

Journal of the  
**GRACE**  
Evangelical Society

---

"Faith Alone In Christ Alone"



**Journal of the**  
**GRACE**  
**EVANGELICAL SOCIETY**

*"Faith Alone in Christ Alone"*

---

<b>VOLUME 13</b>	<b>SPRING 2000</b>	<b>NUMBER 24</b>
------------------	--------------------	------------------

---

<b>Taking a Fresh Look at Some Popular Hymns of the Faith</b> EDITOR	3-10
<b>Evangelical/Roman Catholic Agreement on the Doctrine of Justification and its Ramifications for Grace Theologians</b> PHILIP F. CONGDON	11-23
<b>The Challenge for Spiritual Vision: An Exegesis of Hebrews 12:1-3</b> FREDERIC R. HOWE	25-35
<b>A Voice from the Past: That I May Gain Christ: Philippians 3</b> J. N. DARBY	37-42
<b>Grace in the Arts: C. S. Lewis's Theology: Somewhere between Ransom and Reepicheep</b> JAMES A. TOWNSEND	43-73
<b>Book Reviews</b>	75-81
<b>Periodical Reviews</b>	83-89
<b>Books Received</b>	91-92

**Journal of the  
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY**

Published Semiannually by GES

Editor

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Production

**Cathy Beach**

**Manuscripts, periodical and book reviews, and other communications** should be addressed to Cathy Beach, GES, P.O. Box 167128, Irving TX 75016-7128.

**Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address** should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 167128, Irving, TX 75016-7128. You may call us at (972) 257-1160, fax to (972) 255-3884, or E-mail to [GES@FAITHALONE.ORG](mailto:GES@FAITHALONE.ORG). Subscription Rates: single copy, \$7.50 (U.S.); 1 year, \$15.00; 2 years, \$28.00; 3 years, \$39.00; 4 years, \$48.00. Members of GES receive the Journal at no additional charge beyond the membership dues of \$15.00 (\$10.00 for active full-time student members).

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

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

---

Third-class postage has been paid at Coppell, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 167128, Irving, TX 75016-7128.

---

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

©2000 Grace Evangelical Society



# **TAKING A FRESH LOOK AT SOME POPULAR HYMNS OF THE FAITH**

**BOB WILKIN**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*  
Irving, TX

The Psalms were originally set to music and sung in the temple as part of the worship there. God delights in believers singing praises to Him. The Lord Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn in the Upper Room before they went to the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:30). When the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers about being filled with the Spirit he spoke of “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19). There can be no question but that we as believers should sing to God as part of our regular worship.

There can be a question, however, as to *what* we should sing. In this article I am examining some beloved hymns. My purpose is not to hinder our appreciation of these hymns, but to enhance it. The intent of this article is to challenge each of us to consider if what we are singing is truly honoring to God. And if not, what should we do?

## **SELECTED HYMNS**

### ***Victory in Jesus*<sup>1</sup>**

*Victory in Jesus* is a great hymn. Yet the words, “Then I repented of my sins and won the victory,” are confusing.

The first verse, in which this line appears, concerns how a person comes to be born again. It reads:

I heard an old, old story, how a Savior came from glory,  
How He gave His life on Calvary to save a wretch like me;  
I heard about His groaning, of His precious blood’s atoning,  
Then I repented of my sins and won the victory.

<sup>1</sup> Hymn #473 in *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration* (Waco, TX: Word Music, 1986). All hymns cited in this article are taken from this hymnal.

That second line speaks of Jesus who “gave His life on Calvary to save a wretch like me.” The next makes clear that this concerns eternal salvation: “I heard about His groaning, of His precious blood’s atoning.” Then comes the line meant to indicate what we must do to have eternal salvation: “Then I repented of my sins and won the victory.”

The “victory in Jesus” spoken of is the gaining of eternal life. While it is true that repentance may precede faith, repenting of *one’s sins* is not a condition of eternal life.<sup>2</sup>

There is one other possible reference to what we must do to be saved in verse two:

I heard about His healing, of His cleansing pow’r revealing,  
How He made the lame to walk again and caused the blind to see;  
And then I cried, “Dear Jesus, come and heal my broken spirit.”  
And somehow Jesus came and bro’t to me the victory.

