, none of these references are genuine futures to the time of faith, i.e., referring to the future time of resurrection/judgment. Justification is a reality to be rejected or received in this life. So the past tenses predominate (six aorist, one perfect, five present with four of the five as participles). The four present participles (Rom 3:24, 26; 4:5; 8:33) all appear to be gnomic participles, setting out a universal principle of God's activity, not some process (progressive present). For further help on the gnomic present tense, see Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 523-24.

of our deliverance from the penalty of sin. The “present tense” of salvation is our deliverance from the power of sin. And the “future tense” of salvation is our deliverance from the presence of sin. Romans 13:11 can be easily identified as the future tense of salvation.<sup>36</sup> From the perspective of Romans, it may be beneficial to conceive of salvation in each context as a victory over the power of sin. Sometimes it refers to a positional victory over its enslavement, sometimes a present experience of victory over sin’s power, and finally the complete victory over every aspect of its power at the resurrection.

### 1. Romans 1:16

The first use of “salvation” (*sōtēria*) in Romans appears in 1:16 in what is generally agreed to be the first of two thematic verses for the book (vv 16-17).<sup>37</sup> Once again, our familiarity with the verse colors our objectivity. The apostle declares that he does not shy away from publicly proclaiming the gospel because he knows that it is God’s power for deliverance (“salvation”) for those who have faith.<sup>38</sup> What is that deliverance? Since “salvation” in 1:16 is juxtaposed to the “wrath of God” in 1:18, it is fully appropriate to view the deliverance of v 16 as a deliverance from the divine wrath of v 18. On closer inspection, however, we discover that the wrath of 1:18 is not eternal damnation or hell, but a contemporary wrath being revealed (or inflicted) at the present time.<sup>39</sup> Paul intentionally uses a progressive present tense when he states, “The wrath of God *is being revealed*” (italics added, NIV)

<sup>36</sup>Cf. for example, Boice, *Romans 9–11*, 1214.

<sup>37</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 64-65; James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 38a: 36, 46; Schreiner, *Romans*, 59.

<sup>38</sup>Note that the language reflects a confession. Paul is “prepared to confess the gospel publicly and bear witness to its saving power” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 60). Paul himself is confessing and will “confess with his mouth that Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10:9-10). He will not be put to shame, but will experience victory/salvation (Rom 10:11)!

<sup>39</sup>Hodges argues that “there is not a single NT example of this word [Greek, *orgē*] where it refers unambiguously to the experience of eternal punishment. Every NT instance of God’s *orgē* can be understood as a reference to the temporal display of God’s displeasure with human sin” (italics original). Zane C. Hodges, “The Message of Romans,” *The Kerugma Message* 6 (February 1997): 1.



on those who “suppress the truth.” Three times in the following context (1:24, 26, 28) he defines the wrath with the phrase, “God gave them up” (*paradidomi*)<sup>40</sup> i.e., He no longer restrained them from deeper and deeper enslavement to sin.<sup>41</sup>

By using the term “gospel” in Rom 1:16, Paul is not limiting his thoughts to those central truths by which a person is given eternal life. For Paul, his gospel included such matters as justification by faith (3-5), sanctification through the Spirit (6-8), and God’s future for Israel (9-11). In fact, the gospel gathers together all the truths that are found in Romans.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, we can conclude that in Rom 1:16, Paul is expressing his confidence that the truths of justification, sanctification, and even glorification provide God’s power to deliver us from enslavement and bondage to sin.

## 2. Romans 5:10-11

After Rom 1:16, Paul does not refer to “salvation” again until 5:10-11. An observation that is rarely detected is that Paul has deliberately avoided using “salvation” (*sōtēria*) and “save” (*sōzō*) in his entire discussion about justification by faith in 3:21–4:25! At the climax of his discussion on the wonderful benefits of justification (5:1-11), Paul again refers to “salvation,” distinguishing it from justification.

<sup>40</sup>Similarly, KJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV; “God gave them over” NASB; “God has given them over,” TEV; “God abandoned them” NJB, NLT (1:26, 28), “God let them go ahead and do” NLT (1:24).

<sup>41</sup>The Greek word, *paradidomi*, suggests being delivered over to the power or custody of someone or something, such as being handed over to court or to prison for confinement. Cf. BAGD, s.v. “*paradidomi*,” 615.

<sup>42</sup>Romans 16:25 demonstrates that sanctification truth (Romans 6–8) was part of Paul’s “gospel”: “Now to Him who is able to *establish* you according to my gospel...” (italics added). In Romans, Paul is defending the gospel he preached. While the apostle preached “the gospel of His [God’s] Son” (1:9), the “gospel of God” (1:1; 15:16), and the “gospel of Christ” (1:16, MajT; 15:19), Paul also found it necessary to use the phrase “my gospel” (Rom 2:16; 16:25). Paul’s use of the term “gospel” is very broad, including all the truths about Christ in the OT and the NT. The gospel (1:1) concerned OT revelation about Christ (1:2), his Davidic lineage (1:3), the Holy Spirit’s role in the resurrection (1:4), and Paul’s apostleship to the Gentiles (1:5). It is highly unlikely that all these truths are essential knowledge for eternal life. It is more adequate to see Paul as using the term “gospel” in a wider scope than popular notions of the word.

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” While justification is a past event for the believer, Paul places salvation into the future.<sup>43</sup> We should note that this salvation is stated to be a salvation from wrath (5:9). Bringing forward the meaning of wrath in 1:18, the “saved from wrath”<sup>44</sup> in 5:10 is best interpreted to be a deliverance from God’s earthly displeasure against sin and the resulting human bondage to sin.<sup>45</sup> One

<sup>43</sup>Since there is no future judgment to evaluate the eternal destiny of believers, there can be no thought that the justified person will yet stand before God to await heaven. This form of judgment has been escaped entirely by justification (John 3:18). Besides, what need is there for God to take all believers who at death have gone to heaven and bring them before the Father only to determine whether they should ultimately go to heaven? Does God make mistakes? Despite this logic, most commentators do not conceive of any other “salvation” in 5:9-10 but an eschatological judgment that finalizes our justification. Moo, *Romans*, 310-12; Schreiner, *Romans*, 263; Murray, *Romans*, 171.

The Greek future tense behind the words in vv 9 and 10, “we shall be saved” (*sōthēsometha*) does not need to be a genuine temporal future, speaking of the final day of judgment. It may be a relative or “logical” future. The salvation would then be future to the previously stated action of justification and reconciliation. Zane C. Hodges, “The Message of Romans,” *The Kerugma Message* 5 (July 1996): 6.

<sup>44</sup>The Greek text simply states that we will be delivered “from the wrath” (*apo tēs orgēs*). Some modern translations add the fact that this is God’s wrath for clarification. The Greek article naturally points back to a previous mention of this wrath. Romans 1:18 is the first time wrath (*orgē*) is mentioned. The Greek article is the article of previous reference (or anaphoric article). Cf. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 755, 762; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 217-20.

<sup>45</sup>Could 5:9-10 have implications for the rapture of the church, since 1 Thess 5:9 speaks of the rapture as a salvation from wrath? Moyer reasons, “The answer is that, unlike passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:9, these words in Romans are not set in a context of future eschatological events.” Moyer, *Free and Clear*, 266, n 4. On the other hand, Rom 2:5 mentions a wrath (Greek, *orgē*) that reflects the tribulation when it uses the phrase, “you are treasuring



should carefully note Paul's wording, for he affirms that our justification requires the *death* of Christ, but our deliverance from slavery to sin requires the resurrected *life* of Christ.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Romans 8:24

As chapters 6-8 unfold, Paul reveals that our baptism by the Spirit has joined us with the death and resurrection of Christ (6:2-5). God's design was that we should no longer be slaves to sin (6:6). Christians are promised a bodily resurrection (5:2; 6:8; 8:23, 30). But when 6:4 uses a subjunctive verb in its statement, "even so *we also should walk in newness of life*" (italics added), the challenge is set before us to exercise faith and live out a "resurrection" now! For this to become reality, the power of Christ's resurrected life must work through us. He is the powerful Son of God by virtue of His resurrection from the dead, a resurrection that was according to the Spirit whose character is holiness (1:4).<sup>47</sup> His gospel is also powerful through the same Spirit to work this freedom in our lives (1:16). But for freedom to be experienced,

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up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The following verses (2:8b-9a) add, "and indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." In other words, for Pauline theology God has provided all we need to escape His current disapproval of sin (sanctification), and has promised by rapture/resurrection (glorification) a complete and sure escape from the Day of Wrath (or the Day of the Lord, 1 Thess 5:1-10).

<sup>46</sup>The penalty for sin was completely paid for by Christ's death. He Himself confirmed this when he cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Romans 4:25 also proves the point by stating that He "was delivered up *because of [dia]* our offenses, and was raised *because of [dia]* our justification." The resurrection proved our justification, but it did not provide for our justification. The life of Christ provides for our victory over sin, and for the resurrection of the body. The NIV seems less precise in translating 4:25b "and was raised to life *for* our justification" (italics added).

<sup>47</sup>Romans 1:4 does not designate how Christ was declared to be the Son of God ("was declared with power to be the Son of God," NIV; "he was shown with great power to be the Son of God," TEV), or how He was raised ("was shown to be the Son of God when God powerfully raised him from the dead," NLT). Instead, the best interpretation is a declaration as to who Jesus is by means of the resurrection (declared to be the "Son of God with power," NKJV, NASB, NRSV; "Son of God in power," NJB). Favoring this view is Moo, *Romans*, 48-49.

it is crucial that we consider ourselves as dead to sin, but also spiritually resurrected and alive to God (6:11).<sup>48</sup>

The problem in experiencing this freedom arises from the fact that we live in a dead, mortal body that drags us into sin. While we are new on the inside, we are old on the outside. But in faith, we believe in a God of resurrection who can bring life to a dead body in the future resurrection. But if we believe that, we can also believe Him to produce the qualities of (eternal) life in our dead bodies in the present (4:17, 19-21; 6:12-13; 7:24). The law is powerless to work this life and freedom in me (8:2-3),<sup>49</sup> but the Spirit can (8:4). Reality for the believer is that “the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (8:10). Paul continues in 8:11 by using a double reference to the power of God available through the resurrection of Christ. “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

Of course, deliverance from bondage to sin is available for the believer positionally at the moment of justification. But as we walk by the power of the Spirit (8:1, MajT; 8:4) or “live according to the Spirit” (8:5), a victorious freedom is reached rather than sin and condemnation (8:1). Total freedom from bondage to sin can never be reached in this life (i.e., sinlessness). Our complete deliverance awaits the time when even the creation itself is released from its bondage to corruption (8:21-22). Like the creation groans over its bondage, we too groan while we wait for a resurrected body that will replace this mortal, sinful one (8:23).

<sup>48</sup>Considering ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God is a command that inevitably involves submission to Christ’s Lordship. Those from a Lordship Salvation theology, who insist on commitment and surrender as essential to faith for justification, must find the command of Rom 6:11-13 confusing. They themselves wholeheartedly teach that the unbeliever is dead spiritually (Eph 2:1-3). Since this is so, how can a non-Christian consider himself or herself to be dead to sin and alive to God? Does it not appear reasonable that one must first be crucified and raised up with Christ by faith at justification *before* this command for surrender can be obeyed! The verse supports a careful distinction between justification and sanctification truth.

<sup>49</sup>Paul uses the Greek word *adunatos*, “weak, without power,” as a purposeful contrast to 1:16 and the “power,” *dunamis*, of the gospel. The roots of the two words are related.



At this point (8:24), Paul reintroduces the word “saved” again. It appears here in the aorist tense for the first and only time.<sup>50</sup> But the word is combined with a prepositional phrase and reads, “we were saved in this hope.” Adding the phrase, “in this hope,” throws the thought into the future again. Given the focus of the context on our future resurrection, it seems safe to conclude that Paul is thinking of our positional deliverance from bondage to sin (cf. 6:7) in this mortal body made possible by Spirit baptism. Although it is conceivable to think of the word “saved” in 8:24 as justification, there is nothing that forces that on us from the verse.

#### 4. Romans 9–11

Romans 9–11 comprises a well-known unit focusing on Israel’s present and future relationship to the Lord. The final references to “salvation” in Romans occur in these chapters. Most of these references have the deliverance of Israel in view (9:27; 10:1; 11:14, 26). Besides Rom 10:9, 10, 13 (which are universal in scope according to 10:11–12), only Rom 11:11 speaks of the salvation of the Gentiles. In the case of 11:11, one could legitimately reason that Paul thinks of the justification by faith that has come to the Gentiles. On the other hand, justification without sanctification would not provoke Israel to jealousy (“to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles” v 11b).<sup>51</sup> Gentile Christians have escaped the wrath of God on them as delineated in Rom 1:18–32. Through obedience to the Spirit, “the righteous requirements of the law” are now being fulfilled in Gentiles (Rom 8:4).

The first and last of these references in Romans 9–11 (9:27; 11:26) are contained within OT quotes. In each case, Israel’s deliverance from its enemies and its preservation as a nation are the primary meanings of “salvation.” Beyond this, since each quotation has the Second Coming of Christ as its background, one needs to keep in mind that the introduction of the millennial kingdom will bring a reign of

<sup>50</sup>Most English translations of Rom 11:11 assist the noun “salvation” with a past tense verb: “salvation *has come* to the Gentiles” (italics added). There is no verb in the Greek text. Yet to supply the English past tense is appropriate. This verse may also speak of a positional deliverance from bondage to sin.

<sup>51</sup>“Salvation” in 11:11 in a broad sense may be confirmed by the use of the plural “riches,” i.e., many blessings that have come to the Gentiles (v 12).

righteousness by Jesus Christ's personal presence as King. Satan will be bound so that his deceptions will not prevent the reign of righteousness (Rev 20:2-3). All rebels will be purged from the nation (Ezek 20:37-38; Matt 25:1-30; Mal 3:2-3, 5), which the Messiah will accomplish when He comes out of Zion (cf. Isa 59:20-21; Matt 23:37-39; Acts 15:16). This means that there will be no Jewish unbelievers in the millennial kingdom.<sup>52</sup> "The Second Coming of Christ referred to in Rom 11:26 confirms the OT predictions that Christ will deliver Israel from her persecutors and bring great spiritual revival to His ancient people."<sup>53</sup> For Walvoord, this includes "deliverance from persecution and threatened martyrdom."<sup>54</sup> When "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26), not only will sins be forgiven but the "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will *turn away* ungodliness from Jacob" (italics added, 11:26). All idolatry will cease (Isa 30:21-22), and Jews will readily claim in public Yahweh as their God (Isa 44:4-5) because the Spirit will be poured out in a unique way (Isa 44:3; Joel 2:28-32). Devotion to the Lord will be consistent and extensive (Jer 24:7; 50:19-20; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:25-27; Hos 4:4-8; Zeph 3:9-13). This revival of Israel is nothing short of a "resurrection" since Israel's future acceptance with God will be considered to be "life from the dead" (11:15). Again, Paul implies that salvation stretches beyond justification in its range of meaning for Romans.

### III. SALVATION IN ROMANS 10:9-10

Contextually, the salvation in Rom 10:9-10 is picked up in the word "save" (*sōō*) in v 13 where a quotation from Joel 2:32 is given: "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." It is important to note that in verse 10b to confess with one's mouth brings salvation, but in verse 13 to call on the name of the Lord brings salvation. The logical conclusion is that a similarity or equation exists between confessing with the mouth and calling on the name of the Lord. A

<sup>52</sup>Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1983), 288.

<sup>53</sup>John F. Walvoord, "The Future Work of Christ, Part III: Christ's Coming to Reign," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123 (July 66): 198.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., "The Olivet Discourse on Time of End, Part II: Prophecies Fulfilled in Present Age," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (July 1971): 213.



closer look at the phrase “calling on the name of the Lord” may yield more insights into the nature of confession in this context.

## A. CALLING ON THE LORD IN ROMANS 10

Certain parameters can be established by examining Paul’s use of “calling on the name of the Lord” in Romans 10. Romans 10:14a is the most helpful controlling verse: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?” It is surprising how often this text is ignored or left unexamined. The remaining three questions (10:14b-15a) all demand a negative answer:<sup>55</sup> 1) “And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (v 14b); 2) “And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (v 14c); 3) “And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” (v 15). In each case, the implied answer is, “They cannot!” Therefore, Paul’s answer to his first question is simple. A person cannot call on the name of the One in whom he has not yet believed. For Paul, calling on the name of the Lord can only be done by one who is already justified by faith in Christ.<sup>56</sup> So the order working backward is as follows: a preacher is sent, then the preaching takes place; people hear and some believe. Those who believe can then call on the name of the Lord.<sup>57</sup>

## B. CALLING ON THE LORD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The term “calling on the name of the Lord,” is a frequent OT phrase.<sup>58</sup> There appears to be no uses of the term by those who are not already OT believers. The first use of the term confirms this fact, since at the birth of Enosh “men began to call on the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26). This was not, of course, the initial point in the OT at which people were able to receive justification by faith. Abel, for example,

<sup>55</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, translated and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 293.

<sup>56</sup>Dillow, *The Reign of Servant Kings*, 124; Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 195-96.

<sup>57</sup>Surprisingly, Edwards finds believing as the final element in the chain-syllogism. Edwards, *Romans*, 256.

<sup>58</sup>The comparison is with the equivalent phrase in the LXX. The exact phrase, *epikaleō + to onoma kuriou*, appears five times in the LXX. English references (hereafter also) include Gen 4:26; 26:25; Joel 2:32 (quoted in Rom 10:13), and in the pseudoepigraphal work Psalms of Solomon 6:1; 15:1. Both

sacrificed in faith according to Heb 11:4. But it was at the birth of Enosh that believers began to invoke God's help in open worship. This element of worship is all the more evident in the life of Abraham when he built an altar so that he could call on the name of the Lord (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 26:25). Similarly, Elijah defied the false prophets at Mt. Carmel. "Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD..." (1 Kgs 18:24a; cf. 18:25-27). They "called on the name of Baal" to no avail. Elijah appealed to God for help against his enemies and God answered.

The Psalms are also replete with the concept of calling on the Lord (Ps 14:4; 18:3; 31:17; 50:15; 53:4; 79:6; 138:3; 141:1; 145:18). Frequently, the phrase appears in the context of salvation from troubles and from enemies.<sup>59</sup> The psalmist in Ps 80:18 implies that God must first revive the heart before calling on God's name is possible.<sup>60</sup> In a similar fashion, once God had bestowed his blessings on the OT believer, calling on the Lord was a natural response (Ps 116:2).<sup>61</sup> Worship is also a part of the concept in Psalms (in context, Ps 99:6; 105:1; 116:17; etc.) as was the case with Abraham and Enosh.<sup>62</sup> The prophets also speak of Israel calling on Yahweh in despair and need (Is 55:6; 64:7; Jer 29:12). Prophetically, Zephaniah predicts in the end times, Israel will be revived by Yahweh. At that time, they will call on

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of the latter texts also use the word *sāwō* ("save"). Psalm of Solomon 15:1 says, "In my trouble, I called on the name of the Lord for help. I hoped in the God of Jacob, and I was saved, because you, O God, are a hope and refuge for the poor" (author's translation). The phrase "to call on the Lord" (*epikaleō + ton kurion*) is used ten times (1 Kgs 17:21; Esth 4:8; Ps 18:6; 99:6; 118:5; 2 Mac 8:2; 13:10; Sir 46:16; 48:20; Pss Sol 9:6). Other combinations impact the concept such as "call on My name," "call on His name," etc.

<sup>59</sup>"I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies," Cf. also 55:16; 81:7; 86:7; 91:15; 116:4, 13; 118:5.

<sup>60</sup>"Then we will not turn back from You; revive us, and we will call upon Your name."

<sup>61</sup>"Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live."

<sup>62</sup>The phrase, "call on the name of the Lord," is regularly translated (e.g., Gen 4:6; Zeph 3:9) in the NLT as "worshipped the Lord," and in the NJB by "invoke the name of Yahweh."



the name of the Lord.<sup>63</sup> So too, Zechariah sees Israel calling on the Lord as a result of their future spiritual refinement.<sup>64</sup>

### C. CALLING ON THE LORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Hodges<sup>65</sup> and Dillow<sup>66</sup> have reviewed the NT references to “calling on the name of the Lord” quite adequately, and their research does not need to be duplicated here. A summary of their findings will be sufficient. 1) To call on the name of the Lord in the NT implies a request for divine aid in a time of need.<sup>67</sup> 2) The Greek word for “call on” (*epikaleō*) is often used in legal settings, and comes to mean in those contexts, “to appeal to” (Acts 25:11-12, 21, 25). Paul used the identical term in Acts 25:11 when he replied to Festus, “I *appeal to* Caesar.”<sup>68</sup> The impression of all these references is that the Christian has the legal right to appeal to his resurrected and ascended Lord to come to his aid, just as Paul appealed to Caesar as his earthly legal “lord.” 3) The phrase is regularly employed of those who gathered in public worship of the Savior (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Tim 2:22).<sup>69</sup> 4) The disciples who gathered together in the Book of Acts are designated as those who “call on the name of the Lord.” Saul traveled to Damascus for the very purpose of destroying those who publicly declared Jesus as Lord (Acts

<sup>63</sup>“For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder” (Zeph 3:9).