Does that verse concern justification? Or does it express deliverance from problems in this life? The latter is most certainly the case. And the third line in that verse seems to suggest that prayer is the means by which we can gain God’s healing of our damaged psyches.

So, this hymn says nothing about believing. The only thing it mentions in terms of what we must do to be saved is repenting of our sins.

Whenever we sing this song at church, I substitute the words “Then *I believed in the Lord...*” for “Then *I repented of my sins...*” A person could also sing, “Then *I trusted in the Lord* and won the victory.”

### ***To God Be the Glory***<sup>3</sup>

One of the great hymns of the faith is *To God Be the Glory*.

Sadly one little word in this fine hymn makes it a bit misleading. Take a close look at the second verse:

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood!  
To every believer the promise of God;  
The vilest offender who truly believes,  
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

<sup>2</sup>I realize some Free Grace people define repentance as a change of mind about Christ and see it as a synonym for faith. However, notice that this doesn’t just speak of repenting, but of repenting *of my sins*. Unless a person understood this to mean something like, “Then I recognized I was a sinner in need of salvation,” this is clearly not a condition of eternal life.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Hymn #66.

Instead of the simple and biblically accurate “the vilest offender who *simply* believes,” the third line reads, “The vilest offender who *truly* believes.” Of course, Fanny Crosby, the lyricist, was not writing in a time of great gospel debate. If she were, I believe she would have chosen a different word than *truly*. In today’s climate of *true* versus *false* faith, this is a very unfortunate choice.

### *Jesus Is Coming Again*<sup>4</sup>

When I racewalked the Dallas White Rock Marathon in December of 1998, I chose the chorus of this hymn, *Jesus Is Coming Again*, to sing from time to time over the five and one half hours I was on the course. (Yes, I did finish!)

Coming again, Coming again;  
May be morning, may be noon, May be evening it may be soon!  
Coming again, Coming again;  
O what a wonderful day it will be—Jesus is coming again!

The third verse in this hymn is potentially confusing:

Standing before Him at last,  
Trial and trouble all past,  
Crowns at His feet we will cast—  
Jesus is coming again!

The reference to casting crowns at the feet of the Lord is based on an improper understanding of Rev 4:9-11, which reads:

*Whenever* the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, *and cast their crowns before the throne*, saying:

“You are worthy, O Lord,  
To receive glory and honor and power;  
For You created all things,  
And by Your will they exist  
and were created.”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Hymn #239.



Commonly the reference to crown casting is understood to mean that at the Judgment Seat of Christ believers will give back the crowns they receive. They will place them at the feet of Jesus, before His throne. These crowns, representing all rewards given, will return to their rightful owner. Thus no believer will have any more glory, honor, or power in the millennial or eternal kingdom than any other believer will.<sup>5</sup>

That understanding is not suggested by the Bible verses. Notice first of all the word *whenever*. This is a drama that takes place *repeatedly*. It is not a one-time event. There is no hint here that one of the times it occurs is at the Judgment Seat of Christ. However, the fact that it is a repeated event shows that the crowns are not permanently given away. They are given back to the possessors, later to be placed at Jesus' feet again.

Notice too the ones who are doing the casting: "the twenty-four elders." And who are they? In Rev 7:11 they are listed in the midst of angels and the four living creatures: "All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God." The four living creatures are angelic beings. So, obviously, are the angels. Thus it is extremely likely that the twenty-four elders are as well.

Why *twenty-four* elders? I believe it is because they represent Israel with its twelve tribes, and the church with its twelve apostles.<sup>6</sup> Therefore whenever they cast their crowns at Jesus' feet, they symbolically are showing that all glory, honor, and power is derived from Him. Thus while *we* won't be doing the crown casting, our sentiments will certainly be reflected in the words and actions of the twenty-four elders.

Clearly from many passages (e.g., Matt 6:19-21; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:17, 26) some believers will have treasure, rulership, and other rewards, and some will not. The crown casting of Rev 4:9-11 does not change that.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible, of course, to conclude that believers will give up their crowns and yet retain their authority, treasure, etc. However, very few people who believe we will give back our crowns hold that view so I have stated the conclusion to which *most* people who hold this view come.

<sup>6</sup> There is nothing inherent in this scene to exclude the participants from being human beings, other than the eternal nature of the event. The reason I point out that these are angelic beings is because Scripture indicates they are, not because human beings couldn't do it.

Therefore, when we sing the line “crowns at His feet *we will cast*,” I suggest we realize that we won’t be giving back our rewards. However, the point is, we should be thinking when we see this line that the Lord Jesus is the One from whom all glory, honor, and power flow. He is the worthy One. We will only share those things because He has graciously chosen to reward His children for their service.

### *At the Cross*<sup>7</sup>

Another wonderful hymn is *At the Cross*. The words of the song give an outstanding portrayal of the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross. They speak of the blood of Christ, of His death, His love, our sinfulness, and the substitutionary nature of the cross. The last verse has a terrific statement of the freeness of the gospel:

But drops of grief can ne’er repay  
The debt of love I owe:  
Here, Lord, I give myself away—  
‘Tis all that I can do!

That is a wonderful statement of the gratitude we should feel for what Christ did for us on the cross.

The chorus, however, ends with a discomfiting statement about being happy all day long:

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light  
And the burden of my heart rolled away—  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day!

Of course, not all believers are always “happy all the day!” The reception of eternal life does not eliminate all problems in this life. Freedom from pain is yet future for the believer (Rev 21:4).

But what does the hymn mean by the words, “And now I am happy all the day”? I think it probably means something like this: “And now I am joyful whenever I focus my attention on the love of God reflected in Christ’s death on the cross for me.” Happiness is dependent on circumstances. Joyfulness is not. A believer can be in the midst of great grief and yet be joyful. Our faith should be the foundation of a stable life that can withstand great trials. Whether we do withstand those trials

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Hymn #188.

properly, however, depends on our spiritual strength. Have we grown strong in the faith by regular feeding on God's Word? Do we regularly focus on the Lord Jesus? Have we fallen deeply in love with Him? We can indeed be joyful all day long if our focus is on our blessed Savior.

### ***When We All Get to Heaven*<sup>8</sup>**

*When We All Get to Heaven* is another splendid hymn. It speaks of God's mercy and grace and challenges us to "be true and faithful, trusting, serving every day" in light of our soon entrance into His presence.

However, the chorus contains a potentially deceptive statement: "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!" All believers will indeed enjoy the kingdom forever (which, by the way, will be on the new earth, not in heaven as the hymn implies; see Rev 21:1-3ff.). However, the focus of these words is on our first glimpse of Him ("Just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of life repay") suggesting that all believers will be rejoicing upon seeing Christ.

But is that true? Will *all* believers consider the Rapture "a day of rejoicing"? For the overcoming believer rejoicing is certain. But not for the faithless believer (2 Tim 2:12-13).

John presents his believing readers with two options:

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming (1 John 2:28).

Some believers will have confidence when they see Christ. Some will have shame!

We see the same thing in many of the parables of the Lord. Some will hear His "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19:17). Some will hear, "You wicked servant" (Luke 19:22; compare Matt 24:45-51; 25:14-30.)

When we sing this chorus, we should realize that meeting the Lord will be a day of rejoicing only if we have endured in our profession of faith in Christ. Make no mistake about what I'm suggesting here. I'm not saying that any believer will be disappointed to be with the Lord. However, the unfaithful believer will have some initial shame and tears. Though it will be short lived, it will be real.

We should let this hymn remind us of our need to focus on Christ's soon return so that indeed it will be a day of rejoicing for us.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Hymn #542.



## ADVICE TO WORSHIP LEADERS

### HYMNS THAT AREN'T COPYRIGHTED

Since uncopyrighted hymns are now public domain, you are free to change the inaccurate words and either put the new words on overheads or else print out the new words and put them in the bulletin.