<sup>64</sup>“And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God’” (Zech 13:9).

<sup>65</sup>Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 193-94.

<sup>66</sup>Dillow, *Reign of Servant Kings*, 124-25. Cf. also Moyer, *Free and Clear*, 266, n 7.

<sup>67</sup>The Greek word *epikaleō* when directed to God means “to call upon someone to do something, normally implying an appeal for aid — ‘to call upon, to appeal to, to ask for help.’” *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, ed. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), §33.176.

<sup>68</sup>This phrase means, “to claim one’s legal right to have a case reviewed by a higher tribunal — ‘to appeal one’s case, to appeal to a higher court.’” *Ibid.*, §56.15.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Edwards, *Romans*, 256; Käsemann, *Romans*, page 293.

9:13-14, 21).<sup>70</sup> 5) In summary, as believers gathered together for public worship and by faith invoked God's help in their trials, they were "calling on the name of the Lord" and thereby confessing Christ's Lordship.

## B. THE "SALVATION" OF ROMANS 10:9-10

### 1. The Preceding Context

In Rom 10:1, Paul mentions his desire for Israel's "salvation." To limit Paul's purview to justification by faith of individual Jews is to neglect Paul's introduction of the OT doctrine of the remnant in the immediately preceding verses (Isa 28:16 cited in Rom 9:27-29), and to overlook the corporate nature of Paul's concern for their national deliverance (Rom 11:26-27). The mention of salvation in Rom 10:1 also recalls the thematic statement of 1:16.<sup>71</sup> Dillow writes concerning 10:1, "The salvation in view is not deliverance from hell but the fulfillment of the promise to Israel that she would one day be restored to Palestine."<sup>72</sup> Later, he writes, "We conclude then that being 'saved' in v. 1 refers to God's promise of divine aid to His people in time. It is His provision for victory over their enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil."<sup>73</sup>

The Jews had a zeal for God, but a misdirected zeal (10:2-3). They sought to establish a righteousness that had its source in outward works of the law rather than a righteousness that starts and proceeds from faith (1:17). Israel's great mistake was to make sanctifying righteousness (produced by the works of the law arising from faith) into justifying righteousness done by works (or by works and faith). They transformed the law that was intended for their sanctification into the means of their justification. Sanctifying righteousness (relative righteousness) can never be produced unless one first receives the gift

<sup>70</sup>"Simple logic tells us those Paul arrested were Christians who openly acknowledged faith in Him and asked for His help as it was needed"; Moyer, *Free and Clear*, 122. "When Paul came to Damascus with authority to bind all who called on the Lord's name (Acts 9:14), he was not looking for closet Christians! He was looking for those who were publicly identified with that Name;" Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 196.

<sup>71</sup>Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 586.

<sup>72</sup>Dillow, *Reign of Servant Kings*, 123.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*



of God's justifying righteousness (absolute righteousness).<sup>74</sup> Since Israel would not submit to God's justification righteousness that comes by faith, they failed to attain *either* justification or sanctification righteousness. This line of thought lends helpful understanding to Paul's theme in Romans 10.

The law never was a means of righteousness for justification. Paul made that abundantly clear in Romans 4 and his treatment of Abraham. Israel was under the law for sanctification with the assumption that first God's justifying righteousness would be obtained by faith.<sup>75</sup> Moses promised "life" for "doing" the law (10:5).<sup>76</sup> Works were essential to this blessing. But God had always intended for His commandments to be done by faith with His divine help! With the coming of Christ, He

<sup>74</sup>The Book of Galatians emphasizes how sanctification becomes impossible when believers revert to a false view of justification.

<sup>75</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (1971): 24.

<sup>76</sup>The quote in Romans is taken from Lev 18:5. Three frameworks can be formulated to understand Paul's interpretation of Moses. 1) Moses and the OT taught that justification (righteousness) was possible by the works of the law. But since Paul clearly teaches that justifying righteousness was never based on works of the law, this interpretation must be rejected. 2) Moses spoke hypothetically. If one keeps the entire law perfectly, then (potentially) a person could receive eternal life by the works of the law. Romans 2:7-10, 13 may be marshaled in defense of this interpretation. According to Moo, "The idea that Paul sees in Lev. 18:5 a (hypothetical) promise of life to the doer becomes almost standard in the Reformed and Lutheran traditions." Moo, *Romans*, 648, n 15. But this perspective faces difficulties in Rom 10:5. Did God intend to lead the Israelites to believe that they should pursue the works of the law for a "potential" justification? The law provided for sins that were done unintentionally (Num 15:27-29; Deut 4:42). So how could anyone think that Moses implied that a person could keep the law perfectly, without sin? 3) Moses spoke of keeping the law for sanctifying righteousness by "doing" (i.e., by works produced through faith). Moses (and the Lord) never intended that the law could be kept without faith. The OT is replete with suggestions that faith is the key element in one's relationship to God. Even Abraham illustrated the need to approach God first and foremost by faith (Romans 4). For a similar view, see Kaiser, "Lev. 18:5 and Paul," 19-28. Faith and works for justification are abhorrent to God. Faith and works aimed at sanctification are commanded by God even in the NT era (e.g., Jas 2:22). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life (Rom 8:2). To walk by the power of the Spirit is to produce

Himself “is the end [*telos*] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4).<sup>77</sup> Now through faith in Him, the law has come to an end for any form of righteousness. The NT believer is no longer under the Mosaic Law (6:14; 7:4, 6, 8; 2 Cor 3:6-7) even for sanctification.<sup>78</sup> By setting aside the law for sanctification (its original purpose), God has struck a final blow to the Jewish misconception that the law could be a means of justification.

## 2. The Use of Deuteronomy 30

In contrast to the works of the law for any kind of righteousness, Paul demonstrates in 10:6-8 by a quotation from Deuteronomy 30<sup>79</sup> how Israel should have listened to the exhortation of Scripture that

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an expression of eternal life (8:6). Paul, like Moses, promised “life” for obedience (i.e., works done by faith) when he said, “but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, *you will live*” (8:13, italics added). Genuine love is an expression of and an experience of eternal life. Hatred is an expression of and an experience of death. Moses taught (Rom 10:5) that one could experience eternal life by obedience to the law. This was not eternal life as initial justification, but eternal life as an ongoing sanctification experience and an outgrowth of eternal life received as a free gift. Cf. Dillow, *Reign of Servant Kings*, 138-39, 366.

<sup>77</sup>The phrase (*eis dikaiosunēn*) may go with “everyone who believes” as in the NIV, “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Moo argues convincingly for this reading of the Greek (Moo, *Romans*, 638, n 35). But the interesting parallel with 1:16 may point to taking the words, “for righteousness,” with the phrase “Christ is the end of the law:”

*dunamis gar theou estin eis sōtērian panti tō pisteuonti* (1:16)

(“for it [the gospel] is the power of God for salvation, to all who believe”);

*telos gar nomou Christos eis dikaiosunen panti tō pisteuonti* (10:4)

(“for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to all who believe”).

<sup>78</sup>Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), 189-94. That the Christian is freed from the law for sanctification should not be understood to imply that either 1) NT believers have no moral law to guide them (they are under the law of Christ, Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21), or 2) the Mosaic law has no function in the NT era (it still convicts of sin, 1 Tim 1:9-11; Rom 3:20; 7:7).

<sup>79</sup>Paul is citing the OT passage rather than merely alluding to its words or phrases. The similarities between the two passages are too great to be limited to a simple use of its language or imagery. Dunn, *Romans* 9-16, 603.



pointed her to the need for divine help issuing from faith.<sup>80</sup> Romans 10:9-10 is in reality a further interpretation of the truth Paul finds in Deut 30:12-14, namely that the righteousness that comes from faith is available to all, and so is the divine help (salvation) that can follow justification. Deuteronomy 30:11-14 reads,

For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious [difficult, NASV, NIV] for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

The context of the Deuteronomy passage is the speech Moses gave to Israel as they were about to enter the land of Canaan. Moses warned the people against rebellion and predicted that in their disobedience they would be scattered far beyond their own borders and relocated in many nations as a result of God's judgement of them. But one day (at the Second Coming of Christ) God would bring them back to Himself, circumcise their hearts to be fully devoted to Him (the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31), restore them from their captivity, and bring them into the land to possess it (30:1-11).<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, Israel at the present time should not complain that God's revelation was so difficult it could not be obeyed or so unclear that more revelation was needed before it

<sup>80</sup>Paul actually begins Rom 10:6 with the phrase, "do not say in your heart," taken from Deut 9:4. The warning in the Deuteronomy context is against a heart of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency (which in turn arises from a lack of faith). Cf. Deut 9:5-6 "It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land...Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness..."

<sup>81</sup>As noted above, Paul is conscious of the contexts of his OT quotations in Romans 9-11, i.e., the surrounding material of many of his quotations speak of the Second Coming of Christ. It would be surprising if Paul was purposefully citing a text from Deuteronomy 30 without thinking of the impact of vv 1-10 on the verses he cites (11-14). These verses teach a New Covenant with a circumcision of the heart (cf. Rom 2:27-29) that only God can perform (over against self-righteousness). Sailhamer believes Deut 30:11-15 still addresses matters of the New Covenant (30:1-10), with a transition back to the Old

could be believed.<sup>82</sup> They must not think that someone should go up to heaven or cross to the other side of the sea to bring back divine truth and make the people able to obey it. Revealed truth was not distant, but as close as faith in the heart. That which was not revealed belonged to God alone, but what was revealed was given to be believed and obeyed.<sup>83</sup> Divine help was also ready at hand. If Israel would only turn to their Lord for help He would assist them in obedience. This help was as near as calling on the Lord, invoking His help with their mouth. In Paul's interpretation of Deuteronomy, Christ is God's present revealed truth given to all people in the gospel. Justification through faith in the heart and divine help for obedience to Christ (sanctification) are readily available to all, not just the Jew. Gentiles too can believe in the Lord Jesus and call on Him for help of all kinds. After all, Christ is rich to all that call on Him for deliverance. But first, one must believe in Him before he can call on Him.

One should observe that three times, once in each verse of Deut 30:12-14, the passage adds that Israel must "do" the requirements of the revealed will of God in the law. Paul does not include this phrase in his citation of Deuteronomy 30 but this must be in his thinking.<sup>84</sup> Otherwise, Paul has taken an OT passage that distinctly speaks of

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Covenant in 30:15. John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 474.

<sup>82</sup>In the Ancient Near East, pagan cultures thought of a revelation from a deity as very difficult to procure. This is illustrated in the incident of Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:17-40).

<sup>83</sup>Deuteronomy 29:29 immediately precedes the context of Deuteronomy 30: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." It is for this reason that I do not think that Paul has illegitimately taken this text and replaced the commandment and the law of Moses with Christ. The word that is near Israel is the revealed truth of God. But Christ is the final revealed truth of God. Israel should have perceived the continuing revelation of God in Christ.

<sup>84</sup>As is evident in the exegesis of the DSS, the partial citation of a passage followed by an interpretive explanation (such as "this is..." as in Rom 10:6-8) was a common Jewish approach to the exposition of an OT text. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 603. Philo (*Post. Cain* 24 §§84-85, cited in Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 604-605) and Baruch (3:29-30) also cite the Deuteronomy passage without giving attention to the clause, "so that you can do it." But both interpret the text with this concept in mind.



obedience to the law and finds in it a principle of faith alone, apart from obedience to the law. This would involve a gross aberration of the original context of Deuteronomy 30. What Paul finds in Deuteronomy 30 is that faith for justification is the supreme prerequisite of calling on the name of the Lord and must precede any confession with the mouth.<sup>85</sup> Calling on the name of the Lord can be done only by one who has first experienced the righteousness that comes from faith (10:6). So faith is the first and foremost response to God's revealed truth. Therefore, Paul can also summarize both faith in the heart and confession with the mouth with the phrase, "the word [Greek, *rhēma*]<sup>86</sup> of faith which we preach" (10:8).<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup>Moses gave *two* parts to his warning: revealed truth was not "too difficult" to obey nor was it "too far off" to believe (Deut 30:11). To the thought that revealed truth is "too far off," Moses corresponds with the corrective, "the word is near you, in your heart," i.e., faith for justification righteousness. To the thought that revealed truth is "too difficult," Moses corresponds with the remedial comment, "the word is near you, in your mouth," i.e., calling on the Lord's help for sanctification righteousness. In vv 12-14, Moses (and Paul in Romans) primarily expounds the "too far off" warning in his statements about going into heaven or across the sea (for Paul, going into the abyss) to receive revelation. First and foremost a heart of unbelief must be confronted. Without faith for justification, there is no divine help for obedience to the revealed truth of God. That is, unless "the word is near in the heart" first, it cannot be "near in the mouth" at all.

<sup>86</sup>When Paul refers to the "word of faith," he does not use the familiar Greek word *logos* but the word *rhēma* found in his OT quote from Deut 30:14 (LXX). While most scholars believe that the Greek words *logos* and *rhēma* (both translated "word") are highly synonymous, Girdlestone suggests that there may be a small tendency in *rhēma* to "stand for the utterance and *logos* to point to the rationale for the utterance." Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1897), 206. Paul uses *rhēma* quite rarely. Of his eight uses of the word, three are found in Romans 10 (vv 8, 17, 18). The apostle's choice of *rhēma* is to a degree dictated by his quote from the LXX. Nevertheless, if there is a slight significance to *rhēma* as a "spoken word," it is fully appropriate for Paul to use *rhēma* in Romans 10. This meaning is appropriate in a context where public confession is mentioned and preaching is highlighted. In other words, "the word of faith" is a spoken word both when Paul and others proclaim the need for faith, and when faith is expressed in confession.

<sup>87</sup>Any sincere confession that Jesus is Lord will be a response of faith in the heart. As 1 Cor 12:3b states, "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by

The “word is near” in the sense that when the listener expresses faith in Christ in his heart, Christ will draw near in giving him righteousness (i.e., justification). Once a person is justified before God, Christ can also be near to them for deliverance when they publicly confess He is Lord and call on His name. This is the meaning of the phrase, “The word is near you, *in your mouth*.” The author of Deuteronomy has led the way to this impression with the only other reference in the Book to the nearness of God: “For what great nation is there that has a god *so near* to it as is the LORD our God *whenever we call on Him*?” (italics added; Deut 4:7, NASB).<sup>88</sup>

### 3. The Meaning of Romans 10:9-10

The “saved” in 10:9-10 is directed to those who are already justified believers.<sup>89</sup> If this is the case, what then is the salvation? To begin with, one should understand that exegetically the nature of the deliverance is not to be found in the related Greek words (*sōtēria* and *sōzō*) themselves. A vast number of scholars assume these words speak of a final deliverance from hell.<sup>90</sup> However, the nature of the “deliverance” must be discovered from the immediate context and/or the thematic development of the book.

In the Romans 10 context, Hodges feels the salvation under discussion is a broad concept, embracing God’s generous provisions and aid for the believer in any and every circumstance of daily life. The Lord is defender, provider, sustainer, and savior in all the problems and difficulties of life. Hodges finds support for a broad perspective of the “salvation” of Rom 10:9-10 in the statement of v 12 that the Lord “is rich to all who call upon Him.” Any believer who will invoke the

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the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, only those who are already believers can make the confession of Rom 10:10. This is widely admitted. Because of this reference in First Corinthians, Stuhlmacher even believes the confession of 10:9-10 is spoken within the gathering of the NT church. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*. Trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 156.

<sup>88</sup>The NIV replaces the concept of calling on the Lord with the simple idea of prayer: “the LORD our God is near to us whenever we pray to him.”

<sup>89</sup>Even those that say the confession is the byproduct of genuine faith are admitting that believers make the confession. See footnote 28 above.

<sup>90</sup>See footnote 43.



help of the Lord will find a wealth of succor in store.<sup>91</sup> It encompasses “the whole range of spiritual and personal deliverance which a risen Lord is able to bestow on those who call upon Him for it.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, the “salvation” of Rom 10:9-10 borders on what we generally call sanctification rather than what we identify as justification.<sup>93</sup> So then, the confession in 10:9-10 cannot be an isolated admission.<sup>94</sup>

“It follows from this that the confession Paul calls for here is not merely telling my neighbor or close friend about my conversion. It is much more than that. It is my public identification as a member of that circle of people who ‘call on the name of the Lord.’ Indeed, to call on Him like this in public prayer is nothing less than a confession with my mouth that ‘Jesus is Lord.’ My whole experience of Christian victory and deliverance depends on my willingness to do this.”<sup>95</sup>

#### 4. Application to Israel

Paul is accomplishing several purposes in Romans 10. First, he is continuing to explain why Israel has failed to come to faith in Christ and gain the salvation that is available to them according to OT promises. Second, Paul is defending his gospel and the motive for preaching it particularly against the background of Jewish rejection of the gospel. Paul’s message is applicable to Gentiles as well as Jews, since even the OT sanctioned faith for justification and the subsequent confession of Christ, the New Revelation of God. After the proofs of the universality of the gospel for both Jew and Gentile, Paul defends his missionary policy. If the gospel is available to all without distinction (vv 11-13), then it must be preached to all without distinction (14-17). Part of Paul’s purpose in citing Deut 30:12-14 is to show that God’s

<sup>91</sup>Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 195.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>93</sup>Although Godet comes to a different conclusion than what we have stated above, he observes that a distinction should be drawn between justification and salvation in Rom 10:9-10, and that the salvation is future while the justification is past. He remarks, “But salvation includes, besides, sanctification and glory.” Godet, *Romans*, 383.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. Boice, *Romans 9–11*, 1209, who offers a similar opinion, but from a Lordship Salvation perspective. If his view is correct, it postpones a full assurance of eternal life indefinitely since no one can know at what point their confession of Christ finally proves they are born again.

<sup>95</sup>Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 198.

help is not restricted to Israel in the same way that righteousness by faith is not restricted to Israel either. Romans 10:9-10 are transitional with vv 11-13 as a climax to this perspective.<sup>96</sup>

While Paul argues that his gospel opens the door for Gentiles, it is evident that Paul still has Israel in mind. His regular citations from the OT show this to be true. According to 1:18, the wrath of God is being revealed against all those “who suppress the truth” in their ungodliness. While Paul directly applies this concept to the Gentiles in chapter one, he also charges the moralist and Jew with practicing the very same things (2:1). The Jews, perhaps more than any other group, have continued to “suppress the truth” about the Lordship of Jesus. As a result, a spiritual hardening or unresponsiveness has come on the nation during the church age (11:7, 25). For the Lord to return and rescue them at his Second Coming, the Jews will need not only to place their faith in Jesus as Messiah. They will also need to “call on the Lord” for this deliverance (salvation). Jesus had told the Jews, “you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (Matt 23:39, italics added). In Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Jews had in unbelief shouted out this messianic text from Psalm 118 (Matt 21:9). Now Christ demanded that for His return, Israel will need to confess it out of faith so that He might return to deliver them from their enemies and restore them to the land (cf. Deut 30:1-10).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

For many Christians Rom 10:9-10 is a favorite series of verses for evangelism. Generally, these verses are cited in order to emphasize the need for faith. Often, the statements about confessing Christ for salvation have been slighted or neglected when the verses have been used in an evangelistic presentation. This may be because Christians have been confused about the meaning of confession for salvation in the passage. Yet God has been pleased to use these verses in evangelism precisely because they help clarify the truth that justification is by faith alone. After all, Rom 10:10a states, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified” (NIV). But whenever Christians have stressed

<sup>96</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 645.



the need for an unbeliever to confess Christ publicly in order to get to heaven, the truth of the free gift of eternal life has been abused.

The practical lesson of this passage is this: Publicly identifying with Christ has a cleansing and sanctifying effect on our lives. If nothing else, openly confessing Christ makes the Christian conscious of his lifestyle. He now knows that non-Christians will quickly respond to his inconsistencies and compromises with, 'I thought you said you were a Christian.' Inevitably, the vocal Christian becomes careful to live godly because he or she never wants a non-Christian friend to confront him with hypocrisy. The world is certainly watching Christians. But it is watching Christians who can be identified as such. I can be a secret Christian, but I can never be a victorious, secret Christian. One vital principle for victorious Christian living is the public, vocal, regular identification with the Lordship of Jesus.





# WHY LORDSHIP FAITH MISSES THE MARK FOR DISCIPLESHIP<sup>1</sup>

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What is your definition of a disciple? We know that good theology often boils down to good definitions, and in good theology we shouldn't take definitions for granted. Let me offer you some definitions that you've probably taken for granted—not theological definitions, but just some every-day type of words. Like the word *adult*. Do you know what an adult is? An adult is someone who stopped growing at both ends and now is growing in the middle. What is a *cannibal*? A cannibal is someone who is fed up with people. You've heard this definition of a *committee*: a group that keeps minutes and wastes hours. You know what *dust* is? Dust is mud with all the juice squeezed out of it. What's a *mosquito*? An insect that makes you like flies. And my favorite definition, a *skeleton*: a bunch of bones with the person scraped off!

Don't take definitions for granted. Definitions are important. Especially when we talk about discipleship. What is a disciple? You better know what one is, because in some of Jesus' last words, He told us to go and make them. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations," He told us (Matt 28:19). But what, exactly, are you trying to make? What, exactly, are you trying to produce? What does a disciple look like?