I suggest the worship leader indicate that this is a change from the way the song was originally written. Taking a moment to explain why the word or phrase is being changed might be helpful. This serves several purposes. It glorifies God by singing words that are theologically accurate. It educates believers and unbelievers. And it reminds all to be thoughtful of the words they are singing. Words matter.

### HYMNS THAT ARE COPYRIGHTED

There are definite restrictions on what a church can do with a song that is copyrighted. It should be noted that for a church to duplicate a copyrighted piece of music, it must first receive approval to do so. Further, if a church wished to change the wording of the song before duplication, it would need to receive permission from the publisher. However, churches are free to *sing* different words, though even here it would be good to request permission from the publisher. The worship leader has the following options:

- Point out the confusing line and explain why it is misleading.
- Suggest that the congregation sing alternate words in place of the confusing words.
- Choose to skip that entire verse (with or without pointing out why).

## ADVICE TO WORSHIPPERS

If you find songs that are basically sound but which contain some unbiblical elements, first, go to your church's worship leader(s) and discuss your concern and the question of what should be done. If they do not agree that something must be done in such cases, then there is no point in bringing up specifics. Then the matter becomes one for the leadership board of the church.

While people might disagree on what is significant enough to be offensive, all boards should agree that if some words are clearly unbiblical then something should be done.

Second, once you find agreement on the general issue, then seek to get a committee in place that evaluates the songs you sing each week. This could be done on a week by week basis. Or, songs that are regularly sung could be evaluated all at once. In addition, involve the congregation in finding lines in songs that are unbiblical.

If you find that some of the board is not bothered by lyrics that suggest Lordship Salvation, for example, then that brings up the opportunity to discuss the gospel with the board. Possibly the board is not united on the issue. Sadly many churches today have some leaders who are Free Grace and some which are Lordship.

Third, if the church doesn't respond to your concerns about misleading lyrics, you must decide what you will do. If the church is Free Grace and simply sings some songs with minor points of confusion, then you could choose the following options:

- Simply sing nothing when you come to the offending word or words.
- Change the words yourself, singing low enough that you don't cause a disturbance.
- Sing the offending words, but think about what they should mean.

Personally I have trouble with the last option, since I am singing something which is wrong in its context. I just can't make myself sing, "Then I repented of my sins and won the victory." I can sing, however, about us casting our crowns at His feet, even though I don't believe that the Scriptures teach we will do that, since that is not a gospel issue and it does not require a rejection of eternal rewards either.

The bottom line is that worship is to be in spirit and in truth. We are not merely to sound good. We are to think about what we are singing. Our songs are to be directed to God in praise. Our minds must be in gear to do this. So think when you sing!

# **EVANGELICAL/ROMAN CATHOLIC AGREEMENT ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS FOR GRACE THEOLOGIANS**

**PHILIP F. CONGDON**

Elgin, IL

On October 7, 1997, a group of Roman Catholic and Evangelical theologians met in New York City to discuss and define a common theological stand on the issue of salvation. This meeting was called to build on the foundation laid by the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium (ECT)* declaration on March 29, 1994. While the signers make it clear that they are not speaking officially for the various religious traditions which they represent, their sheer collective influence (among Evangelicals, Dr. Bill Bright, Dr. Harold O. J. Brown, Charles Colson, Rev. Max Lucado, Dr. Mark Noll, Dr. James I. Packer, and Dr. John Woodbridge; among Roman Catholics, Fr. James J. Buckley, Fr. Avery Dulles, Dr. Peter Kreeft, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, Mr. Michael Novak, and Dr. Robert Louis Wilken) makes it impossible to overlook their conclusions.<sup>1</sup> These were made public in a statement entitled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation" (*TGOS*), published for the first time in the December 8, 1997 issue of *Christianity Today*.<sup>2</sup>

All Christians should rejoice at efforts to clarify misconceptions and increase dialogue between various religious traditions.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, all Christians should fervently insist on faithfulness to revealed

<sup>1</sup>The numbers of evangelical leaders who endorse "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation" can only be surmised, but the impact of such an esteemed group of leaders is significant. See "Evangelicals, Catholics Issue Salvation Accord," *Christianity Today* (January 12, 1998): 61-63.