We must begin with the end in mind. So what is your definition of a disciple? There is a lot of talk about discipleship in the church today. Everybody talks about making disciples. We just can't seem to agree on what a disciple is, and so now enter the Lordship Salvation proponents, who have a different definition of discipleship. A misunderstanding of what a disciple is confuses the gospel. It dangerously will leave people in spiritual immaturity instead of moving them on into maturity where God desires. I think we all recognize that churches are full of too many people who are in spiritual infancy and have not moved on and grown to live productive and fruitful reproducing types of lives.

<sup>1</sup>This article is from a message originally delivered March 31, 1999 at the Grace Evangelical Society's fourth annual conference. It has been edited slightly for publication.

## I. HOW LORDSHIP SALVATION UNDERSTANDS DISCIPLESHIP

So what do we do about this problem? Well, the Lordship Salvation camp says that we should front-load the gospel and raise the ante. Let's raise the standard so that we make sure that only those who are committed to going on can really become Christians to begin with, they would say. Is that the answer? Doesn't this breed legalism and insecurity which never ever produces spiritual maturity and Christlikeness? We may alter the external, but not the internal; we may change the behavior, but not the heart, with a system like that. Let's take a look at how Lordship Salvation understands discipleship.

John MacArthur says, "The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience."<sup>2</sup> He equates the gospel call with the discipleship call. Another writer says, "We maintain that being a believer and a disciple are the same. A believer/disciple has salvation. One who has salvation is a disciple."<sup>3</sup> He couldn't be much clearer about what he believes. Smith says, "Those who *believe* in Christ *follow* Him, and those who do not follow Him do not really believe in Him" (emphasis his), and "Discipleship is an invitation to salvation, not to some deeper experience of secondary commitment."<sup>4</sup> And another person says, "The call to faith and discipleship are the same and cannot be separated."<sup>5</sup> And then, the last one, by J. I. Packer in his classic book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*: "In our presentation of Christ's gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and making sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness. In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 21.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Ashville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 65.

<sup>4</sup>Bailey E. Smith, *The Grace Escape: Jesus as Savior and Lord* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), xviii, 97.

<sup>5</sup>J. Wallis, "Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience," *Sojourners* (March 1976): 21.

<sup>6</sup>J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 73.



Is that going to effect how we do evangelism? Absolutely. How widely read is J. I. Packer's book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*? You'll find it still in print, I am sure. You see, there's a different definition that Lordship Salvation offers for discipleship.

## II. HOW THE BIBLE PRESENTS DISCIPLESHIP

But how does the Bible present discipleship? What's the biblical definition of a disciple? The word itself comes from the verb "to learn," and so it means in its simplest form "learner," "pupil," "adherent to a system." But you and I recognize that there are different degrees of commitment involved in learning something. You know that because you went through college perhaps, or some other kind of school. Some of you may have just taken a course and audited it—a minimum commitment—but you were there, you were a student, you were learning. Others of you might have gone for the whole enchilada, tried to get on the dean's list, graduated with honors—the ultimate commitment. There are learners at different levels of commitment.

We see this in John chapter 6. At the beginning of the chapter there is a multitude of people who are following Jesus out of curiosity basically, or perhaps even political motivations. And yet by the end of the chapter, there are only twelve who remain, twelve who are committed. In John chapter 6, believe it or not, John refers to those who turned away from Jesus as disciples, and says that Jesus knew that they didn't believe (vv 60-66). So in the broadest sense, you see, a disciple is someone who is a follower, somebody who is learning from a system, and it may even be someone who doesn't believe. Judas was one of the twelve disciples. Peter was one of the twelve disciples, but there is quite a difference between the two.

What I am saying is that I am cautioning you to be careful about how you define the term disciple, and not lock it in to a rigid definition. It is a fairly flexible term, as long as you have the idea of learning, pupil, or adherent. Theologically it can be a flexible term always determined more carefully by its context. In the New Testament we read about the disciples of Moses, the disciples of the Pharisees, the disciples of John the Baptist, and then, of course, there are the disciples of Jesus, which is the predominate use in the New Testament and the one that we are most familiar and comfortable with. So in its essence, a disciple is a follower, a student, a pupil, an adherent.

What also helps us to understand what a disciple is in the New Testament is the invitation that we see Jesus offering to people. He invites them to *follow* Him. He invites them with a synonymous term to *come after* Him. Now both these terms mean more than just a physical walking behind. Both these terms really denote, to the first century mind, the system of education and discipleship they had then, which was based on a Rabbi calling together a group of disciples who would share his life, who would travel with him, who would live with him, who would eat with him, who would stay with him, and basically share their lives and live with him. They didn't sign up for Discipleship 101 not knowing who their professor was. They would either seek out the man they wanted to be like, or that Rabbi would seek them out and invite them into discipleship. When Jesus said, "Follow Me," when He said, "Come after Me," I am convinced He was offering to those people a specific invitation, a pointed and direct invitation to take up a life of discipleship and to follow Him and to share His life.

The goal of discipleship also helps us understand what a disciple is. The best statement of the goal of a disciple is in Matt 10:25. Here we read, "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master." You see, the whole goal of a disciple is to be like his teacher. This tells us that being a disciple is a progression; it is a process. And if our teacher is Jesus Christ, it is interminable in this life. It's never over until we are glorified and made like Him. So discipleship by its very definition is a process.

I am fond of saying that there is a sense in which every disciple is challenged to become more of a disciple. No matter where you are in your Christian life today, God wants you somewhere else tomorrow. That's discipleship. And what He is asking *you* to do today is different from what He is going to ask *me* to do today. It's a process that spans our lifetime, and nobody retires from it. The journey goes on.

### III. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SALVATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Now you will notice some of the differences between salvation and discipleship I have listed here and tried by indentation to show how they might be grouped. This basically, is going to form some of my comments about the problems I have with the Lordship view of discipleship.



<u>Salvation</u>	<u>Discipleship</u>
Justification	Sanctification
By grace <i>Through faith</i> <i>Free</i> <i>Christ's love for me</i> <i>Christ's commitment to me</i>	By works <i>Through faithfulness</i> <i>Costly</i> <i>My love for Christ</i> <i>My commitment to Christ</i>
Christ's cross for me	My cross for Christ
Eternal life	Eternal rewards
An unbeliever's response	A believer's response
Instantaneous	Progressive
New birth	Continued growth
One condition	Many conditions
Inclusive	Exclusive

We should notice the obvious differences and that we cannot merge the two. For example, eternal salvation speaks of justification. Discipleship speaks of sanctification. Our eternal salvation then, is positional righteousness, whereas discipleship is practical righteousness. We know that salvation is by grace through faith, and it's free. But discipleship is by works through faithfulness, and it's costly. Our eternal salvation depends on Christ's love for me, Christ's commitment to me, and Christ's taking His cross for me. Discipleship involves my love for Christ, my commitment to Christ, and my taking up my cross daily for Him. The focus of eternal salvation is eternal life. Discipleship, however, focuses on eternal rewards. Eternal salvation involves an unbeliever's response. Discipleship involves a believer's response. Eternal salvation is instantaneous, and a new birth. Discipleship is progressive and a continued growth. Eternal salvation depends on one condition: belief. Discipleship depends on many conditions, which I'll

mention later. Eternal salvation is inclusive of all. Discipleship is exclusive. So let's break some of these down and talk about them by category.

### **A. LORDSHIP FAITH CONFUSES JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION**

First of all, Lordship Salvation misses the mark for discipleship because it confuses justification and sanctification. We've said a lot about this already.<sup>7</sup> We won't spend a lot of time here. Just as they confuse faith in their definition of faith, justification, and sanctification, so they do the same with discipleship. Justification is the declaration by God of our positional righteousness before Him, while sanctification is our progressive growth in righteousness and godly conduct, learning to live in obedience, learning to live up to our new position. But we cannot confuse the two. They are related, but they must remain distinct. How clearly that comes out in the Book of Romans where justification is clearly dealt with from 3:21 through chapter 5. And when we come to chapters 6-8, we find a discussion of our sanctification. Isn't it interesting that in Romans the first command doesn't come until 6:11? Why is that? Because obedience has nothing to do with justification, everything to do with sanctification. And so the commands don't begin until 6:11.

### **B. LORDSHIP FAITH NEGATES GRACE WITH WORKS**

Another problem with Lordship Salvation is that it negates grace with works. What does Romans 11:6 say? "If it is of works, it is no longer grace." Pretty simple. You can't mix the two. It's either by works or by grace. Lordship Salvation confuses the two. Free grace believes that it is through faith in Christ that we are eternally saved, but it is through faithfulness to Christ that we are made disciples.

Lordship Salvation talks about costly grace, but free grace says that there is only one kind of grace, and it is free. Discipleship is costly,

<sup>7</sup>See Charlie's other message also delivered at the conference and published in the previous issue of this journal: "Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Salvation," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 12 (Spring 1999): 21-35.



but grace is free. John MacArthur says, "Salvation is both free and costly."<sup>8</sup> How so? How can something be free and costly? Well, he says that it is a paradox, a seeming contradiction. No, it's just bad theology, bad English, and bad logic. *A* cannot equal *B*. Is salvation costly? To God, yes. To Jesus, yes. But we have a word for that, and the word is *redemption*, which in its essence means to purchase or to buy. It implies cost. Let's be more careful when we talk about salvation in its various terms and various perspectives. When we talk about eternal salvation and its cost, we talk about redemption, but the cost is not ours, it's God's, it's Jesus'. He paid the price. But what does Romans 3:24 say about our redemption and the freeness of salvation? It couldn't be clearer. Romans 3:24 says, "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Free to us, costly to God. And the only reason we can have a free salvation is because God paid a tremendous price. So we don't say that there is no price. We don't deny that there is a cost to salvation. We just say that God paid it by His grace.

That's the wonderfulness of our salvation. Salvation is free to us, but it cost Him something. To talk about "costly grace" is a contradiction in terms. We call that an oxymoron, like "military intelligence," "Russian economy," "Social Security," or "Honorable Senator." Those are oxymorons, contradictions. There's no such thing as "costly grace." Grace, by its very definition, is free. There is only one kind of grace. It's absolutely free. We talk about "free grace," and that's a redundancy, but we have to do it because the debate has forced us to do it. We talk about the "Free Grace" movement. That's kind of like talking about the "inerrant word of God." Why do we have to say that? Or the "infallible, inerrant word of God," or the "infallible, inspired, inerrant word of God." All those are redundancies, but the debate that's going on demands it of us. It's a shame.

We believe that Christ's love for us is what brings us our salvation. It is our love for Christ that is part of the discipleship process. In the same way, it was Christ's commitment to me that took Him to the cross, and my commitment to Him that helps me to grow as a disciple. He took up His cross and carried it down the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha for me, and I am to take up my cross daily for Him in discipleship.

<sup>8</sup>MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 140.

And then, we have eternal life versus eternal rewards. It's amazing to me how many times Jesus Christ and Paul the apostle used rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ as a motivation for Christian living, as something to look forward to and to shape our lives by. It was so good to hear [Dr. Earl Radmacher's] exhortation about keeping our eyes on the eternal significance of life in the Kingdom of God, because Jesus and Paul certainly did, and yet we hear so little teaching about that. And that is, for one reason, because Lordship Salvation has confused the two. They don't like to talk about rewards, and so many rewards passages are interpreted as salvation passages. Discipleship truth is interpreted as salvation truth. We lose the beauty of the promise of rewards and eternal significance and kingdom life, and a whole section of Scripture is eviscerated.

### **C. LORDSHIP FAITH IS UNREALISTIC IN ITS EXPECTATION OF THE UNREGENERATE**

Lordship Salvation confuses discipleship, which also results in an unrealistic expectation from the unregenerate. You see, the Lordship Salvation view of discipleship assumes a Christian response from unbelievers. But what would an unbeliever understand about carrying his cross? What would an unbeliever understand about loving God with all his heart? He doesn't know God. Would we expect an unbeliever to give up all his possessions or be willing to? What kind of logic is it that demands of an unbeliever such sophisticated, mature Christian decisions that I am still grappling with in my own life? It just doesn't make sense to expect from someone who is dead in his sin, to expect from someone whose mind has been veiled by Satan himself, to respond to God with a fully loving heart at the moment of salvation, to respond to God in total commitment and total submission, to be willing to suffer for Him.

We believe that obedience and commitment are a response to God's wonderful grace, and that's why Romans 12:1 is Romans 12:1 and not Romans 1:1. Paul had to wait until 12:1, so that he could say, "by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice." That's why he waits until Ephesians 4:1 to exhort us to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." He had to tell us about who we *are* before he tells us what to *do*. And yet we are so guilty of getting the cart before the horse and telling people what to do before we tell them what they are and why they should do it. Even we, who believe in free grace,



will fall into that error. Listen to the words of Col 2:6 as well: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in Him." There is a process; there is a progression. We receive Christ; we trust in Him as Savior. He comes inside of us. We now learn to walk with Him in fellowship.

This progression probably comes out best in Titus. You might want to look at Titus chapter 2. I don't think it can be said any clearer of how salvation should result in discipleship, that they are sequential. Verse 11 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." The grace of God has appeared. Jesus has brought us salvation. That salvation teaches us as a consequence how to live a godly life. The word used for *teaching* there is a word that was used of training children. How appropriate, since the Christian life is a process of taking those who are not mature into maturity, from spiritual infancy into spiritual adulthood.

So it is unrealistic to expect the unregenerate to make mature Christian decisions. It takes the grace of God to teach us how to make those decisions and commitments. Did it ever occur to the Lordship Salvation person, for example, that someone who is drowning may just want to get out of the water, and not become a life-guard? Or become a missionary? When someone realizes that they are lost in their sins and they are destined to separation from God, what is their concern? A legitimate concern is to be saved from sin or separation. Some may be saved with a heart of gratitude, some may be saved with a loving heart. I don't deny that these things can happen in an overlapping manner so that we can't easily separate the two. Some people realize that when Jesus saves them they owe Him everything, and they should commit to Him, and they do so from day one. That happens. But probably, more likely, there are people like me, who coasted along for a good while before we really understood what the Christian life should be about and what God has done for us. And no matter how they start, God is going to continue to ask of them decisions and commitments along the way.

#### **D. LORDSHIP FAITH LEAVES YOU NOWHERE TO GROW**

Lordship Salvation misses the mark in discipleship, because their understanding leaves you nowhere to grow. You see, if disciples are



born not made, then there is nowhere to grow. We understand the conditions of discipleship, which are: love God with all your heart, love Him more than your mother, brothers, sisters, father, etc, deny yourself, take up your cross daily, follow Christ, be willing to commit all of your possessions, be willing to suffer for Jesus Christ, abide in His word. All these are conditions for discipleship that we find in the gospels.<sup>9</sup> Now if we believe that people must make those commitments in order to become a Christian, where does that leave them room to grow? But growth is expected. Peter said, "As new-born babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby" (1Pet 2:2). He said, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18). Part of that growth is dealing with the reality of sin in our lives. How does Lordship discipleship leave room for the reality of sin in our lives? In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, no matter what you do with the carnal Christian there, he's still a carnal Christian. He's still undeniably a babe in Christ. There is growth that needs to take place. And when you get to 1 Corinthians 11:30, you see Christians that are living in carnality and abusing the Lord's supper, and they die in their carnality. They are believers who have not submitted.

Lordship Salvation is not realistic in its expectations for Christian growth, nor is it realistic about the reality of sin in our lives. I think that the Bible is very clear that there is always another level of commitment that we are called to. That's just the excitement of the Christian life. Life is an adventure with Jesus. I don't know about you, but I'm quite an outdoors person and when I get to walking in mountains or the hills, I'm like a billy-goat. I've got to start climbing. I love a good view, and so I'll climb. I was in Southern California this summer and I climbed up this one hill. But it's awfully deceiving when you're in the mountains sometimes, because you think if you just get up to that top you'll have a beautiful view. And then you get up there and you find, "Well, I'm not really at the top, am I? There's another ridge I didn't see, and I'll bet the view is even better up there." So you go up

<sup>9</sup>See Matt 10:37-39; 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-26; 14:25-33; John 8:31. For a detailed discussion of these passages as well as the whole issue of Lordship Salvation's understanding of discipleship and salvation, 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).

to the next ridge and you say, “Boy, the view is beautiful up here.” But you know what? There’s still another ridge there, and so pretty soon you’re getting way up there. That’s what discipleship is like. God takes us to one level and life is exciting, but you know something? There’s another level to get to. There are greater challenges, greater rewards, greater excitement in store for us.

That’s how Jesus called His own disciples. When we study the process of discipleship and His calls and appeals to them in the gospels, we find that He called the disciples to be disciples, kind of like calling saved people to be saved. For example, in John chapter 1, we find Peter coming to Jesus Christ, and yet we see Jesus inviting the earliest disciples, including Andrew, to follow Him. So we are introduced to Peter and assume that Peter probably believed then, and yet we know that later in life, as told by Mark chapter 1 or Matthew chapter 4, that Jesus sees them by the sea mending their nets or fishing and He says, “Come follow Me.” Well, didn’t He already say that to Peter in John 1? Yes He did, but He needs to say it again. These men knew more about Him, so the commitment level needed to change.

What do you do with Luke chapter 5 when Jesus sees them again by the sea, and He says, “Follow Me”? Most people assume that this is a parallel account of Matthew chapter 4. I don’t. I explain the details in my dissertation.<sup>10</sup> But I think it is significant to note that the setting is different, the circumstances are different, they are doing different things, and yet Jesus says to Peter again, “Follow Me.” In fact, Jesus says to Peter a number of times, “Follow Me,” “Follow Me,” “Follow Me” throughout the gospels, and then you get to John chapter 21 and He tells Peter twice, “Follow Me.” Peter is surely a believer by now, isn’t he? Why in John chapter 21 does Jesus have to tell Peter to follow Him? Because He’s given him new revelation and He’s challenging him to a greater commitment based on that new content. He told Peter, “When you are older, you are going to be stretched out and you are going to be led where you don’t want to go,” referring to his manner of death. And then He said, “Now, you follow Me—Now that I’ve told you that you are going to die for Me, you follow Me.” Well, you see, “Follow Me” takes on a whole new significance to somebody who has just learned that he’s going to die. And then Peter sees John over there and asks Jesus, “What about him? What about this guy?” And Jesus

<sup>10</sup>Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, 150-52.



says, "It's none of your business. You follow Me." Well, there's another new revelation for Peter: God has an individually designed ministry for him, an individual calling for him. "Don't worry about your brother, get on with what I've told you to do." And He says again to Peter, "Follow Me."

Do you want a model for discipleship? Look at Peter. That's why Peter is so prominent in the Scriptures. He's always the first apostle named, the spokesman for the group, an extrovert. An extrovert is someone who talks while he's thinking of something to say. That's Peter. But thank God that we are given the model of Peter to look at, because Peter wasn't a perfect person, and it shows us that part of discipleship is learning how to fail. Discipleship is a journey, but that journey has setbacks and obstacles and we sometimes trip and fall, as Peter did. Yet during that whole account of Peter denying Jesus Christ, if you look at that account in John, you'll see that word "follow" appears every now and then. "Are you a follower of that man?" "No, I'm not." Oh, yes, he was. He followed Christ secretly at a distance. It's an amazing study. I've got seven sermons on Peter as a follower, but I'm not going to preach them all right now.

So Jesus appeals to Peter's curiosity in John 1; He appeals to his devotion to duty in John 21. Jesus never lets up the pressure of discipleship. It is a progression. It is a process. It is a journey. It is a call to commitment. There is a sense in which a disciple is always challenged to become more of a disciple. So how can we say that all those discipleship commitments are involved in coming to Christ as Savior? What do you do with the secret disciples in John, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? They were secret disciples, but it took time for them to come out. I hate to use that term with them, but it took them time to show their Christian faces. The process of discipleship goes on. It is never finished until glorification.

## **E. LORDSHIP FAITH CONFUSES THE GOSPEL**

Lordship Salvation misses the mark in discipleship, because it confuses the gospel. If discipleship and eternal salvation are equated, then according to their definition, there are many conditions for salvation. You must deny yourself, according to Luke 9:23, as well as take up your cross and follow Christ. Jesus said in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life, he cannot be My



disciple;" in Luke 14:33, "So, likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple;" in John 8:31, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed;" and in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

There are a lot of conditions for discipleship, but one condition for eternal salvation: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So if we take Lordship's definition for discipleship, doesn't that confuse the gospel? Of course, it does. How could a person ever know that he or she is saved, ever know that he or she has met all those conditions? Assurance would become illusive—No, it would become impossible, absolutely impossible. How many of you have met those conditions satisfactorily to yourself or to God? If disciples are born and not made, then boy, they sure have to hit the ground running. They say only 2% of Christians in America are actively leading people to Christ. But Lordship Salvation people say that part of discipleship is fishing for men, and if you're not fishing, you are not following. Well, there are a lot of Christians in that category aren't there? I think they have just excluded themselves from the Kingdom of God.

## **F. LORDSHIP FAITH MAKES SALVATION INACCESSIBLE**

Lordship Salvation misses the mark also because it makes salvation inaccessible. Here we end up with the same concern that we have about Lordship's understanding of faith: that they are taking away the hope of salvation from so many people. The gospel invitation is inclusive; it is "whoever," "whosoever." But discipleship is exclusive. Jesus said, "You can't be My disciple unless..." or "Unless a man..." When it came to salvation, Jesus invited everyone. His arms were open wide. When it came to discipleship, He practically pushed people away.

I know a fellow who started a pretty intensive discipleship ministry to teenagers. He invited all the teenagers in several churches to come, and he promoted it heavily. Only a few teenagers came. He was greatly discouraged, wanting to quit. And I told him, "Wait a minute. Let's look at what you are trying to do. It's the nature of discipleship. You will never have people flock to discipleship classes if you are doing it right." People will not flock to suffer for Jesus, or to take up their cross, or deny themselves. That's the nature of discipleship. It is very exclusive. In John chapter 6, Jesus whittled a crowd of 6,000 down to

12. Wouldn't that have looked good on His resume? Imagine if He were to apply to many churches today: "Well, I managed to build a congregation of 6,000 down to 12." That's church growth, according to Jesus. Maybe we need to reexamine our views on church growth.

There is a difference between Jesus' saying "Come to Me," and "Come after Me." I think there's a technical difference here. Small words, but great significance. When He says, "Come to Me," He's inviting people to salvation. When He says, "Come after Me," He is saying the same as "Follow Me," or "Be My disciple." I think it comes out in Matt 11:28-30 very clearly. What I see here is that He is actually extending both invitations. To those Jews who were lost in the hopelessness of a pharisaical system, burdened by the requirements of the law, He said in Matt 11:28, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." I think that is His invitation to salvation—"Come to Me...I will give you rest," the "rest" of righteousness, the "rest" of peace with God and of reconciliation with God, the "rest" that the pharisaical system can not give under its burden of law-keeping. And then He says, "Take My yoke upon you." "Now that you've come, you take. Now that you've received, you learn from me," He says. "For I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls." "Rest" speaks of the fellowship that can now be enjoyed with God, "for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The whole figure of a yoke implies obligation, commitment, and duty. I find both invitations here: "Come to Me," and then "Take up and learn from Me." I have no problem with the way that Jesus offered those invitations, but they are distinct. There is a big difference between believing and behaving, between receiving eternal life and taking up the cross for Jesus Christ.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

I'll just conclude with a few practical exhortations.

When we teach about discipleship, let's be sure to keep it distinct from eternal salvation, but related. Jesus did say, "Go and make disciples" and the key verb in that passage, as you may know, is "make disciples." The going probably implies the evangelism process, but His end result is that we are to make disciples of people. I believe that is why the Book of Acts uses the term "disciples" synonymously with "believers." It's bridging from the gospels where we are told to make



disciples into what actually happened. People became enthusiastic followers of Jesus Christ. That's the norm for the Book of Acts, with but rare exceptions that are noted. Discipleship should follow salvation, and salvation should flow into discipleship. How will that shape your ministry then? I saw a cartoon once of someone opening the nursery door in a hospital and a little baby is crawling out, and the nurse is saying, "Good luck!" Dr. Radmacher says that we could be jailed for child-abuse or child-neglect. What do we want to do with those who come to know Christ as their Savior? Do they understand what discipleship is? Do we want to lead them further?

We ought to learn to disciple from a grace perspective, to keep grace first. It is the motivation to follow. The heart of discipleship is not what we do, but who we are in Christ. Unfortunately, I have seen that most discipleship material begins not with who we are, but with what we should do, leaving the impression that if we establish a quiet time, if we establish a prayer life, if we read our Bibles regularly, or memorize a certain number of verses, then we are disciples. Those things are important. Those things may be very necessary for spiritual growth, but that's not where God starts. He starts by telling us who we are in Christ. My friends, when somebody has the motivation, all the how-to's and all the disciplines will work themselves out eventually. When I first became a Christian, I did not go to a church for about a year and a half, but I was so motivated by the love and the grace of God that I would stay up until 3 o'clock in the morning reading my Bible. I didn't need anybody to check it off on a list for me. Give them the motivation. Give them the reason. Give them the goal. And then help them with the disciplines along the way.

I've spent a lot of time thinking about this. I was asked to write some discipleship materials, and I've written and finished the rough draft. I spent a lot of time thinking about the approach I wanted to use, because there are so many different approaches out there. What is the biblical approach? What I basically ended up doing was taking the Book of Romans and saying, "Here's where we are going: This is what has happened to you. This is who you are. Now let's talk about what you should do." It makes more sense to me. It's more biblical to me. Ground them in grace. Motivate them and fire them up with grace. People will find a way to pray. They will find a way to read their Bible.

A soldier at Ft. Hood, Texas, was looking forward to seeing his girlfriend in Chicago. Then they had a security breach, and they had to



close the fort down. They wouldn't let anybody in and they wouldn't let anybody out. So he was greatly disappointed. Finally he decided, "I'm going for it." He starts running toward the front gate, and the guard says, "Stop!" But he keeps running towards it and the guard says, "Stop or I'll shoot!" The young soldier said, "Look, my mama's in heaven, my papa's in hell, my girlfriend's in Chicago, and I'm gonna see one of them tonight!" You just give people the motivation; they'll find a way.

Motivation is what is so lacking, I believe, in our Christian teaching. The motivation of the Kingdom, the motivation of rewards, the motivation of love, the motivation of grace, and the motivation of duty. If motivated, people will find a way. No wonder Jesus made love the first commandment. Maybe He knew what He was doing. He says, "You just love, and you'll keep all the other commands."

Learn to disciple from grace. Teach people who they are. Make that part of your discipleship process and materials.

Another application might be that Christians who coast should be taught that that is not pleasing to God. We have an obligation and a duty to tell people who are Christians that God wants them to move on in the Christian life and not to stay in spiritual infancy or to remain in their diapers. They should not be comfortable in their diapers. If they are, we should hold their diapers in their face, make them smell the smell, make them feel uneasy. Christians who coast are not appreciating the grace of God, and we need to talk to them about it.

Let me leave you with one thought: Christians have never changed the world—only disciples have. So what are you going to do about it? What commitments are you going to make? What is God asking you to do, where you are, on your journey today? How will you challenge people to go on to a productive and fruitful life of discipleship? The cost of discipleship is high, but the rewards are great!

## A VOICE FROM THE PAST:

### LIFE RECEIVED<sup>1</sup>

JAMES H. BROOKES<sup>2</sup>

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who 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” (John 3:14-18).

Truly these are great and precious words, surpassing far in value all the words of all the philosophers and poets and statesmen who have ever lived. They assure the troubled sinner, if like Nicodemus he is perplexed by the doctrine of the new birth, that his difficulties may come to a speedy end. He that hath everlasting life enters of course into the kingdom of God; but he that believeth hath everlasting life; therefore he that believeth enters into the kingdom of God, and hence he that believeth is born again, or born from above. The inquirer, then, need not harass his mind with questions about regeneration, but turn his thoughts singly and entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ. When Moses at God’s command lifted up the serpent of brass in the wilderness,

<sup>1</sup>This article is excerpted from Chapter V of *From Death Unto Life* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, n.d.), 55-66. Scripture text has been changed from the KJV to NKJV for ease in reading.

<sup>2</sup>James H. Brookes, D. D. (1830–1897) was pastor of Washington Avenue Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. The Brookes Bible Institute of St. Louis was named in his honor. Dr. Brookes was a prolific writer, having authored more than 200 booklets and tracts. He was the editor of *The Truth*, and was a well-known Bible teacher. One of his very influential students was C. I. Scofield, editor of the popular *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909, 1917, revised as the *New Scofield Reference Bible* 1967). Brookes was also a key leader in the famous prophetic conferences of 1878 and 1886.



God's promise was, "that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live" (Num 21:8). The bitten Israelites were not told to look upon the wounds made by the fiery serpents, nor to look upon Moses, the representative of the law, nor to reason about the connection between looking and living, but to look upon the uplifted serpent, made in the likeness of that which had inflicted the deadly stroke, even as God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. If they looked, they showed that they believed God's word and trusted God's promise.

"Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." Jesus had just exclaimed, "You must be born again," and now He adds, "Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." The one *must* makes the other *must* a necessity, and both are necessary to regeneration, or the reception of eternal life. But, blessed be His name forever and ever, although He purchased salvation at such an immense cost to Himself, to us it is absolutely free, "without money and without price" (Isa 55:1). The way by which it is received is so simple, so easy, so nigh at hand, the believer wonders his heart does not break with penitence and love, every time it is presented to his mind. There may have been many an idiot in the widely extended encampment of the Israelites, struck by the fangs of the fiery serpents, but if he had sense enough to look, he lived. There may have been many a little child, moaning in its mother's lap from the poisonous bite, but if it was old enough to follow the mother's glance, to notice the mother's pointed finger, to heed the mother's voice bidding it look, it lived. To this day it is only, Look and live; Believe and live; for it is a sweet truth we are accustomed to sing in the sweet hymn—

"There is life for a look at the crucified One;  
There is life at this moment for thee;  
Then, look, sinner, look unto Him, and be saved,  
Unto Him who was nailed to the tree."

Matt, the idiot boy, on the coast of England had learned enough to know that he owed a debt to God which he could not pay, and he was weeping for fear God would shut him up in prison. A Christian lady took his trembling hand in hers and gently said, "No, Matt, you need not be shut up in prison, for Jesus has paid your debt." Down into his darkened mind glanced the soft light of the gospel, and when he saw the wondrous truth that Jesus died on the cross in his stead, he lifted

his streaming eyes to heaven with the joyful cry, "Man that paid, Matt says, Thank you, thank you." Then and there he was born again; then and there he received eternal life, for he had looked upon the Son of Man lifted up; and if he had possessed sufficient intelligence he might have walked down the beach, singing in the gladness of exulting faith—

"Jesus paid it all;  
All to Him I owe;  
Sin had left a crimson stain;  
He washed it white as snow."

But these mighty words of Jesus tell us why the Son of Man was lifted up: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is a mistake to suppose that Christ came down from heaven in order that God might love us; He came down because God did love us, and so love us, with a love so deep, so amazing, so unchangeable, so unutterable, He "did not spare His own Son" (Rom 8:32) the shame and humiliation and rejection and agony, that attended upon every step of His lonely and sorrowful path from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary. It is needless to add that "Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma" (Eph 5:2). His too was a love most ardent, self-sacrificing, boundless, eternal, and "which passes knowledge" (Eph 3:19). The redemption of poor sinners was more to Him than the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, for He emptied Himself of it; more to Him than the joys of heaven, for He left them all; more to Him than life, for He says, "I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18); more to Him than the shining of God's countenance, for when God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21), He willingly leaped into the awful abyss of wrath and gloom, out of which arose such a wail of distress as never shook the earth before, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46).

The offering and the sacrifice thus presented on the cross, God has accepted as a sweet smelling savour, and the proof of its acceptance is furnished to angels, men and devils, in the fact that God has raised Him from the dead. Nothing can be added to the efficacy of that atoning sacrifice; nothing can be added to the completeness of that finished work; nothing can be added to the value of that precious blood. Any attempt to add something of our own, in the way of feelings, repentance,



good resolutions, charitable deeds, or ecclesiastical ordinances, that salvation may be rendered more certain and secure, is an insult to God, a dishonour to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a grief to the Holy Spirit. "Can you tell me," said an unhappy skeptic to a happy old saint, "just what is the gospel you believe, and how you believe it?" She quietly replied, "God is satisfied with the work of His Son—this is the gospel I believe; and I am satisfied with it—this is how I believe it." Said another lady to another unhappy man, "There is a great difference between your religion and mine; your's consists of two letters, D-O, and mine consists of four, D-O-N-E."

In the nature of the case, since the work which Christ accomplished to bring life to dead souls, is finished, life can be received only by accepting it, by believing in Christ, by trusting in Christ, by coming to Christ, which all mean one and the same thing. Hence when the religious Jews asked Him the question, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said unto them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:28-29, 47). Hence too His tender and comforting invitation to those who are toiling to be saved, and are burdened with cares and fears and troubles, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). If any imagine that He will not receive them in all their labour, and with all their load of sin, let them think of the woman, "which was a sinner," who fell at His feet without a prayer, without a word, to whom He said, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Luke 7:50).

So it was always when the Lord Jesus was here on the earth. He never refused healing nor salvation to any who believed in His power and willingness to restore health or to forgive sin. He never turned any away disappointed, no matter who they were. There were many who thought themselves too good for Him, and with these He had nothing to do except to rebuke their pride, and self-righteousness, and fatal delusion; but oh, how gracious He was to all who came to Him as needy and sinful. "The Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15:2); and He proceeded to vindicate His reception of them, simply and only on the ground of the joy it gave Him to seek the lost, and to bestow life upon the dead. "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), was His word of defense; and trust in His love

found a way at once to His bosom, and to the infinite resources of His power. It might be a wasted finger reaching no further than the hem of His garment, as when the poor sick woman came timidly through the crowd, after she had suffered many things of many physicians for twelve wearisome years, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse; yet the feeblest touch of faith thrilled His heart, and immediately brought forth the assurance, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (Mark 5:34).

So it is still, for look where we will throughout the New Testament, the salvation of men is made to turn upon their faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was preaching to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household, and having told the story of the death and resurrection of the Son of God, he said, "'To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins.' While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word" (Acts 10:43-44), showing that it was testimony which the Spirit of life approves. Paul was preaching to the Jews, and, having told the story of the death and resurrection of the Son of God, he said, "by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). Paul and Silas were preaching to the Philippian jailor at midnight, who cried out in his distress, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30, 31).

Precisely the same testimony is found all through the inspired Epistles. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood...that He might be just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus....Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:25-28). "To him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom 4:5). "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.' But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, 'Who will descend into



the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:4-9).

These texts are taken from a single Epistle, and it may show the prominence attached to the truth that life is received through faith alone, when it is stated that the words translated *believe*, *believing*, and *faith*, occur about five hundred and sixty times in the New Testament. It is not faith and something beside, it is faith by itself which receives life, as it is written, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26); “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1); “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph 2:8-9); “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (Gal 2:16).

The sinner who wants to be saved is not asked to lift his hand, to move a foot, to wait a moment, to be saved, but just as he is, with all his sins upon him, and his hard and unhappy heart within him, he is permitted, and implored, and commanded to believe that Christ is able and willing to save him, and that God for Christ’s sake will pardon him straightway; for “this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23). Nothing can be gained by delay, for sooner or later, the troubled inquirer must take God at His word, and, without the least shred of righteousness of his own, trust in Christ to give him everlasting life. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Since the death of Christ on the cross, since He suffered the penalty of sin, since He met the demands of God’s law, since He paid our debt to the last farthing, it is no longer the sin question but the Son question with a lost world. “He who 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.” There is no sin so dark and deep the precious blood of Jesus cannot wash it away; and the chief of sinners who believes ought to be as sure that all of his sins are

blotted out, as if he had been guilty of none, and that he too may say with other blood washed sinners in the confidence of a simple and unquestioning faith, "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

Listen to His loving assurance, which sounds out in His word, as if the very tones of His voice could be heard, as if He stood personally and visibly revealed in the presence of the troubled soul, as if the kindly glance of His eye were piercing the gloom and the sorrow, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).





## GRACE IN THE ARTS:

### CHARLES DICKENS: CHESHIRE CAT “CHRISTIANITY”

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

I doubt that the following trivia piece is included in any Ripley’s Believe It or Not, but my suspicion is that one would be hard pressed *ever* in the same twenty year period *in world history* to find three notable names of fame all of which share the same first name and begin the last name with the same first initial. Between 1850 and 1870 flourished three famous Charles D’s—Charles Dickens (the greatest English novelist of his time), Charles Dodgson (alias Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland*, which may be the best known children’s fantasy of all time), and Charles Darwin (popularizer of evolution). On many circles Darwinism fell like a bombshell. Yet (amazingly) Charles Darwin’s writings of the same period made virtually no impact upon Charles Dickens’s writings.

Harland Nelson reported: “Steven Marcus says forthrightly that of course Dickens was a Christian...”<sup>1</sup> The later English writer George Orwell said of Charles Dickens: “he ‘believed’ undoubtedly.”<sup>2</sup> The famous Russian novelist Fyodr Dostoevsky spoke of Dickens as a “great Christian” (in *Diary of a Writer*, vol. I, p. 350).<sup>3</sup> But was he? What does the preponderance of evidence show?

It is my contention—mirrored in my article’s subtitle—that Dickens merely had a “Cheshire Cat ‘Christianity.’” The other Charles D. (Charles Dodgson) painted in *Alice in Wonderland* the pen-portrait of

<sup>1</sup>Harland Nelson, *Charles Dickens* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 179.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>A. Boyce Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 16.



the Cheshire Cat sitting in a tree—with its famed fade-away Cheshire grin. At times only the cat's grin could be seen by Alice. The only brand of "Christianity" I believe Charles Dickens really had was that of the hangover, fading remnants of a cultural "Christian" consensus of a Victorian society. With this thesis most literary analysts of Dickens would concur.

## II. LITERARY LAURELS

Dickens was dubbed the Great Inimitable. A professor of English literature at the University of Pennsylvania wrote: "The truth is there is no great man of letters in all English literature so wholly sui generis [of his own kind] as Dickens."<sup>4</sup> A *Reader's Digest* writer asserted: "Many critics rank [Dickens's] novels with Shakespeare's plays as the greatest works of fiction in the English language. He has probably given more pleasure to more people than any other writer who ever lived."<sup>5</sup> E. W. F. Tomlin offered the opinion that Dickens's "position as the greatest novelist of the English-speaking world, and perhaps the greatest of all masters of fiction, is assured..."<sup>6</sup> With this assessment G. K. Chesterton concurred—that Dickens is "certainly the most popular and perhaps the greatest of the great English novelists."<sup>7</sup>

If the praises of fellow novelists constitute a criterion, then one of the two greatest Russian novelist's transcribed tributes will serve well. Aylmer Maude, friend and biographer for Tolstoy, recorded: "During my [last] visit he repeated his often expressed opinion that Dickens stands far above all other English writers."<sup>8</sup> Dickens's portrait was one of three portraits that hung in Tolstoy's house. Tolstoy's daughter remembered: "'If you were to put the whole of world literature through a sieve,' my father said, 'and keep only the very best, you would be left with Dickens.'"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Cornelius Weygandt, *A Century of the English Novel* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1925), 67.

<sup>5</sup>James Nathan Miller, *Reader's Digest* (November, 1972), 223.

<sup>6</sup>E. W. F. Tomlin, *Charles Dickens: 1812-1870* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 100.

<sup>7</sup>G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens: The Last of the Great Men* (New York: The Press of the Readers Club, 1942), 214.

<sup>8</sup>Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. II, 464.

<sup>9</sup>Tatyana Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1977), 275.

In that time Dickensmania was like Beattle-mania in the 1960s. Americans met ships pulling into the New York harbor to find out if Little Nell, a Dickens character, was still living. As his daughter Katey said, "He had the world at his feet."<sup>10</sup>

Only five of Thomas Hardy's fourteen novels were first-rate. Robert Louis Stevenson produced four or five memorable works (out of over thirty published writings). Dostoevsky and Tolstoy each authored two world-class novels. Yet I would rate ten out of Dickens's fourteen finished novels as worthy of high honors.

Dickens was friends with Washington Irving, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Carlyle, Wilkie Collins, and the other notable authors of his day. In "nine years...he had written almost two million words."<sup>11</sup> Over 13,000 of Dickens's letters (to and from him) have been preserved (even though Dickens personally burned twenty years worth of them!). Dickens (1812-1870) made two trips to America to do public readings, and "probably no other human being ever won such a triumph as a public reader as did Dickens."<sup>12</sup>

### III. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

The imprudent, impecunious, and grandiloquent Mr. Micawber (of *David Copperfield*) and the scatterbrained Mrs. Nickleby (of *Nicholas Nickleby*) were disguised versions of Charles Dickens's parents. Neither of them possessed any serious spiritual roots or strong institutional ties to the Church of England. Dickens's first biographer and long-time friend, John Forster, said almost nothing about Charles's religious upbringing.

Later in life Fanny Burnett, Charles's one sister, and her husband became seriously committed Christians and decided to leave the theater (which Charles frequented). Fanny reported concerning her childhood (which assuredly reflects that of her brother Charles as well): "I was brought up in the Established Church (of England), but I regret to say,

<sup>10</sup>Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), vol. II, 1007.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. I, 540.

<sup>12</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 11.



without any serious idea of religion. I attended divine worship as a duty, not as a high privilege."<sup>13</sup>

Next door to their childhood home was the Providence Baptist Chapel in Chatham where the Dickens family sometimes attended and where the Reverend William Giles pastored. Christopher Hibbert reported: "Charles detested these services, and ever afterwards when he was to write a scene showing children in church or chapel it was nearly always with the hint that it would have been better if they had not been made to go. The minister would sometimes preach for a full two hours" with the result that Dickens "was left with a permanent distaste for Nonconformism [churches]..."<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the same minister had a son of the same name who became Charles's school teacher. "William Giles [the younger] was a kindly, intelligent Oxford graduate...who took great care with his pupils" and recognized Charles's promise.<sup>15</sup> Charles also later attended Somers Chapel in Seymour Street with a friend.