<sup>2</sup>"Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation," *Christianity Today* (December 8, 1997): 35-38 (henceforth referred to as *TGOS*).

<sup>3</sup>Roman Catholics have long sought to bring unity to the Christian Church (i.e., bringing separated communities into unity with the Pope). However, whereas these attempts were once viewed with deep suspicion by conservative



biblical truth. Unity gained at the expense of truth means defeat for all. The purpose of this article is to respond to some critical points in the *TGOS* statement.

## **BACKGROUND: *TGOS* AND R. C. SPROUL'S CRITICISM OF *ECT***

The meeting on October 7, 1997, and the purpose of the resulting statement, was to respond to the strong criticism elicited by the publication of *Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT)*. When this original declaration was published, it was applauded for showing areas of common interest, such as abortion and education. However, it was criticized for glossing over important differences. No area caused more concern than the doctrine of justification. The conclusion of *ECT* was, "All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ." R. C. Sproul responded to this inclusive statement in his book critiquing *ECT*, entitled *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*.<sup>4</sup> In it he raised a number of issues, but the essential point that galvanized his response was the failure of *ECT* to affirm that salvation was by faith alone, (*sola fide*). He wrote:

The word *alone* was a solecism on which the entire Reformation doctrine of justification was erected. The absence of the word *alone* from *ECT's* joint affirmation is most distressing. Had the document insisted that we are justified by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, because of Christ *alone*, it would have gone much further in securing peace and unity between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. The glaring absence of the word *alone* makes the statement totally inadequate as a rallying point for historical Evangelicalism.<sup>5</sup>

---

Evangelicals, they are now being embraced by many. The effectiveness of Roman Catholic efforts in this regard is notable. The encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II in 1995, *Ut Unum Sint* (That They May Be One), embodies the Roman Catholic attempt to bring about broad church unity. (*TGOS* is no doubt a residual effect of these efforts.)

<sup>4</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

If this were the heart of Sproul's difficulty, he should have been pleased when *TGOS* addressed this very point. In his sympathetic assessment of *TGOS*, Timothy George writes:

Evangelicals believe that justification by faith alone is at the heart of the gospel. It is, as Luther said in 1537, "the first and chief article," which cannot be "given up or compromised." The language about justification in "The Gift of Salvation" echoes the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England: "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings."<sup>6</sup>

George then concludes with this assessment:

We rejoice that our Roman Catholic interlocutors have been able to agree with us that the doctrine of justification set forth in this document agrees with what the Reformers meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).<sup>7</sup>

## MISSING THE ISSUE

The unexpected willingness of the Roman Catholic signers of *TGOS* to accede to his position may be unnerving to Sproul, since it makes it difficult for him to now not endorse this latest agreement. Others, like John MacArthur, who enthusiastically endorsed Sproul's book, may also feel uncomfortable sharing a doctrine of justification with Roman Catholic theologians.<sup>8</sup>

Sproul focused his guns on the failure of *ECT* to affirm "faith *alone*" (*italics mine*), but in doing so he missed the most crucial issue. He asked, "Does faith in Christ as Savior and Lord include a trust in the biblical gospel?"<sup>9</sup> That is, what is the *object* of our faith? Is there a certain content to the gospel, or could those who affirm Jesus as Savior

<sup>6</sup>"Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Initiative," *Christianity Today* (December 8, 1997): 34-35.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>Of course, both Sproul and MacArthur are uncomfortable having their view of justification endorsed by Roman Catholic leaders, but it may stem more from traditional than theological differences. See "Groups Battle over Catholic Outreach," *Christianity Today* (March 2, 1998).

<sup>9</sup>*Faith Alone*, 29.

and Lord, and at the same time require works as an additional qualification for salvation, be rightly termed “brothers and sisters in Christ”? He correctly insisted that the biblical position was that “we are justified by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, because of Christ *alone*.”<sup>10</sup> If we have faith *alone* in Christ *alone*, we are saved.

But hidden in this simple statement is an even more fundamental question, which provided a “doorway to peace” between the so-called “evangelical” position and that of the Roman Catholic theologians who signed *TGOS*. This is found in Sproul’s understanding of the content of saving faith.

## WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?

In *Faith Alone*, Sproul addresses the meaning or content of faith, in a section entitled “Lordship Salvation” Controversy.<sup>11</sup> Concerning the core issue in this controversy, Sproul writes:

The chief question in dispute was whether a person can be saved by embracing Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. At issue were the necessary conditions or requirements for justification. The debate did not center on merit and grace, but it did (and continues to) center on faith and works.

At the heart of the issue is this question: Does saving faith *necessarily* produce the works of obedience?<sup>12</sup>

The question is simply this: What is faith? Is *saving* faith a special kind of faith which includes *works*? What, if any, is the *necessary* relationship between faith and works for a person to be saved? To put this another way, Does *saving* faith, by definition, include good works, without which there is no salvation? Or, as John MacArthur puts it, Are there certain works that are indispensable to faith, what he calls “faith works,” the absence of which show unquestionably that one does not have saving faith?<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 24ff.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 25 (italics his).

<sup>13</sup>John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 53. Of course, just exactly what and how many “faith works” are required for one to be saved—or to have



Sproul responds to these questions by siding with MacArthur and affirming the Lordship Salvation position. He states that “true faith necessarily, inevitably, and immediately yields the fruit of works.”<sup>14</sup> What is the end result of taking this position? It creates a requirement for good works without which one cannot have any assurance that he is indeed saved and, in theory at least, without which a person is not saved. We might refer to such works as “Protestant Indulgences.” While Roman Catholic indulgences are presumed to relieve the temporal results of sins, these Protestant indulgences are presumed to relieve the temporal fear that one may not be saved because of the presence of sin. But, like their Roman Catholic kin, Protestant indulgences are destructive to salvation by faith alone.

One must ask, What good does it do to affirm that a person is saved by faith *alone* apart from works, if at the same time you affirm that faith itself *includes* works?<sup>15</sup> What you give with one hand, you take away with the other! This reveals the theological duplicity of the classical Reformed axiom that “though justification is by faith alone, it is not by a faith that is alone.”<sup>16</sup> By insisting on the explicit wording “faith *alone*,” yet proclaiming at the same time that “true faith” necessarily includes subsequent works, Sproul provides a huge loophole through which any synergistic doctrine, such as Roman Catholicism, can easily pass.<sup>17</sup> Suddenly it was not so difficult for the descendants of Wittenberg and Trent to find common ground. And they have.

---

some assurance of salvation—is not identified. Any attempt to do this would set off an endless debate among “faith works” proponents from MacArthur to Roman Catholicism, and all points in between! See Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe In Jesus Christ* (Victor Books, 1989), 48.

<sup>14</sup>*Faith Alone*, 26.

<sup>15</sup>Redefining faith to include works is, in fact, exactly what Roman Catholics do; see Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 238. Of this kind of redefinition, the authors state, “This is a classic example of eisegesis, that is, reading into the text what is not there, indeed, in this case, the exact opposite of what is there.”

<sup>16</sup>*Faith Alone*, 26.

<sup>17</sup>In the ongoing discussion over *TGOS*, this issue has repeatedly come to the forefront. The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, comprised of a number of respected evangelical leaders, including R. C. Sproul, (whose opposition to *ECT*, and subsequent book, led to the *TGOS* statement!), James Montgomery

## THE *TGOS* STATEMENT ON FAITH

In *TGOS*, the signers affirm the following: "Faith is not merely intellectual assent but an act of the whole person, involving the mind, the will, and the affections, issuing in a changed life. We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*)."<sup>18</sup>

At the outset, it must be noted that it is no small matter when Roman Catholic theologians accept a doctrinal tenet that is specifically tied to "Reformation traditions." It should also be noted, however, that these "traditions" are the conclusions of the Westminster Assembly, which met from 1643-49, and are not specifically drawn from the actual