Four experiences were most formative upon young Charles. His debt-ridden father was sent to Marshalsea Prison (which Dickens depicted in *Little Dorrit*). Secondly, he had to work in a rat-infested warehouse where he pasted labels upon shoe polish bottles for twelve hours a day. Thirdly, he experienced his first romantic crush upon Maria Beadnell (depicted as Dora Spenlow in *David Copperfield*). Fourthly, after he was married, his sister-in-law (Mary Hogarth who lived with them in mutual admiration) died suddenly. Most Dickens interpreters presume he would have been better off married to this sister (or someone like her). She became the angelic model for many of Dickens's young female characters—Little Nell, Florence Dombey, etc. By the time Dickens was twenty-five years old he had hit the jackpot with the writing of *Pickwick Papers*.

Ironically, Dickens has been called "the laureate of family life."<sup>16</sup> After some twenty years of marriage and ten children together, he separated from his wife in 1858. One year earlier he had met an eighteen-year-old actress named Ellen Ternan. Reportedly, a gift he intended

<sup>13</sup>W. Kent, *Dickens and Religion* (London: Watts, 1930), 10-11.

<sup>14</sup>Christopher Hibbert, *The Making of Charles Dickens* (London: Book Club Associates, 1967), 31.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>16</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 4.

for Ellen Ternan got into the hands of Mrs. Dickens, and that was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Fred Kaplan stated: "No conclusive evidence has surfaced to determine whether or not their relationship was sexual."<sup>17</sup> Yet K. J. Fielding asserts that "there is no reasonable doubt" that Ellen Ternan was Dickens's mistress.<sup>18</sup> Some of the strongest evidence to that effect is: (1) Dickens paid for the house she and her mother lived in; (2) she was the person first named in his will; (3) they were together in a near-death railroad train accident at Stapleton, France, in 1863; (4) he hoped she could follow him to America on his second public reading trip (though he finally realized it wouldn't be feasible); (5) she visited frequently at the Dickens home among his children and with his sister-in-law (Georgina) who sent for her when he was dying; (6) his daughter Katey said her father "was not a good man."<sup>19</sup> If this compiled evidence does not add up to her being Dickens's mistress, it certainly was an unusual relationship. She was undoubtedly the real-life model for the beautiful-but-cruel Estella (in *Great Expectations* and for Helena Landless (in his last book, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*), for Helen Landless's name and Ellen Lawless Ternan's are too coinciding to be coincidental.<sup>20</sup> In light of all that, it is ironical that at that very period Dickens considered calling his new magazine *Household Harmony*!

Dickens engaged in two public reading tours of the United States (1842 and 1867-68). By his last reading tour he was revealing the physical symptoms which would eventually kill him. He was addicted to this public adoration, and it was actually a form of slow suicide. When Dickens died, he left an estate worth 93,000 pounds (approximately 154,000 U.S. dollars).

#### IV. HIS BOOKS IN BRIEF

Generally Dickens novels were serialized before they were published in book form. He wrote five Christmas stories (from 1843-1848, omitting 1847), of which the most famous is unquestionably "A Christmas Carol" starring Scrooge.

<sup>17</sup>Fred Kaplan, *Dickens: A Biography* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1988), 410.

<sup>18</sup>K. J. Fielding, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction* (n.p.: Longman and Green, 1958), 161.

<sup>19</sup>Johnson, *Dickens*, vol. II, 1007.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 1123.



The first of Dickens's fourteen and a half novels skyrocketed him to fame. *Pickwick Papers* (1837) features a gentleman's club out adventuring in England's countryside and stars a Laurel and Hardy team of the cockney Sam Weller as humorous sidekick to the bespectacled Mr. Pickwick—"what is probably the greatest comedy team in all of literature."<sup>21</sup> The BBC brain trust voted it and *War and Peace* the world's two greatest novels.

From rollicking humor Dickens switched in *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839) to a much more somber exposé of poverty-grown crime. In his third book Dickens's social consciousness shifted from slums to educational abuses in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839), a delightful narrative with more than a hundred characters.

Dickens's fourth novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841) was perhaps his most melodramatic, and it attacks the vice of gambling. Little Nell's death is a real tear-jerker. Dickens's fifth book, *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) "is the least satisfactory of all Dickens's full-length books."<sup>22</sup> Its focus fell upon England's anti-Catholic riots spearheaded by Lord George Gordon.

Dickens's sixth novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-1844), "met with the poorest reception of any of his novels."<sup>23</sup> To inject interest and revive sales, Dickens shipped young Martin off to America (as Dickens had himself done in 1842) where Dickens slashed out satirically at America's slavery, spittoonery, and swaggering spirit.

*Dombey and Son* (1846-1848), Dickens's seventh, "is partly the teaching that a rich [person] cannot easily enter the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>24</sup> The proud industrialist, Dombey, wages everything on his small son who dies, and only the daughter whom he despises (Florence) can eventually save him.

*David Copperfield* (1850-1852) has Charles Dickens's initials in reverse order, and it is Dickens's most autobiographical novel. Edward Wagenknecht claimed it "is probably the best-loved novel in the English language."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Miller, *Reader's Digest*, 223.

<sup>22</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. I, 330.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 470.

<sup>24</sup>Fielding, *Charles Dickens*, 99.

<sup>25</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, *An Introduction to Dickens* (New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1952), 239.

Dickens's ninth novel, *Bleak House* (1852-1853) hacks away at the injustice of England's justice system (in his famous Chancery Court case of Jarndyce versus Jarndyce). Harland Nelson claimed that "*Bleak House* is the finest and most intricately worked out attempt [by Dickens] to show that the human world in its totality is the source of evil."<sup>26</sup> The tenth, *Hard Times* (1854), lashes out against the exploitation of industrial capitalists and the educational tenets of the utilitarian philosophy.

*Little Dorrit* (1855-1857) is a dark novel (written immediately prior to his separation from his wife) and is set against the backdrop of debtors' prison. Dickens's depiction of the Circumlocution Office (or government bureau of red tape) offers "his greatest social satire."<sup>27</sup> George Bernard Shaw claimed the novel was "a more seditious book than [Marx's] *Das Kapital*."<sup>28</sup>

"*A Tale of Two Cities* [Dickens's twelfth novel] is one of the most popular historical novels ever written. Certainly it is the most famous novel about the French Revolution,...yet it is a historical novel which has no historical characters in it."<sup>29</sup> Avrom Fleishman stated that in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) "personal salvation in Christ is translated into...the promises of social regeneration through sacrifice."<sup>30</sup> Yet it "expresses neither a redemption from the sins of history through Christ, nor a natural purging of crime and suffering..., but a fusion of the two."<sup>31</sup> The key word is *social*, because for Dickens redemption was seen as primarily social rather than personal and spiritual.

Practically all Dickens commentators (including myself) concur with the conclusion of Richard Burton concerning Dickens's thirteenth novel that if one considers "story value, construction, characters, atmosphere, adequacy of style, climactic interest, and impressive lesson, I should name *Great Expectations*...as his most perfect book..."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Harland Nelson, "Evangelicalism in the Novels of Charles Dickens" (Ph.D. thesis at the University of Minnesota, July, 1959), 244.

<sup>27</sup>Fielding, *Charles Dickens*, 145.

<sup>28</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 10.

<sup>29</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, *Introduction to Dickens*, 426.

<sup>30</sup>Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 123.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>32</sup>Richard Burton, *Masters of the English Novel* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 189.



Dickens's last complete book, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865), is described by Edgar Johnson as "the darkest and bitterest of all Dickens's novels."<sup>33</sup> In this last finished novel Dickens used "the powerful Jewish-Christian motif of redemption," only he "conceives of the Jew in stereotypical Christian terms and the Christian in stereotypical Jewish terms."<sup>34</sup> Fred Kaplan speaks of the author's "fascination with rebirth and with human nature."<sup>35</sup>

Though the poet Longfellow had lyrical praise for Dickens's unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, I don't think most interpreters would agree with his assessment. In this book, John Jaspers, the choir director in the cathedral, is also an opium addict, so this is Dickens's version of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Also, interestingly, Dickens's last two books contain his only really positive pictures of Christian clergyman—Rev. Frank Milvey (in *Our Mutual Friend*) and Canon Septimus Crisparkle (in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*).

## V. DICKENS'S DOCTRINES

### A. HIS GENERAL POSITION

Literary critic Angus Wilson spoke about "that very evasive thing, [Dickens's] religious beliefs."<sup>36</sup> Edward Wagenknecht claimed, "He was always, in Evangelical parlance a 'professing Christian,' though there is sometimes some question as to just what it was he professed."<sup>37</sup> Three days after Dickens died, the Anglican Bishop of Manchester in Westminster Abbey declared, "Possibly we [he and Dickens] might not have been able to subscribe to the same creed in relation to God, but I think we should have subscribed to the same creed in relation to man."<sup>38</sup> As the Introduction indicated, Dickens operated within a "Cheshire Cat Christianity"—a cultural consensus which pervaded his perspective and colored the moral universe of his writing.

One rationalist analyst, William Kent, acknowledged that "the thinnest streak of supernaturalism divides [Dickens] from the

<sup>33</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. II, 1043.

<sup>34</sup>Kaplan, *Dickens*, 472.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 473.

<sup>36</sup>Nelson, *Charles Dickens*, 179.

<sup>37</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 212.

<sup>38</sup>Kent, *Dickens and Religion*, 22.

humanists."<sup>39</sup> The great English social reformer Lord Shaftesbury compared Dickens to "the pagan Naaman by whom the Lord had delivered Israel."<sup>40</sup> Georgina Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law who lived with him for many years and raised his children, is probably the best voice for Charles's views when she voiced her own to Mrs. Fields:

Like you, I have been brought up...in a very liberal atmosphere, with more of church influence than you, very likely, but always out of the pale of strict creeds and dogmas. I scarcely know what I believe! But I know I do faithfully and earnestly believe in the Almighty and in our Savior and have a perfect faith and trust in a Hereafter—and in the future state being blessed and peaceful!<sup>41</sup>

Such a statement is congruent with what is known about and by Dickens elsewhere.

## B. THE BIBLE AND SUPERNATURALISM

Many preachers—from their sourcebooks for sermon illustrations—have run across Dickens's statement (to his son) that the Bible "is the best book that ever was or will be known in the world..."<sup>42</sup> Also Dickens asserted: "There cannot be many men, I believe, who have a more humble veneration for the New Testament, or a more profound conviction of its all-sufficiency than I have."<sup>43</sup> On the surface these affirmations sound impressive, but such statements do tell us that the Bible is God's uniquely inspired Word.

There is no argument that Dickens—like agnostic Thomas Hardy, theist Robert Louis Stevenson, and Herman Melville—was steeped in the thought and terminology of Scripture. The Christian professor of literature at Yale University, William Lyon Phelps, remarked that Dickens's novels are "virtually a commentary on the Four Gospels."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>41</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 247.

<sup>42</sup>Robert C. Hanna, *The Dickens Family Gospel* (San Diego, CA: Legacy Press, 1998), 20.

<sup>43</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 213.

<sup>44</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, *Dickens and the Scandal mongers* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 112.



The amplitude of Dickens's biblical allusions is made apparent in this quotation from Edward Wagenknecht:

In 1929, James A. Stewart published *Quotations and References in Charles Dickens*...in which he collected 365 Biblical references and 480 to other literature...In his book he finds 64 quotations from Matthew, 18 from Mark, 44 from Luke, 21 from John, and 13 from Corinthians...Among Old Testament books, Genesis leads with 60...<sup>45</sup>

At this point I offer a selective mosaic of Biblical allusions from Dickens's major novels:

1. "a vessel of wrath" (*Pickwick Papers*);
2. "if the sea gives up its dead" (*Oliver Twist*);
3. "Gog and Magog" (*Nicholas Nickleby*);
4. "heap coals of fire upon his head" (*The Old Curiosity Shop*);
5. "a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" (*Barnaby Rudge*);
6. "as we sow, we reap" (*Martin Chuzzlewit*);
7. "firmament...rolled up like a scroll" (*Dombey and Son*);
8. "how Lazarus was raised from the dead" (*David Copperfield*);
9. "writing with His finger in the dust when they brought the sinful woman to Him" (*Bleak House*);
10. "like competing towers of Babel" (*Hard Times*);
11. "the camel and the needle's eye" (*Little Dorrit*);
12. "I am the resurrection and the life" (*A Tale of Two Cities*);
13. "O Lord, be merciful to him, a sinner" (*Great Expectations*);
14. "Pharaoh's multitude that was drowned in the Red Sea" (*Our Mutual Friend*);
15. "lamb...led to the slaughter" (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*).

Despite massive biblical allusion, however, Edward Wagenknecht claimed that even before the onslaught of higher criticism, Dickens "had independently made up his own mind that the Bible was not infallible..."<sup>46</sup> Dickens thought all authentic new discoveries should be counted as "revelation." Edgar Johnson (in a Dickens biography of more than a thousand pages) said, "[Dickens] read Lyell's *Antiquity of*

<sup>45</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 229.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

*Man*, and calmly ranged himself with Colenso's demonstration that the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua could not be considered reliable scientific documents."<sup>47</sup> Dickens also did a respectful writeup in his magazine *All the Year Round* of the implications of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* one of the Dickens characters speaks of "teaching the probability of the human race having once been monkeys."<sup>48</sup> Another story he had published late in life in *The Atlantic Monthly* ("George Silverman's Explanation") has been called "certainly the most naturalistic...thing [Dickens] ever did..."<sup>49</sup> All in all, then, it would seem that despite Dickens's declared respect for the Bible, he was floating with the tide of his times.

### C. GOD

Dickens inherited the traditional Church of England view that God is personal, powerful, and providential. Dickens even asserted that "all art is but a little imitation" of "the way of Providence."<sup>50</sup> Harland Nelson affirmed that Dickens "believes in a guiding Providence, the plainest mark of his affinity with evangelicalism."<sup>51</sup>

Dickens's best friend and first biographer, John Forster, belonged to the Unitarian Church. When Dickens visited the Boston area in 1842, he discovered that the poet Longfellow and many of his intellectual American friends were Unitarians. When Dickens returned to England, "in the winter of 1842-43 he [became] a member of Taggart's Unitarian congregation."<sup>52</sup> However, Dickens's non-doctrinal motivation is illustrated by his own statement: "Disgusted with our Established [Anglican] Church, and its Puseyisms, and daily outrages on common sense and humanity, I...joined the Unitarians, who would do something for human improvement, if they could; and who practice Charity and Toleration."<sup>53</sup> Obviously Dickens was not overly concerned about metaphysical distinctions.

<sup>47</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. II, 1132.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>50</sup>Kaplan, *Dickens*, 415.

<sup>51</sup>Nelson, "Evangelicalism in the Novels of Charles Dickens," 236.

<sup>52</sup>Kaplan, *Dickens*, 175.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*



After visiting with the famous Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing in Boston, back in England Dickens visited the Essex Street Chapel pastored by Reverend Thomas Madge. "In November of [1843] he had heard the Rev. Edward Tagart preach a funeral sermon for Dr. Channing at...the leading [London] West End place of worship of the Unitarians."<sup>54</sup> With Tagart, Dickens maintained a lifelong friendship, though he stopped going to church. Whether Dickens ever seriously factored into his thinking a Unitarian concept of God is up to the guesstimate of Dickens interpreters.

## D. CHRIST

Naturally if one is a bonified Unitarian, this has monumental ramifications for one's view of Christ. All the Dickens commentators I read concurred with Edgar Johnson's appraisal: "Dickens did not believe in the virgin birth of Christ..."<sup>55</sup>

In 1849 Dickens wrote a private book for his own children's religious instruction. In the 1930s this slender volume was published posthumously as *The Life of Our Lord*. In this treatment Dickens preserves Christ's miracles intact and offers no de-supernaturalizing explanation. This publication recounts the biblical story of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

In *The Life of Our Lord* Dickens set forth a number of interpretive comments that bear upon his Christology. The angels announce to the Bethlehem-area shepherds that the child "will grow up to be so good that God will love Him as His own Son..."<sup>56</sup> This sentence does not sound like it teaches the eternal Sonship of Isaiah 9:6, Hebrews 1:8, or Hebrews 5:9.

After Lazarus's raising from the dead, Dickens wrote, "Many of the people there believed that Christ was indeed the Son of God, come to instruct and save mankind."<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Dickens observed that "because [Jesus] did such good, and taught people how to love God and how to hope to go to Heaven after death, He was called Our

<sup>54</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. I, 464.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Charles Dickens, *The Life of Our Lord* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934), 13.

<sup>57</sup>Hanna, *The Dickens Family Gospel*, 89.

Saviour."<sup>58</sup> Any evangelical editor would want a stronger statement than the latter for a biblical presentation on Christ's person.

The rationalist Kent claimed that "neither in his works nor in his letters did Dickens ever repudiate or even question the doctrine of the Trinity or the belief in a mediator."<sup>59</sup> Kent's assertion, however, is open to some serious question. Though one of Dickens's sons was christened in the Church of England, the famed contemporary poet Robert Browning spoke of Dickens as "an enlightened Unitarian..."<sup>60</sup> Whether Dickens was all that doctrinally "enlightened" is the nub of the issue.

Toward the end of his life Dickens wrote back "to a man who had questioned his religious beliefs, saying, 'I have always striven in my writings to express veneration for the life and lessons of our Saviour.'"<sup>61</sup> John Forster, Dickens's first biographer (*Life*, Appendix 2), claimed Dickens acknowledged Jesus to be "Lord and Savior," but we must remember that Forster was a Unitarian and such biblical terms become plastic in the hands of Unitarian users. Thus, Fred Kaplan claimed that "despite his secularism, [Dickens] believed 'Jesus Christ to be the son of God...'"<sup>62</sup> However, Edgar Johnson speaks of the "consistently Unitarian emphasis" of *The Life of Our Lord* and that Dickens treated Christ as a "spiritual teacher, not...divinity."<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the "Son" of Charles Dickens's writing is commensurate with the views of an Arian or Unitarian.

## E. ANGELS, SATAN, AND DEMONS

In chapter 3 of *Martin Chuzzlewit* we read of one who was as "proud as Lucifer." One woman in *David Copperfield* speaks of "the father of all evil." *Bleak House* refers to "its father the devil" and "Sir Lucifer." *A Tale of Two Cities* mentions "Lucifer's pride" and the "father of lies." There is certainly linguistic fodder in Dickens's works for a doctrine of Satan. Yet the Anglican-turned-Catholic G. K. Chesterton

<sup>58</sup>Dickens, *The Life of Our Lord*, 33.

<sup>59</sup>Kent, *Dickens and Religion*, 30.

<sup>60</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. I, 574.

<sup>61</sup>May Lamberton Becker, *Introducing Charles Dickens* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1940), 246.

<sup>62</sup>Kaplan, *Dickens*, 284.

<sup>63</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. II, notes, Part Seven, note 35.



penned: "I do not know whether, in the kindly rationalism of his epoch, he kept any belief in a personal devil in his theology..."<sup>64</sup> Whether Dickens's view of the devil was literal or literary, on the very last page of his unfinished novel the old opium den woman is described as "malignant as the Evil One."<sup>65</sup>

Dickens was acquainted with spiritualism though he considered most seances as a species of humbug. Nevertheless, Dickens himself practiced mesmerism (hypnosis) on other people who were sick or troubled.

Dickens's doctrine of angels is, I suspect, responsible for a good deal of erroneous teaching. Essentially Dickens taught that when the good people (particularly children) die, they become angels in heaven (a doctrine that the Bible nowhere maintains). When Dickens's favorite sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, died at age seventeen, he said, "God numbered her among the angels at seventeen."<sup>66</sup> The word "among" in the previous sentence might mean that she was simply surrounded by angels—unless we had other Dickens contexts that clarified this notion.

There can be little question about Dickens's meaning when he taught his children in *The Life of Our Lord*: "The most miserable, the most ugly, deformed wretched creatures that live [on earth] will be bright Angels in Heaven if they are good here on earth."<sup>67</sup> In Dickens's account of Jesus receiving little children he even asserts: "the Angels are all children."<sup>68</sup> In *The Old Curiosity Shop* (chapter 54) the schoolmaster says to Little Nell: "There is not an angel added to the Host of Heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those that loved it here."<sup>69</sup> In other words, individuals engage in their "work on earth" and are finally "added to the [angelic] Host of Heaven." Reflecting this people-become-angels teaching, Dickens's adult daughter Katie remarked, "Well, really, papa, I think when you're an angel your wings will be made of looking glass, and your crown of [his favorite] scarlet geraniums!"<sup>70</sup> Thus, we must conclude that Dickens's angelology was askew—and it suggests his naivete about some other doctrines.

<sup>64</sup>Chesterton, *Charles Dickens: The Last of the Great Men*, 202.

<sup>65</sup>Fielding, *Charles Dickens*, 204.

<sup>66</sup>Becker, *Introducing Charles Dickens*, 129.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Dickens, *The Life of Our Lord*, 59.

<sup>69</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 237.

<sup>70</sup>Kaplan, *Dickens*, 495.

## F. HUMAN NATURE, SIN, AND EVIL

Dickens analysts coalesce upon their biographical subject's understanding of this theme. Dickens's position is: "human beings are innately good; their goodness resides in their natural moral sentiments."<sup>71</sup> Fielding spoke of Dickens's "faith in human goodness."<sup>72</sup> George Orwell referred to Dickens's "whole message" as an "enormous platitude: If men would behave decently, the world would be decent."<sup>73</sup> *A Reader's Digest* article summarized "the single personal quality that runs like a bright thread through the fabric of Dickens' life and writings [which is] the basic decency of man."<sup>74</sup>

Notwithstanding Dickens's optimism about intrinsic human nature, he is aware (as a meek character says in *Our Mutual Friend*) there is "something appallingly wrong somewhere," but another counters with the comment: It's "easy to say somewhere; not so easy to say where."<sup>75</sup> Mr. Plornish (a Dickens character) says of the world-muddle: "He only know'd that it wasn't put right by them what undertook that line of business, and that it didn't come right of itself."<sup>76</sup>

Harland Nelson evaluated the situation as follows: "The Dickens man is born without sin. The world—human society—is his enemy because it is evil and will corrupt him."<sup>77</sup> In a different book Nelson wrote: "The one religious doctrine that I have noted Dickens objecting to is that of original sin..."<sup>78</sup> In an essay in *The Uncommercial Traveler* Dickens objected to a preacher addressing his audience as "fellow sinners."<sup>79</sup> Naturally there are philosophical problems for someone who believes that humans aren't born with sin, yet society corrupts them. If they weren't born that way, how did they get that way? Nelson encapsulated Dickens's perspective by saying that "evil grows out of the environment," yet "people to Dickens are fundamentally good."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Kaplan, *Dickens*, 353.

<sup>72</sup>Fielding, *Charles Dickens*, 41.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>74</sup>Miller, *Reader's Digest*, 228.

<sup>75</sup>Nelson, *Charles Dickens*, 202.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>77</sup>Nelson, "Evangelicalism in the Novels of Charles Dickens," 211.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>79</sup>Kent, *Dickens and Religion*, 30.

<sup>80</sup>Nelson, "Evangelicalism in the Novels of Charles Dickens," 238.



Obviously Dickens's view on sin runs aground of the orthodox Christian view of sin—and so will skew his soteriology as well. In short, in Dickens society is always the scapegoat—though individuals are mostly okay. In one case, (Bill Sikes) however, Dickens did describe one of his characters as incurably bad (which he altered from “irredeemably bad”).

## G. SALVATION

Anyone who has studied and subscribed to biblical theology is aware that one's stance on sin will invariably slant one's stance on the subject of salvation. Dickens is a classic case of that truth.

Sometimes sermonizers are familiar with the wording of Dickens's will: “I commit my soul to the mercy of God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Yet, as the rationalist Kent observed: “the wording is very similar to that of Shakespeare's will and may be conventional.”<sup>81</sup> As Wagenknecht put it: Jesus Christ in Dickens's view is “our Savior,” “but there is no indication of how He saves us, or of what we are to be saved from.”<sup>82</sup> (Please remember that this is not an orthodox theologian speaking but a literary analyst who authored three books on Dickens.)

One of Dickens's most offensive passages to evangelicals concerning salvation appeared in his first blockbuster book (*Pickwick Papers*). The cockney Sam Weller's father explains to his son that his wife has been involved with Methodist meetings.

“She's got hold o' some inwention for grownup people being born again, Sammy; the new birth, I think they calls it. I should wery much like to see that system in haction, Sammy. I should wery much like to see your mother-in-law [actually his stepmother] born again.”<sup>83</sup>

To objectors to this paragraph Dickens penned: “That every man who seeks heaven must be born again, in good thoughts of his Maker, I sincerely believe.”<sup>84</sup> However, the explanation “born again, in good thoughts of his Maker” sounds like something a Christian Scientist might use to explain John 3:3 and 5. Dickens's explanation to his objector didn't even satisfy Kent the rationalist (who grew up within conservative Christianity). Kent wryly commented: “Bless his

<sup>81</sup>Kent, *Dickens and Religion*, 29.

<sup>82</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 240.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 214-15.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*

innocence. Did [Dickens] really think he had thus defined the evangelical doctrine of the new birth?"<sup>85</sup> As Kent noted, probably Dickens's correspondent was now really sure that Dickens was lost.

Four explanatory comments from Dickens's own mouth (in *The Life of Our Lord*) most epitomize his view on this determinative subject. In the scene of Jesus' temptation Dickens told children that Jesus prayed "that He might be of use to men and women, and teach them to be better, so that after their deaths, they might be happy in Heaven."<sup>86</sup> In explaining the parable at the outset of Matthew 20, Dickens declared: "Our Savior meant to teach them...that people who have done good all their lives long will go to Heaven after they are dead. But that people who have been wicked, because of their being miserable, or not having parents and friends to take care of them when young, and are truly sorry for it, however late in their lives, and pray to God to forgive them, will be forgiven and go to Heaven too."<sup>87</sup>

The formula given when Dickens teaches the story of the Prodigal Son is as follows: "Our Savior meant to teach that those who have done wrong and forgotten God are always welcome to Him and will always receive His mercy, if they will only return to Him in sorrow for the sin of which they have been guilty."<sup>88</sup>

In these three previous statements there is ample material for critique. Any Christian should be able to recognize (in light of Romans 3:10-12) the falseness of saying "that people who have done good all their lives long will go to Heaven..." In none of the first three Dickens statements is there any mention of believing in Jesus (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 3:22-24).

At the finale of *The Life of Our Lord* Dickens concludes by declaring: "Remember! It is Christianity to do good always...It is Christianity to love our neighbors as ourself... If we do this, and remember the life and lessons of our Lord Jesus Christ, and try to act up to them, we may confidently hope that God will forgive us our sins and mistakes, and enable us to live and die in peace."<sup>89</sup> There is nothing in Dickens's preceding statement that tells one how to become a

<sup>85</sup>Kent, *Dickens and Religion*, 27.

<sup>86</sup>Dickens, *The Life of Our Lord*, 23.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.



Christian. His first couple of sentences have value for one who has already become a Christian through believing in Christ for eternal life, but as a formula for entering eternal life it will never do. The rationalist Kent (familiar from childhood with biblical salvation) critiques Dickens by saying that he “seems to have taken the view that the whole duty of a Christian was simply to do what any decent-living man or woman would do...”<sup>90</sup> Tragically, that is often the world’s view of Christianity—simply doing your best and presuming God will accept you on that basis.

## H. THE CHURCH, CATHOLICISM, ANGLICANISM, EVANGELICALISM, AND DISSENT

Brought up in a nominal Anglicanism, with a very souring childhood stint among dissenting churches, after Dickens “ceased to attend [the Unitarian] Little Portland Street Chapel, there is no evidence that he was a church-goer at all...during the last twenty-five years of his life.”<sup>91</sup> Dickens seems to have been like his initial popular character Mr. Pickwick—who only attended church at Christmas or for a wedding. Interestingly, even Dickens’s agnostic contemporary, George Eliot, depicted Christian clergy in her writings far more favorably than Dickens did.

Despite Dickens’s opposition to legislative anti-Catholic opposition and anti-Catholic riots (in *Barnaby Rudge*), Dickens “felt...more violently unsympathetic to the Church of Rome as an institution than he did to the Church of England or even to the bulk of Dissenters.”<sup>92</sup>

There is one dream that Dickens had while he was in Italy that is of interest. He was visited (he wrote) by his dead sister-in-law Mary’s spirit, and he asked her, “What is the true religion?” Dickens prompted her spirit by saying, “You think, as I do, that the form of religion does not so greatly matter, if we try to do good?” Then he added, “Perhaps the Roman Catholic is the best?” To this, the spirit replied, “For you it is the best!”<sup>93</sup> There is nothing to indicate, however, by way of follow-up that this dream changed his views about Catholicism, for he wrote his friend Miss Coutts concerning “the Roman Catholic religion—that

<sup>90</sup>Kent, *Dickens and Religion*, 126.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>92</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. I, 562.

<sup>93</sup>Kaplan, *Dickens*, 174.

curse upon the world."<sup>94</sup> Dickens was more opposed to Catholicism's stagnating social effect than to its dogmas.

Though he had his children christened in the Anglican Church, Dickens said of one of his children, "I don't know what I should do if he were to get hold of any Conservative or High Church notions."<sup>95</sup>

Toward Evangelicals within Anglicanism and Dissenters found in chapels Dickens consistently revealed an attitude of antagonism. To him such people were represented either by the harsh, stern, gracelessness of Arthur Clennam's mother (in *Little Dorrit*) or made the butt of humor, (as is the social worker, Mrs. Jellyby [in *Bleak House*] who terribly neglects her own ragged children while she pours all her energies into propaganda for the natives of Borrioboola-Gha). Even the names of Miss Murdstone and Miss Barbary announce to the reader that this is a brand of religion you don't want. "Witness [Rev.] Stiggins in *Pickwick*, Little Bethel [chapel] and its devotees in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the Rev. Melchisedech Howler and his disciple Mrs. MacStinger in *Dombey and Son*, [Rev.] Mr. Chadband in *Bleak House*, [and] Brother Hawkyard and Brother Gimblet [who 'used to detail from the platform the torments reserved for the wicked'] in 'George Silverman's Explanation.'"<sup>96</sup> The only attractive Christian clergymen painted by Dickens are found in his last two books—and both of them are Anglicans. In summary, Dickens treated evangelicalism either with humor or hostility in his books. Even the American Harriet Beecher Stowe criticized Dickens on the score of his antipathy to evangelicalism.<sup>97</sup>

If one is opposed to *evangelicalism*, one will most naturally be opposed to world *evangelization*. With "the missionary movement Dickens was fundamentally out of sympathy."<sup>98</sup> Dickens satirically depicted Jo the crossing sweeper (in *Bleak House*) starving to death on the steps of the building of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. As the rationalist Kent (who grew up in a Nonconformist chapel) stated: "Dickens seems to have regarded what

<sup>94</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 226.

<sup>95</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. I, 452.

<sup>96</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 220.

<sup>97</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Known and the Unknown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 148-51.

<sup>98</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 219.



is called 'a passion for souls' as something unseemly and 'the missionary effort Dickens recommended appeals as much to the Agnostic as to the Christian...'”<sup>99</sup> No wonder church was not big on Dickens's agenda.

## I. THE AFTERLIFE, HEAVEN, AND HELL

With his “Cheshire Cat”-like hangover of cultural Christianity Dickens accepted the general Christian view of the afterlife. In *A Tale of Two Cities* Charles Darnay, threatened with death by the guillotine, tells his wife “they would meet in heaven.” In *Pickwick Papers* someone says that a dead “woman’s soul took its flight—I confidently hope—to a place of eternal happiness and rest” (chapter 6). *Oliver Twist* (chapter 51) speaks of one who “went to heaven.” In *The Old Curiosity Shop* Little Nell’s mother had “flown to a beautiful country beyond the sky where nothing died or ever grew old” (chapter 6). Chapter 72 of the same novel speaks of the “assurance of immortality.”

When his seventeen year old sister-in-law died, Dickens said that she “is now in Heaven.”<sup>100</sup> Then he copied out a relevant entry from Sir Walter Scott’s diary: “She is sentient and conscious of my emotions somewhere—where, we cannot tell; how, we cannot tell; yet would I not this moment renounce the mysterious yet certain hope that I shall see her in a better world...”<sup>101</sup> Near the end of his life Dickens wrote: “in this world there is no stay but the hope of a better [world] and no reliance but on the mercy and goodness of God.”<sup>102</sup> In *The Life of Our Lord* Dickens stated that Christ “is now in Heaven, where we hope to go, and all meet each other after we are dead and there be always happy together...”<sup>103</sup>

Charles Dickens’s views in relation to hell are far more nebulous than his statements about heaven. He does have the flighty Miss Flite (in *Bleak House*) say, “I am expecting a judgment shortly, on the Day of Judgment.” In *David Copperfield* (chapter 47) we find: “in the name of the great Judge before whom” all must stand. In *Barnaby Rudge* Barnaby’s father (a murderer) must face the “retribution which is to

<sup>99</sup>Kent, *Dickens and Religion*, 128, 131.

<sup>100</sup>Kaplan, *Dickens*, 94.

<sup>101</sup>Johnson, *Charles Dickens*, vol. I, 199.

<sup>102</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 238.

<sup>103</sup>Dickens, *The Life of Our Lord*, 12.

come" (chapter 73). In chapter 68 of the same book it is "as though the last day had come and the whole universe were burning." In *Oliver Twist* we read of "hell's fire" in reference to Bill Sykes (chapter 47). In chapter 14 of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* there is a reference to "the bottomless pit." Outside of his novels, however, there is little that could be regarded as definitive of his personal views on this subject.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Because Charles Dickens echoed a number of Christian sentiments, we have subtitled this paper: "Cheshire Cat 'Christianity.'" He was a strange amalgam (like Robert Louis Stevenson) of rationalism, humanism, and traditionalism. Of course, in order to be a popular and successful seller of novels, Dickens could hardly afford to offend the strong prevailing Christian sensibilities in a Victorian England.

Though Dickens pimentoed his novels with over 300 biblical allusions and professed high respect for the Bible, he was beginning to buy into the evolutionary secularism of his contemporaries and so denied the Bible's infallibility. We can't say definitively if or how his short Unitarian stint really affected his doctrine of God, but certainly his presentation of Christ to children in *The Life of Our Lord* would've been acceptable to Unitarians. Dickens denied the virgin birth of Christ, yet he narrated His miracles, bodily resurrection, and ascension.

His "Cheshire Cat 'Christianity'" kept most of his readers satisfied—except for the more discerning, biblically literate ones. Dickens's notion that people who go to heaven turn into angels doesn't jibe with scriptural data. The most problematic area, however, is undoubtedly his comments that relate to the subject of salvation. His view of salvation seems mostly to be summed up in the idea of "doing good." If you haven't done an adequate amount of good, then you should indicate your sorrow and seek God's mercy. It is the absence of clearcut biblical information about specifically believing in Jesus Christ in order to receive eternal life that an evangelical analyst would find most disturbing. In fact, Dickens's one clearcut reference to being "born again" is found in one of his humorous satires (in *Pickwick Papers*).

Dickens wanted society to change for the better, but he offered no crystal clear message of Christian conversion. In *Bleak House* a poor, ignorant boy named Jo is dying. Dr. Allan Woodcourt seeks to help this youth who has no biblical background and is at the point of his death. Woodcourt asks Jo if he has ever prayed. Then Woodcourt starts



to teach him to say the Lord's Prayer. Jo only gets to "our Father," then dies. Surely someone with New Testament instincts would want to know if the boy knew about Jesus and had believed personally in Him.

Probably no better story of Dickens brings home the salvation question than the one known by most people—"A Christmas Carol." Scrooge is the epitome of selfishness. But what brings about Scrooge's moral betterment is not a life-changing experience through faith in Christ. Like liberal Christendom, Dickens wanted the *results* of Christianity without its *reality* and *roots* in real regeneration.

The very last thing that Dickens penned (in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) before he died was how the springtime gardens were "preach[ing] the Resurrection and the Life..."<sup>104</sup> It is the resounding message of the Christian that all may come to know the One who is "the Resurrection and the Life" through faith in Christ.

Sadly, one biographer (who wrote three complete books on Charles Dickens) said that whatever religion Dickens had, "it never brought him peace. All his life he was conscious of wanting something—restless—searching for a satisfaction he never found."<sup>105</sup> When a human being is "justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1, NKJV). Thus, we ever extend the message of Christ who cried out "Come to Me...and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28, NKJV).

<sup>104</sup>Becker, *Introducing Charles Dickens*, 247.

<sup>105</sup>Wagenknecht, *The Man Charles Dickens*, 242.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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***Absolutely Sure.*** By Steven J. Lawson. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1999. 190 pp. Paper, \$12.99.

This could have been a shorter book. Lawson (author and pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile, AL) early on states that “the assurance of our salvation rests upon the impregnable rock of God’s Word. Our confidence about heaven is based solely upon what God says in Scripture regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is on this basis alone that we may be absolutely sure that we belong to Him” (p. 23). After this sound statement, he spends the rest of the book contradicting himself.

It soon becomes apparent why. His gospel is that of Lordship Salvation and includes turning from sins, abandoning one’s life to Christ, humbling oneself, and submitting or committing one’s life to Christ as Savior and Lord. He promotes Lordship to the point of sounding polemical, a sure clue that he is aware of the controversy and is declaring his stand. But as many Lordship advocates have a habit of doing, he also blithely promotes faith alone in Christ alone, saying “Not relying upon your own goodness, you have put your faith in Christ alone to save you” (p. 26); and “Salvation comes as we rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross—and so does assurance” (p. 29).

But such statements are washed away by the flood of subjectivity spouted in the rest of the book, which is a sermon commentary on First John. Of course, his interpretation views the epistle as a list of tests to see if one is truly saved. He finds nine “vital signs”: 1) Communion with Christ (1:1-4), 2) Confession of sin (1:5-2:2), 3) Commitment to God’s Word (2:3-6), 4) Compassion for believers (2:7-11; 3:14-18; 4:7-21), 5) Change of affection (2:12-17), 6) Comprehension of truth (2:18-3:10), 7) Conformity to Christlikeness (2:28-3:10), 8) Conflict with the world (3:11-13), and 9) Confidence in prayer (3:19-24; 5:14-15).



At least his list is shorter than that of John MacArthur, Jr. (who writes one of the forwards along with Adrian Rogers) who has eleven tests from First John in his book *Saved Without a Doubt: How to Be Sure of Your Salvation* (Victor Books, 1992; reviewed by me in *JOTGES*, Spring 1993). Robert Law only had three tests from First John in his well-known commentary *The Tests of Life* (Baker Book House, 1968).

Compare the following statements by Lawson with his contrasting statements about faith and assurance above: "We know that our faith is real as we see the evidence of a changed life" (p. 33); "If one's walk does not match his or her talk, such a confession [of faith in Christ] is a lie" (p. 64); "Assurance of salvation becomes real when love gets real" (p. 88); "Acceptance by the world would cause the assurance of our salvation to waver" (p. 136); "Until we suffer for our faith, it will remain suspect" (p. 158).

Such an emphasis on one's behavior does not give assurance but doubt. Indeed, life-change is an evidence of salvation, but not adequate as assurance of salvation. I think that many cult members could pass Lawson's nine tests on the basis of their subjective evaluation. Salvation rests on the objective truth of Christ's death and resurrection and our faith in that truth. This would distinguish us from the cultists' false assurance.

Even as a popular level commentary on First John, the book is very weak. It does not deal in depth with the purpose of the epistle. Crucial interpretive issues are treated superficially. Lawson defines fellowship with God in 1 John 1 as salvation. There is very little exegesis. This is due to the fact that the book is obviously a transcript of a sermon series, and as sermons, detail and exegesis are usually avoided. But this is inexcusable in a book that goes to a wider and more critical audience. Lawson should not assume that he has the trust of an unknown reader in the same way he might have the trust of one of his church members. Thus explanation becomes necessary. (We could even criticize his sermons as containing too many archaic and dated illustrations.)

Besides the faulty theology, the other lamentable fact about this book is that the beautiful truth of First John about a Christian's fellowship with God is virtually ignored by Lawson's view of the epistle as a list of tests of salvation. Fellowship with God becomes only another of these tests.

The book has no value to a Christian. It will throw many into confusion. In light of the other similar books mentioned above, one wonders why it was printed at all.

**Charles C. Bing**

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***How Shall They Be Saved: The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus.*** By Millard J. Erickson. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996. 278 pp. Paper, \$19.99.

One of the questions I heard over and over again from college students during my four years on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ was “What about those who have never heard about Jesus?” Many college students figured since most people on earth had never even heard of Jesus Christ, surely faith in Him couldn’t possibly be the only way to be saved.

Erickson surveys various views. He considers annihilationism (the conception that at some point unbelievers cease to exist at all), universalism (the view that salvation is not only *available* to all people, but that all people will actually be saved), pluralism (the view that all religions are equally valid ways to God and salvation), postmortem evangelism (the idea that those who have never heard the gospel in their lifetime will have an opportunity to hear and believe beyond the grave), etc.

*JOTGES* readers will not find here a man who is clear on the gospel. For example, in Chapter 13, which deals with the question of those who are incapable of believing (e.g., babies and small children who die), Erickson says that “repentance and faith...are generally understood to be the precondition of all saving benefits” (p. 246). In the first place, we should base our theology solely on the teaching of the Word of God, not on what is “generally understood.” In the second place, Erickson fails to state what he means by repentance. If it is a condition different than faith, then doesn’t this mean that justification is actually not by faith alone? We are not told since the author is merely mentioning this as an aside. However, on such an important topic, we would like at least a brief explanation.



Erickson concludes, by the way, that all infants who die are saved. He fails to deal with the question of what the age of accountability is. He has an interesting discussion of the difference between those who've never heard, yet who live to adulthood and do have general revelation, and those who've never heard and die in infancy (pp. 252-53).

In Chapter 10 ("The Biblical Requirements for Salvation") Erickson actually directly deals with what one must do to be saved. There, too, however, he is not crystal clear. He suggests that OT people were saved by abandoning hope in their own works and instead relying upon God Himself to save them (pp. 191-92). While this is helpful, unfortunately he rejects the idea that they believed in the coming Messiah for eternal life (p. 194). Then when he comes to the question of people today who've never heard of Christ, he hedges. He wonders if they too merely need to abandon hope in their own works and rely upon God Himself to save them (pp. 194-95). He concludes: "Perhaps there is room for acknowledging that God alone may know in every case exactly whose faith is sufficient for salvation" (p. 195).

While the idea that only God knows precisely what we need to believe to be saved is disturbing, to say the least, Erickson has a series of questions that every Grace believer should carefully consider. He says:

If one insists that to be saved in this era it is necessary to know and believe in Jesus, how much must one know, understand, and believe? Must one understand the incarnation, the fact that Jesus was both God and man? How orthodox must this understanding be? Is it necessary to believe that Jesus was deity just as was the Father, in the same sense and to the same degree? What if one believes that Jesus was the Son of God, but not actually God, or has not thought through what he or she believes by that expression? Must one hold the substitutionary-penal theory of the atonement, for that atonement to be efficacious? (p. 195).

The Gospel of John answers these questions. Anyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, in the biblical sense, has eternal life (John 20:31). In John 11:25-27 the same expression ("the Christ, the Son of God") is used as an equivalent to believing that "whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die [spiritually]." In other words, anyone that believes that Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him, no strings attached, has that life.

I highly recommend this book to the well-grounded believer. Erickson covers the key issues involved, and while *JOTGES* readers will not find themselves in agreement with him on every point, they will find that he covers the bases and makes them think.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, TX

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***The Gospel Solution: Was Jesus Looking for "a Few Good Men"?***

By Tom Weaver with John Souter. Bremerton, WA: True Light Press, 1999. 291 pp. Paper, \$15.95.

According to the back cover, this book "develops a comprehensive approach to understand the Gospels. This is more than a book on the 'hard sayings' of Jesus. Author Tom Weaver shows how Christians have often misunderstood the words of the Lord."

One gets the impression from the title and subtitle, however, that Weaver is going to discuss what one must do be saved and the relationship between salvation and discipleship.

In reality, the author's point is hard to follow. He speaks of something he calls *Transitionalism*. Evidently this is some modification of Dispensationalism. He suggests that Jesus was not teaching principles that are applicable to the church-age believer (contra 2 Tim 3:16-17). Instead, He was "clarifying the old covenant and its implications in order to reveal the futility of trying to keep the law" (p. 30).

Weaver sees this taught, for example, in Luke 15 and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In contrast to Zane Hodges, who has written an article for *Grace in Focus* on that parable, he suggests the Prodigal does not illustrate a *believer* who needs to repent and get right with God, but an *unbeliever* who needs to recognize his sinfulness and inability to merit salvation (pp. 141-61). Unfortunately, this completely misunderstands the point of the parable, and eliminates its intended applications to the believer today. That is the difficulty with the entire book.



The selection of material to be included in the book is a bit confusing as well. Why is there a chapter, for instance, on church discipline (chapter 10), or on Jesus' teachings on divorce (chapter 13)?

I have been contacted by a number of people asking if this book gives a good defense of the Free Grace position.

While Weaver does appear to be Free Grace, his main focus in this book is not what one must do to be saved. His emphasis is more in the area of pre-evangelism, showing our spiritual bankruptcy.

There are, however, some references to what we must do to have eternal salvation. Here is one statement on why he knows he is going to heaven: "Not because I'm good...I still fall short of God's standard of perfection. I'm going to heaven because I am depending upon what the Lord did on Calvary's cross. Jesus accepts losers like me. Me and Zaccheus...Salvation has come to my house too, because I've turned, in faith, from the old life to trust in the Lord's power to save me" (p. 56). While *JOTGES* readers might wonder at the wisdom of speaking of "turn[ing]...from the old life" as a stated reason for why Weaver knows he's going to heaven, he doesn't seem to be referring to turning from his old sinful ways. Rather, he appears to mean that he ceased to rely upon his own works.

At one point Weaver unfortunately suggests that in at least seven places "Mark hooks together...separate incidents for his editorial purposes" (p. 228, see esp. note 141). In other words, though he doesn't seem to realize it, he accepts as true the dubious conclusion of some Evangelical NT scholars that the Synoptic authors created sermons that never really occurred. For example, he suggests that Mark 4:1-20 was not really spoken on one occasion, but was a group of sayings that the Lord gave on many different occasions. Yet there is an introductory formula in Mark 4:2, indicating that all that follows was indeed presented on one occasion. And there are concluding remarks in verses 33-35 which clearly confirm that understanding. Mark 4:1-33 is indeed one sermon given on one day. It is not something that Mark put together! (For more discussion of this issue see Thomas and Farnell's, *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship*.)

If you are looking for a book on the gospel debate, you will need to look elsewhere. If you are looking for one on Dispensationalism, this book might be of some interest since it is somewhat helpful to see how the author struggles to develop his own unique brand of it.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, TX

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***Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works.*** By Robert N. Wilkin. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999. 287 + xii pp. Paper, \$9.95.

Robert Wilkin is a man after my own heart. He has a passion to handle the Word of God accurately in order that he might stand approved after testing by God. In the spirit of 2 Tim 2:15 he has “created a sweat” in the pursuit of being found faithful to the meaning of the author. In the process he has done us all a real service by following careful hermeneutics in the development of word studies, grammatical relationships, and consideration of context, as well as the culture. He does not come to the text superimposing a creedal statement or a denominational agenda. He works hard at letting the text speak rather than speaking to the text. In so doing he has provided a gold mine of research in many passages that result in turning on all kinds of lights of clearer understanding.

Much of this clarity comes by being careful not to follow the common error of reducing the word “salvation” to justification. Recognizing that there are many things that one can be saved from, he will often raise the question “Saved from what?” Is the passage talking about physical deliverance from danger, disease, or death? Or, on the other hand, is it spiritual deliverance from the penalty of sin or from the power of sin? As a matter of fact, there is far more in Scripture about the latter than the former. Wilkin helps us to see that there is a sense in which the saved (i.e., justified) need to go on being saved (i.e., sanctified). If believers could simply get a handle on this truth, it would make a world of difference in communicating our Savior to a world that desperately needs to see Christ modeled today.



Another distinction that is carefully articulated is that of the *gift* of eternal life which can be received without cost by all who desire it, and the *reward* for faithfulness and endurance that comes to those who are willing to pay the price. Many today have been confused by those pastors and teachers who combine the two and present a “costly gift” theology that results in multitudes being in doubt and uncertainty with respect to their place in eternity.

Having said all of that, one might get the impression that this is a book so heavy with content that only the erudite scholar could profit from it. But that is not the case. Wilkin is a man of our culture who is able through relevant illustrations to bring the truth home to the layperson of the 21st century. Time and again the readers will find themselves saying “That really makes sense. Why haven’t I seen that?”

Now I hasten to add that Wilkin has not always had this clarity of theological understanding. Whereas his whole life seems to have been pursued with passion, many years of his youth were plagued with devastating legalism. He had devotion and dedication but he did not understand the unique. Some books are written in a matter of days. Others take years. Some take a lifetime. This one is somewhere between “years” and “lifetime.”

Nor is this work infallible, for there is only one of those. I have no doubt that a man like Wilkin, who in my opinion has the gift of knowledge, will continue to discover refinements even as he has with his view of the doctrine of repentance which is different today than when he finished an entire doctoral dissertation on the subject. The reader will find this more recent view among the several very helpful appendices. The work is divided into four major sections dealing with Saving Faith, Assurance, Eternal Security, and Perseverance. There is also a study guide that presents a list of questions to consider in pursuing each of the twenty chapters. Furthermore, the twenty-six pages of endnotes provide very helpful material for further study and comparison of views.

Finally, I would not be faithful to my task if I did not make a few suggestions. First, because the word “saved” covers a broad area of meanings, it would be helpful if, when we mean justified or regenerated, we would say so rather than making “saved” carry the whole burden of justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Second, I live for the day when speakers and writers will stop the common habit of making “literal” and “figurative” antithetical to each

other (for example, see p. 191). We know better for we all know that literal interpretation includes both figurative and non-figurative language. A figure of speech is a perfectly acceptable vehicle for conveying a literal truth. We should never depart from the literal meaning for that is simply the single sense that the writer expressed.

Third, I would like to suggest to the author, with respect to the interpretation of John 15:6, that the setting is the spring of the year, and thus the statement about the burning of unproductive branches is irrelevant. Pruning takes place in the autumn—after the harvest. Furthermore, the identification of “they” in the verse may be advanced by noting that John has an inclusio that begins in 13:35 and ends with the same basic statement in 15:8. Perhaps the “they” in 15:6 is the “all” of 13:35 who fail to see the fruit (i.e., love) among Christians and thus discount us as worthy of consideration and cast us out.

I heartily commend this volume as a valuable resource volume that will be used for many years to come with great benefit. Keep it handy!

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***Galatians: God's Antidote to Legalism.*** By Ron Merryman. (Hermantown, MN: Merryman Ministries, 1999), 130 pp. Paper, \$13.00.

“*Galatians* is God’s antidote for legalism. As no other book, it clarifies the issue of the believer’s relationship to Old Testament Law and the grace provision for sanctification clearly expressed in the New Testament... Thank God for the *Epistle to the Galatians*: It establishes us in God’s grace provision for justification, sanctification, and life of the Spirit. Sink your moorings deep into the message of this book” (pp. i, v). So writes able Bible teacher Ron Merryman in his newly revised commentary on Galatians.

This is a thorough, verse-by-verse, exegetical commentary ideally suited to assist Bible teachers; yet it is written clearly enough to be



used profitably by the average believer as a guide to studying this epistle for personal enrichment.

This commentary is divided into several major sections. Most of the commentary is a verse-by-verse analysis, as might be expected. There are also introductory sections dealing with the theological importance of this epistle, its historical setting within the first century church, and an outline of the book. It concludes with a brief annotated bibliography for further study of Galatians.

*Galatians: God's Antidote to Legalism* is a revised second edition of Merryman's previous commentary entitled *Analytical Notes on Galatians* published in 1979. Even if readers have the original commentary, it would be worth investing in this new edition. It has several enhancements. First, it is completely re-typeset, making it more reader friendly. There are insightful quotations sprinkled throughout by grace-oriented Bible teachers of the past. There are ten very helpful doctrinal summaries at various points on such topics as "Apostleship," "7 Key Aspects of Justification," "Legalism," "The Doctrine of the Believer's Relationship to the Mosaic Law," "Understanding Spirituality," etc. In addition, fourteen new graphics have been added which illustrate the truths explained in the text.

Though I personally own many commentaries on Galatians, in my estimation, this is the most useful at capturing Paul's flow of thought and accurately interpreting the text. If a pastor, teacher, or student were to limit his commentaries on Galatians to just five, this one should be included. During my own pastoral teaching of Galatians this is one commentary that has remained "on my desk" instead of "on the shelf."

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*Editor's Note:* This review has been adapted and revised from one that appeared originally in *The Grace Family Journal* (July-Aug 1999), p. 23. It is used with permission.

*Are You Stone Deaf to the Spirit or Rediscovering God.* By R.T. Kendall. Scotland, U.K.: Christian Focus Publications, 1994. 255 pp. Paper.

For nearly 2,000 years, Hebrews 6:4-6 has been a theological battleground. The reason being, this passage presents grave difficulties for evangelicalism's two most prominent theological systems: Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinists teach that saved people cannot fall away from grace and will always persevere in their faith. However, Hebrews 6:6 says otherwise. Arminians teach that saved people can fall away from grace but can be restored once again to salvation. Yet, Hebrews 6:6 says otherwise. Obviously, this is one of those passages where most interpreters find themselves in a bit of an exegetical "pickle."

In the course of his book, *Are You Stone Deaf to the Spirit or Rediscovering God*, Kendall suggests another way to understand Hebrews 6:4-6. His view is a hybrid interpretation, which combines the strengths of both Calvinism and Arminianism. Although Reformed in his theology, Kendall does not carry Reformed thought to its final conclusion (pp. 145-46). On the contrary, he acknowledges the reality that some saints will not persevere and "many converted people today will suffer loss and be saved by fire at the judgment seat of Christ" (p. 24).

There are several strengths that should also be mentioned. First, this is an in-depth, user-friendly commentary on Hebrews 5:11-6:20. It is quite possibly the finest treatment on this section of Hebrews in print. Although the focus of this book is Hebrews 5:11-6:20, it is the labor of a ten-year exposition of Hebrews at a Friday evening Bible Study at Westminster Chapel.

Second, Kendall motivates the reader to seek a more intimate walk with Christ. Although this book is first and foremost doctrinal and exegetical, it is also spiritual. While Kendall is a gifted intellect (Ph.D. Oxford), what makes him extraordinary is his unique ability to write devotionally and expositively. This is illustrated when he writes, "What I want this book to do for you is to give you a hunger for more of God than you have ever had—with the hope your life will be transformed afresh" (p. 6).

Third, Kendall is very much grace-oriented. He poignantly writes, "To believe that you are saved by the death of Christ alone, there are



not many people who really believe that. They say they do, and then insist that you need to have works to show it" (p. 64). He also makes a clear distinction between salvation and reward: "Salvation is by faith plus nothing; inheriting the promise is by faith plus patience" (p. 187).

Fourth, Kendall expresses great concern for believers who lack assurance. He writes: "I have been convinced for many years that it is the devil's wish that Christians would always be bothered by the problem of whether they are saved, so that they will stay in that condition, and never be of any use to God. As long as people are still wondering whether they are saved, they are not going to do anything" (p. 111).

Finally, Kendall articulates his view of salvific repentance effectively. He suggests that repentance is "agreeing with God; it is saying, I was wrong; it is simply changing the way you were thinking, which leads to changing the way you were living" (p. 62). He adds, "repentance is renouncement. A renunciation of all that I thought would save me" (p. 63).

Although this book is exceptional, there is at least one issue with which this reviewer takes exception. While discussing the "instructions about baptism" in Hebrews 6:2a, Kendall writes: "As for the time the baptism of the Spirit takes place, I think you can make the case that in some cases it takes place at conversion; and in many cases, probably most, it takes place after conversion" (p. 75). In light of 1 Cor 12:13 and the transitional nature of the Book of Acts, it is clear that the baptism of the Spirit now always occurs at the moment of faith.

Throughout his entire work, Kendall remains true to the text and resolves difficulties that past interpreters have wrestled with. This book is one of the most spiritually challenging and exegetically insightful works that this reviewer has read.

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***When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations.***

By Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997, 365 pp. Cloth, \$24.95.

*When Cultists Ask* is a companion volume to *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* by Norman Geisler and Tom Howe, and *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook of Christian Evidence* by Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks. The aim of *When Cultists Ask* is to catalog and answer many misinterpretations of the Scripture set forth by various sects and cults to justify their own aberrant beliefs and behaviors. This book certainly hits the mark, having many excellent features.

First, the introduction is a very helpful overview of cults. It succinctly defines the term “cult” and explains what sort of doctrinal and sociological characteristics are generally associated with the cults. Also included is helpful information about cults such as their methodology, reasons for their rapid growth, and the spiritual, psychological, and physical dangers cults pose for their members.

Second, the general format makes this reference very easy to use. Organized in biblical order from Genesis through Revelation, the book deals with the misinterpretations in the order in which they appear in the Bible. Geisler and Rhodes list the passage that is misinterpreted by a cult, explain the misinterpretation, and then give the correct interpretation of the passage.

Third, not only are the misinterpretations of mainstream cults such as Mormons, Oneness Pentecostals, and Jehovah’s Witnesses included and answered, but the authors admirably include and answer other groups, which, though not strictly labeled as “cults,” have aspects of their theology which are cultic. This, in my opinion, is a brave and necessary strategy in this day when unbridled ecumenicalism is advocated above the truth.

Fourth, the index, which is divided into three main sections, is very helpful and easy to use. Geisler and Rhodes have not only compiled an index of the specific verses misinterpreted by the cults (i.e., “John 1:1,” “Mark 16:16,”), but they have also indexed the misinterpretations by topic (i.e., “Baptism,” “Salvation,” “Deity of Christ”) and by specific religious group (i.e., “Mormons,” “Jehovah’s Witnesses”). This is especially helpful if the book is being used as an aid in witnessing to cultists.



Fifth, the book includes a comprehensive bibliography that contains both primary and secondary references for further study of the groups included in the book.

Finally, the authors provide a strong defense of the essentials of the Christian faith such as the nature of God, the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the physical resurrection, the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, and, especially, salvation by faith alone. Thus, this book addresses, from an evangelical viewpoint, many topics that would interest and benefit members of GES. Such topics include salvation by faith alone, the nature of faith, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as Savior, baptismal regeneration, universalism, salvation by works, postmortem conversion, reincarnation, purgatory, annihilationism, soul sleep, eternal rewards, immortality of the soul, and apostasy.

For example, Geisler and Rhodes spend much energy defending salvation by faith alone, since it is one of the main doctrines that every cult denies. They make many clear statements concerning the free gift of eternal life with which GES supporters would certainly agree. For instance, in addressing the claims made by many cults that one must be baptized to be saved, the authors state, "Not once in the entire Gospel of John, written explicitly so that people could believe and be saved (John 20:31) is baptism noted as a condition of salvation. Rather, this Gospel instructs people to 'believe' to be saved (cf. John 3:16, 18, 36)" (p. 196). Also, Geisler and Rhodes claim, "The simple truth is that no works *of any kind* merit salvation. Eternal life is a free gift received only by faith (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Rom. 6:23)" (p. 214). There are many more clear statements throughout the book supporting salvation as a free gift.

There are, however, a few statements with which members of GES might disagree. For instance, the authors affirm that "true faith" *will* result in good works. Commenting on Jas 2:21, they claim that a true faith will produce fruit as "proof of justification." In other words, if one has true faith, they will not fail to do good works. If one fails to do good works, then one has a false faith and reason to doubt his salvation. This seems more congruent with Lordship Salvation than the Free Grace position. Many Free Grace theologians, however, see this passage as contrasting a living faith with a dead faith rather than a true faith with a false faith. Works are the catalyst that cause a faith to be alive, active, and profitable, and a Christian who does not do good works is in danger

of being judged by God both temporally through punishment here on earth and eternally through loss of rewards.

This book is a “must have” for anyone who is interested in sharing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with those who are trapped in the theological and sociological quicksand of the cults. Not only will it help believers defend the faith against the growing number of cultists around the world, it will also help them better understand and appreciate the foundational doctrines of the historic Christian faith.

**Jeffrey M. Spencer**

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***Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics.*** By Norman L. Geisler. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999. 841 pp. Cloth, \$49.95.

Baker Book House has several excellent reference works that compose their Baker Reference Library. No doubt, many *JOTGES* readers are familiar with some of these popular works including the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, and *Topical Analysis of the Bible*, all edited by Walter Elwell.

The *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* by Dr. Norman Geisler is the latest work to be released into the Baker Reference Library. In short, this work captures a lifetime of Dr. Geisler’s study in the area of philosophy, theology, and Christian apologetics and is an ideal resource for any believer who is interested in obeying the biblical mandate to defend the faith (1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 3).

*The Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* has a multi-faceted presentation of Christian apologetic evidences. First, Dr. Geisler provides an abundance of positive apologetic evidence. “Positive Apologetics” is the presentation of philosophical, theological, and biblical evidence that defends the Christian faith as the only true faith. Foundational philosophical questions such as “Is truth absolute or relative?,” “Is the use of logic valid in matters of faith?,” and “Does God exist, and, if so, what is He like?” are answered with precision and clarity. Also, Geisler provides theological and biblical answers for many of the challenging questions raised against the faith such as



"Is the Bible the reliable Word of God?," "Did Jesus really rise from the dead?," or "Is Jesus God?" Indeed, much of the encyclopedia is concerned with the presentation of the overwhelming amount of evidence that proves Christianity is the one true faith.

Second, the author attacks false belief systems by presenting negative apologetic evidence. "Negative Apologetics" is the presentation of evidence that exposes the fallacies of non-Christian philosophies and theologies. For instance, Geisler ably answers philosophical objections to the Christian faith such as the Problem of Evil, an atheistic objection to theistic proofs for the existence of God. Also, excellent argumentation is given against Atheism, Deism, Pantheism, Panentheism, Polytheism, and Finite Godism—the worldviews that compete against the Christian theistic worldview. Moreover, Geisler defends the Christian faith against opposing theologies such as Islam, New Age, the Jesus Seminar, and religious pluralism. For instance, he gives convincing argumentation that the Qu'ran cannot be divinely inspired. Also, the book includes overviews and evaluations of such non-Christian doctrines as reincarnation, apparitions of Mary, annihilationism, universalism, and modalism. With accuracy and clarity, Dr. Geisler defends the Christian faith against these, and many other objections that are countering the Christian faith in the marketplace of ideas.

Third, there is helpful information on Christian philosophers and theologians and the important contributions made by them. For example, philosophers/ theologians Augustine, Aquinas, and Anselm are featured along with succinct presentations of some of their beliefs, such as their arguments for the existence of God, their views on man, faith and reason, and truth. Also, Geisler has articles about reformation theologians such as Calvin and Luther, highlighting the contributions to apologetics made by each. Other Christian philosophers and theologians that have been included are Simon Greenleaf, C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, Soren Kierkegaard, and Jonathan Edwards.

Fourth, Geisler reveals insightful information concerning non-Christian philosophers and theologians. He presents and answers the views of prominent atheists such as Anthony Flew, Carl Sagan, Jean Paul Sartre, Bertrand Russell, Ayn Rand, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. Moreover, he gives much space to answering objections to the Christian faith that are derived from an atheistic world view, such as evolution. Also, included are answers to other non-atheistic

philosophers and theologians such as the “prophet” Nostradamus, the founder of Islam, Muhammad, Finite Godist William James, Universalist John Hick, and Jewish theologian, Martin Buber.

The primary aim of this encyclopedia is to present and defend the Christian faith against all opposing philosophical and theological points of view. Thus, the issues that are precious to the Free Grace camp are not dealt with in this volume. Nevertheless, Dr. Geisler has provided a fine apologetic tool for every believer who is interested in doing solid “pre-evangelistic” work to clear away any intellectual barriers an unbeliever may have to the Christian faith. Truly, this book has so much excellent and useful content that this review barely scratches the surface. I highly recommend *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*.

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## PERIODICAL REVIEWS

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**“God is Love,”** D. A. Carson, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (April-June 1999), 131-42.

Carson originally presented this material at Dallas Theological Seminary at the W. H. Griffith Thomas Lectures in February of 1998. This is the second article in a four part series entitled, “The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God.” Dr. Carson allows that this might be cause for surprise, although after reading Carson’s article, the love of God does seem more difficult to understand than it was before!

In “God is Love,” Carson labors to show what the expression “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16) actually means. He explained that we cannot follow the “classic treatment” by Anders Nygren of investing “the *agapaō* word-group with theological weight” (p. 131). Most *JOTGES* readers will be familiar with the suggestion that *agapaō* refers to willed love, *phileō* to emotional love, and *erōs* (which is not found in the NT) to sexual erotic love (p. 131). Carson rejects the notion that God’s love is only expressed by the *agapao*, word-group” (p. 132). He cites seven difficulties with that claim (pp. 132-34). Carson attributes many of these mistakes to “methodologically flawed word studies” (p. 134).

There is no doubt that there are things here with which we can readily agree; but words are slippery things, and we must be careful. It is easy to conclude that there is nothing to what we have been taught about the distinctions in meanings between the three Greek words for love, that those traditional distinctions are completely invalid. As we said, we must take care. For example, the word *epiginōskō* is often used “with no emphasis on the [preposition], essentially = *ginōskein*” (S.v. “*ginōskein*,” BAGD, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], 291). There are times, however, when in a given context the core meaning of the word is manifest such as in 1 Cor 13:12 where *ginōskō* means simply “to know” and *epiginōskō* means to “*know exactly, completely, through and through*,” (BAGD, 291), with the meaning of the prepositional prefix coming through.



So also, are we to maintain that there is no distinction in the meanings of *agapaō* and *phileō* in John 21:15-17? If so, many sermons on that text have just been eviscerated! Not that this is necessarily bad, but the distinctions between those two words there *do* seem to be maintained with *agapaō* clearly being the stronger. They bring something to the context and the context brings something to them. Here the context brings out the latent distinction in the meanings of those two words. It does not follow that these distinctions are *always* maintained.

Dr. Carson compels us to pay close attention to the context. That is “how to proceed.” We agree. It seems to me that this should not cause us to be suspicious of word studies. They are valuable for insight into the Scriptures. We can protect ourselves from “methodologically flawed” word studies simply by paying attention to every context where the word is found. *Any* kind of Bible study is “methodologically flawed” if it disregards the context.

Carson also examines the “intra-Trinitarian love of God” based on John 5:16-30. He correctly observes that we can learn something of the love of God by examining the fact that “the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does” (v 20).

The author then moves to the extension of this “intra-Trinitarian” love to men in referring to John 15:19 where “Jesus tells His disciples, ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.’” In His relationship of love to the Father, Jesus, by perfect obedience, remained “in His love” (15:10). It follows that “if we love *Him*,” we will obey Him (14:15); here, if we obey Him, “we remain in His love” (15:10). We are then referred to John 15:14 where Jesus told His disciples, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” Carson seems to assume that all believers are friends of Jesus. This fits with the Reformed view of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints which holds that a true believer will essentially live for Christ throughout his or her life and will not ultimately fall away into disobedient living. In this view, if a professing believer falls away from the faith, it shows that he or she was never really saved in the first place. The Bible makes it clear that a believer can do this and still go to heaven (cf. 1 Cor 3:15). Consistent with that view, Jesus holds out the same possibility for His disciples, which is precisely why He said that the disciples were His friends, *if* they did what He commanded them to do.

If believers choose not to obey, though they are justified and bound for heaven, they will not be friends of God in their daily experience,

but will place themselves in an adversarial relationship with Him. James concurs. In writing to believers (cf. "My brethren" in Jas 3:1), he said, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Could anything be clearer? Obviously, believers who choose that path experience broken fellowship with God and can expect divine discipline. Rather than enjoying His love, they will experience His rod. Similarly, Paul said to the Corinthians, "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" (1 Cor 4:21).

Carson's closing statement that "God is love; and we are the friends of God" (p. 142), is partially rooted in his view of John 15:15: "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." He comments that believers are Jesus' friends "because He has made known to them all He learned from the Father" (p. 142). However, the fact that Jesus made known to the disciples all these things was not the *basis* of their being called friends by Him, but the *hoti* clause offers *evidence* that it was so and therefore expresses the *result* (BAGD, 589) of the friendship. The *basis* of their friendship with Him was that they had fulfilled the condition for it ("if you do what I command you," cf. v 14b; emphasis added). It does not necessarily follow that because Jesus was perfectly obedient to His Father, and the disciples were obedient enough to be called Jesus' friends, that *all* the children of God will be so obedient. It was not guaranteed that the disciples would finish well, thus the exhortation to them here. Nor is it guaranteed to us. God is love; and we are His friends *if* we do what He commands us as His children.

This article is hardly a strong statement of Lordship Salvation, or of assurance by good works. By all means read this article, as well as the other three in the series. I have received much help from the writings of D. A. Carson over the years, particularly in his work on Matthew in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Obviously, one must bear in mind his perspective as contrary to the Free Grace view, but of course we *always* have to be vigilant about that!

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**“The Theology of Evangelism: Introduction and Biblical Principles of Evangelism,”** John C. Beck, Jr., *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* (October 1998), 28-47.

Beck wrote his Doctor of Ministry (D. Min.) dissertation at Western Seminary in Portland on this subject. This is the first of three articles which is drawn from his dissertation.

The theology of evangelism surely must center upon and begin with the message of the gospel. Unfortunately, Beck does not do this in this article. (He will do this in a subsequent article.) In fact, in an editor's note we learn “This article does not address the content of the gospel” (p. 29n).

The next step in any theology of evangelism should be, it seems, to examine various evangelistic encounters as recorded in Scripture. Jesus' encounters with Nicodemus (John 3), the woman at the well (John 4), and Martha (John 11), all come to mind, as does Paul's famous exchange with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-31). Peter's divine appointment with Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) would be fruitful material as well. Beck discusses none of these in this article, though it is likely he will in two promised future articles, one on the presentation of the gospel and one on apologetics.

After some introductory material, the author discusses this subject under three major headings drawn from the NT: principles from the Gospels, principles from Acts, and principles from the epistles. From the Gospels, a number of principles are discerned, including: the Christian serves a seeking God (Matt 28:18-20), we should ask appropriate questions (Matt 21:24; 22:41), and we should have a harvest mindset (Matt 9:36-38). These are helpful observations. Unfortunately, there is very little discussion of these or other NT texts. They are simply mentioned as proof texts. This is true of the use of Scripture in the entire article. I would like to have seen some discussion of these texts. Fewer texts, with more interaction, would have been preferable.

Acts 26:29 is used to teach that “the gospel...includes an invitation to receive Christ. Without an invitation to receive Christ, the gospel has not been completely presented” (p. 38). Yet here is what Acts 26:29 says, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.” First, it is hard to see in this verse “an invitation to receive Christ.” Paul is expressing a desire not only for Agrippa's

salvation, but also that he would gain Christian maturity. Second, if the gospel is not completely presented without an invitation, then Paul didn't present the gospel completely to the Philippian jailer, nor Peter to Cornelius and his household, nor the Lord Jesus to Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and Martha. Indeed, one is hard pressed to find even one example anywhere in the NT of an "invitation."

In the NT epistles, Beck cites various principles of evangelism, including, becoming all things to all men (1 Cor 9:19-22), being motivated by the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:10-15), and the value in seeing oneself as an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 5:16-21).

While *JOTGES* readers may wish for more interaction with Scripture, there is helpful material in this article. Possibly one of its greatest benefits would be to motivate all of us to consider what the NT teaches on this subject and how we might apply it in our own lives and teach it to others. Beck should be commended for tackling something that few have undertaken.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

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**"The Pillar and the Throne in Revelation 3:12, 21,"** Daniel K. K. Wong, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1999), 297-307.

The identity of the overcomer of Revelation 2-3 is a very important issue in the gospel debate. While it is possible for a Free Grace person to conclude that all believers are overcomers in some sense (and some do), it is not really possible for a Lordship Salvation person to conclude that only *some* believers are overcomers. Their theology demands that there be no significant failure in the Christian life.

It is unclear as to where the author stands on the gospel debate. However, the article is well written and the subject matter addressed is easy to follow.

Wong's conclusion is that all believers are overcomers: "The people who will receive these blessings are all true believers. The many lines of evidence from the text and context, as well as the nature of the



rewards promised, point consistently to this conclusion" (p. 307). *JOTGES* readers will note the reference to "all *true* believers" (see also p. 305 and *real* versus *false* believers).

Concerning the nature of the rewards, the author is a bit ambivalent on what being a pillar in God's temple (Rev 3:12) symbolizes. He suggests that it refers to "the overcomers' permanent security in eternity, as well as their privilege of forever belonging to and being identified with God, the city of God, the Son of God, and all that is consistent with their names" (p. 307). He mentions, but rejects, what is to this reviewer the more plausible interpretation, that it refers to "the overcomer's prominent position in eternity" (p. 300). In a footnote he cites a thesis written by GES member Reagan Benedict in defense of his view. Though Wong acknowledges that pillars are used in the NT and in Jewish literature to refer to important leaders, he adopts a different conclusion than the one presented by Benedict. Why?

Since Wong has already determined that all believers are overcomers, he must reject any interpretation that requires the overcomers to be a faithful group of believers. Obviously the idea that some will have special prominence in the kingdom must thus be rejected. This leads to an interpretation that is hardly a "reward." All believers are eternally secure by the grace gift of God. Their works have absolutely no bearing on their security.

Concerning what it signifies to sit with Christ on His throne, Wong is clear. He sees this as referring to ruling with Christ both in the millennium and in the eternal kingdom (pp. 304-307). Once again, however, he must conclude that this is true of all believers—all *true* believers—since all believers are overcomers.

Wong's reasoning here is well worth reading. I especially point all interested readers to pages 304-305. He makes his case well, if one adopts his interpretations of other passages. For example, he says that all believers must reign, for "to see it as a privilege for only a special class among the saved is tantamount to arguing for a partial rapture, which Scripture nowhere teaches (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-17)" (p. 304).

Why does Wong say this? The reason is that his understanding of Rev 3:10 demands it. That verse reads, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world..." If all believers are raptured—and they are (1 Thess 5:10), then this verse seemingly requires that all

believers persevere. And since all who persevere will reign with Christ (Rev 2:26), all will reign.

Unfortunately, there are many Scriptures which make it clear that not all believers persevere (e.g., Luke 8:13; 1 Cor 3:1-3; 11:30; Heb 6:4-8; Jas 5:19-20; 1 John 5:16). And other passages make it clear that not all believers reign with Christ (Luke 19:11-27; 2 Tim 2:12).

While there are various explanations of this verse, Wong is evidently unaware of an unpublished article by John Niemela in which he, in my estimation, proves that we have improperly punctuated Rev 3:9-10.

The first part of verse 10—"because you have kept My command to persevere"—should be connected with verse 9 and not with verse 10. Thus the second half of verse 9 should read: "I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you *because you have kept My command to persevere.*" Then verse 10 should begin, "I also will keep you from the hour of trial..." The promise of the Rapture is unconditional. The Rapture is in no way conditioned upon perseverance.

At this point Wong interacts briefly with an objection by Jody Dillow in his book *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. Wong quotes Dillow as saying, "If all believers are winners and will receive the reward, it is difficult to see how the warnings in verse 11 as well as in Revelation 2-3 have any relevance to them" (p. 478). Actually that is not an accurate quote, though it does capture the point Dillow makes. The actual quote is this: "If the overcomer refers to all Christians, it is difficult to see how the warnings have any reference to them."

The misquote aside, Wong throws aside Dillow's objection by appealing to the distinction between *real* versus *false* believers. Wong suggests that both types of believers "mingle together" in churches. "The truly saved live by faith that overcomes in a life marked by purity...To them, the warnings are a reminder to endure and a guide on what to do and what to avoid" (p. 305).

This is theological doublespeak. Why do those who cannot possibly fail to endure need "a reminder to endure"? Of course, Wong may mean that no one can be certain if he or she is a *real* believer prior to death. Hence these passages are threats of eternal condemnation that should spur one on to perseverance. He does go on to say that some believers do live for a time like the unsaved, but that they eventually repent: "their repentance from carnal living can itself be indicative



that their claim as Christians is real” (p. 305). If the author is suggesting that no one can be sure he is a true believer prior to death, and that does seem to be the case, then one wonders why the motivation to persevere would not be to make it to heaven. And if that is the case, would not the person think he was contributing to his own salvation? Would this not be works salvation? The author does not address these points, but we wish he had.

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**  
**THE PASSION**  
**OF THE APOSTLE JOHN**

*A Hymn about God's Grace in Christ from The Gospel of John*

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Word became the God-Man, in flesh, full of grace and truth from heaven;  
Jesus dwelt among us, true light, we beheld His glory!  
God so loved the whole world, He gave, His begotten Son to save us;  
Those who only **trust** Him, He saves, when they trust **Him** only!

Love from Son and Father, grows deep, if we love our Savior deeply;  
Christ is manifested, to us, if His words we're keeping!  
Full joy comes from Jesus, true vine, if in Him we are abiding;  
Jesus said He calls us, His friends, if we love each other!

Saying "It is finished," He died, making satisfact'ry payment;  
Giving up His spirit, His life, took our place in judgment!  
God the loving Father, looked down, separated from our Savior;  
God the just Judge canceled, our debt, "paid in full" forever!

Death could not contain Him, He rose, proving He is the Messiah;  
Son of God—the Savior, gives life, guaranteed by promise!  
Life that's everlasting, God gave, in the moment we believed Him;  
More grace after each grace, God gives, life that's more abundant!

Refrain

Jesus is the bread of life, the living water: gift of God;  
We will never hunger, thirst, our destination—certain!  
We have confidence in Jesus Christ our Savior;  
Everlasting life was given to us, when persuaded that His guarantee  
is true!

Amen, Amen.



*The Passion of the Apostle John* (alternate title: *Confidence in Christ*) seeks to highlight the apostle John's primary purpose in writing the Fourth Gospel. John wrote the only book of the Bible that has as its primary purpose that we may have eternal life through faith in Christ, the Guarantor of that life (John 20:31). It is not until John's other writings, The Epistles of John and Revelation, that Christian growth through fellowship and encouragement toward perseverance are primary themes.

Verse one of the hymn relates God's appearance on earth through the incarnation of Christ. God made Himself known as the loving God who provides eternal life and salvation as a gift received through faith in Christ. Verses three and four address the death and resurrection of Christ which provide satisfactory remedy for the sin of humanity, authenticate Jesus' role as Savior and Christ, and give us everlasting life the moment we believe Him.

Verse two of the hymn reflects a theme that is secondary to John's immediate purpose. He writes that the experience of joy through growth in discipleship is conditional upon our continued faith and participation in obedience and love. John's secondary theme is especially evident in chapters 13-17 of his Gospel. Our response as a child of God to this theme carries with it its own set of consequences, good or bad. The result of a life of discipleship is joy, fruitfulness, and friendship with God. The result of a life devoid of discipleship is the loss of joy, fruitfulness, and friendship with God. John records Jesus' pertinent principle in John 13:17. He said, "If you know these things, blessed [*happy*] are you if you *do* them" (italics added). The reverse is also true. We won't be happy, blessed, or joyful if we don't obey Jesus' commands. But eternal condemnation is *not* one of the consequences of mediocrity, apathy, or even rebellion. Eternal condemnation results from not having believed the promise of everlasting life (John 3:18).

Clarity of the relationship between John's primary and secondary themes in The Gospel of John is critical to personal stability and confidence in living the Christian life. Consequently, that relationship is being given disproportionate comment here. Some people think that John insists that the living out of this theme of discipleship is an automatic, supernatural outcome of the presence of eternal life and necessary in order to authenticate the presence of eternal life. Others assert that discipleship is necessary even to maintain the continuance of eternal life. Rather, the apostle John maintains a distinction between

birth through faith alone and growth through discipleship. This distinction is reflected particularly in the hymn's refrain. Though distinct, John's primary and secondary themes *are* related: we cannot grow in discipleship unless first we have been born from above.

The refrain of the hymn underscores and celebrates the possession of God's gift of life through one moment of faith in Christ, emblematically portrayed, in Christ's words, as one taste of the bread of life, or as one drink of the living water. One taste or drink satisfies eternally (John 6:35). Once having believed, we can venture into the hardships of life on earth with confidence in Jesus Christ because there is absolute certainty of eternity with God and absolute freedom from everlasting condemnation (John 5:24). The refrain closes with a double *amen*, reflecting Jesus' strong affirmation of some of His own statements variously translated "truly, truly" or "most assuredly" (John 3:3; 5:24, 25; 6:47, 53).

Even if one were in rebellion as a child of God, he or she could experience underlying certainty about his or her eternal and heavenly destination. He would be believing that the promised gift of everlasting life was already his when he believed that Christ's guarantee is true. However, he would not be able to enjoy confidence in Christ for daily living (John 15:5-6). Neither would he anticipate with confidence Christ's evaluation of the quality of his life at the believers' judgment (1 John 2:28). Only through confession of sins and the attendant forgiveness from God (1 John 1:9) would he be able to enjoy living his eternal life. Upon confession, he could then sing in full confidence and joy again the primary theme of the Gospel of John as rendered in the hymn, and especially in its refrain.

The hymn is set to the stately tune of *St. Anthony Chorale*, a piece ascribed to Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), but more well known from a work by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) entitled *Variations On a Theme by Haydn*. The hymn is arranged by my son, Aaron Kenagy, a graduate of Willamette University. This hymn is written in dedication to the memory of my mother, Marie G. Kenagy (1921-1997), who told me in response to a question about heaven at the age of 7, that I would have everlasting life if I believed in Jesus. I believed.



# The Passion of the Apostle John

*And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true;  
and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.*

From: *The Gospel According to John*  
Alternate Title: *Confidence in Christ*  
In Memoriam: Marie G. Kenagy, 1921–1997  
Lyrics: Bob Kenagy, 1948–

(John 19:35, NKJV)

St. Anthony Chorale  
Franz Joseph Haydn, 1732–1809  
Variations: Johannes Brahms, 1833–1897  
Arrangement: Aaron Kenagy, 1977–

Andante  $\text{♩} = 60$

1. Word be-came the God-Man, in flesh, full of grace and truth from heav-en;  
2. Love from Son and Fa-ther, grows deep, if we love our Sav-ior deep-ly;  
3. Say-ing "It is fin-ished," He died, mak-ing sat-is-fac-t'ry pay-ment;  
4. Death could not con-tain Him, He rose, prov-ing He is the Mes-si-ah;

1. Je-sus dwelt a-mong us, true light, we be-held His glo-ry!  
2. Christ is man-i-fest-ed, to us, if His words we're keep-ing!  
3. Giv-ing up His spir-it, His life, took our place in judg-ment!  
4. Son of God—the Sav-ior, gives life, guar-an-tee'd by pro-mise!

1. God so loved the whole world, He gave, His be-got-ten Son to save us;  
2. Full joy comes from Je-sus, true vine, if in Him we are a-bid-ing;  
3. God the lov-ing Fa-ther, looked down, sep-a-rat-ed from our Sav-ior;  
4. Life that's ev-er-last-ing, God gave, in the mo-ment we be-lieved Him;

1. Those who on-ly trust Him, He saves, when they trust Him on-ly!  
2. Je-sus said He calls us, His friends, if we love each oth-er!  
3. God the just Judge can-cel'd, our debt, "paid in full" for-ev-er!  
4. More grace af-ter each grace, God gives, life that's more a-bun-dant!



*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.*

(John 6:47, NKJV)

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

(John 20:30-31, NKJV)

Refrain

Je - sus is the bread of life, the liv - ing wa - ter: gift of God;  
Life, \_\_\_\_\_ Life, \_\_\_\_\_ Life: \_\_\_\_\_ gift of God;

We will nev - er hun - ger, thirst, our des - ti - na - tion— cer - tain!

We have con - fi - dence in Je - sus Christ our Sa - vior;

Ev - er - last - ing life was giv - en to us, when per - suad - ed that His guar - an - tee is true! A - men, A - men.  
A - men, \_\_\_\_\_ A - men, His guar - an - tee is true!



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## BOOKS RECEIVED

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AYCOCK, DON M. *Living by the Fruit of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999. Pp. 128. \$7.99 (paper).

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