---

Boice, and Alistair Begg, has released its own response to *TGOS*, entitled "Appeal to Fellow Evangelicals." Their complaint with *TGOS* is that it makes no mention of "imputed righteousness" as opposed to the Roman Catholic concept of "infused righteousness" (also called "transformative" or "effective" righteousness). Notably, this difference has to do with faith and works. *Imputed righteousness* means that the righteousness of Christ is freely credited to our account by faith alone apart from any merit or good works on the part of the believer. *Infused/transformative/effective righteousness* means that there is some participation of works by the one who believes and receives the righteousness of Christ. It is precisely at this point that the Classical Reformed view of justification, reflected in Lordship Salvation, irreparably blurs the truth. As Mark Seifrid recently observed, "It is true that recent biblical scholarship has tended to obscure the distinction between 'imputed' and 'effective' righteousness. Whether it has rightly done so is another matter." (See "The Gift of Salvation": Its Failure to Address the Crux of Salvation, *JETS* 42:4 [December, 1999], 681. Unfortunately, Seifrid's own attachment to the *Reformed* Evangelical connection of faith and works renders his own criticisms of *TGOS* confusing and contradictory. For example, he affirms that justification is by faith alone, yet later writes, "I hardly need to repeat the traditional Protestant elaboration, that good works follow this faith necessarily." Are works necessary, or are they not?) Frustrated Evangelicals are left to ask whether Sproul and others in his alliance include works or not—whether righteousness is in their view truly imputed or infused. The answer is anything but clear! See "Evangelical, Catholic Document Under Review," *Moody* (May/June, 1998): 40-41. Also, "Evangelicals, Catholics Issue Salvation Accord," *Christianity Today* (January 12, 1998): 61-63.

<sup>18</sup>*TGOS*, 36.



reformers themselves.<sup>19</sup> While this may seem to be a minor point, modern scholarship has revealed a distinct evolution in doctrine from the time of the writings of the Reformers to the writing of the Westminster Confession.<sup>20</sup> It might therefore be more accurate to call *TGOS* an alignment of Roman Catholics and *Reformed* Evangelicals.

Having said this, we return to the definition of faith in *TGOS*. It is immediately clear that the writers are in agreement with the Sproul/MacArthur/Lordship Salvation view of the meaning of saving faith. We first encounter a pejorative reference to “mere intellectual assent,” followed by an affirmation that faith is “an act of the whole person, involving the mind, the will, and the affections, issuing in a changed life.” As often occurs in attempts to define faith, the writers have “beaten all around the bush” without making any clear statement of meaning. While they are quick to say what faith is *not*, they have a more difficult time telling us what faith *is*. Instead, they quickly leap to the safer (and less precise) confines of what faith *involves*. This information may help us determine what they understand faith to mean, but it is nebulous at best. After all, could we not say that *love* is an act of the whole person, involving the mind, the will, and the affections, issuing in a changed life”? What about *hope*? Or *joy*? The benefits of this kind of definition are limited, to say the least.

However, since this is what we are given, let us examine it. Clearly, of primary importance to the writers is the desire to distance themselves from the idea that faith is “merely intellectual assent.” Instead, they suggest that while there is a kind of faith that is “merely intellectual” (involving only the mind), the kind of faith that saves involves two further elements, the will, and the affections (thus “issuing in a changed life”). But does faith actually include these elements?

<sup>19</sup>This fact is explicitly stated by Timothy George (a signer of *TGOS*) in his article including the *TGOS* statement (“Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Initiative,” *Christianity Today* [December 8, 1997]: 34-35).

<sup>20</sup>See R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford University Press, 1979).

## DOES FAITH INVOLVE THE WILL?

Saving faith is often seen as being active and volitional—that is, it is something we *do*, and something we *choose* to do.<sup>21</sup> If this is so, then faith is certainly an act of the will. But there are sound reasons to understand saving faith to be passive and inescapable—that is, as something which we come to possess, not by choice, but by being persuaded, after hearing the Good News, that what God has said in His Word is true.

A primary reason for coming to this conclusion grows out of the common, or non-theological meaning of the term. A simple illustration will suffice.<sup>22</sup> Let us suppose we are talking with a person who *believes* that Elvis is alive. This person *believes* strongly that Elvis lives, and wants us to *believe* it, too. He presents evidence for his “faith”—rumors of sightings, first-person testimonials from the tabloid press, unanswered questions surrounding Elvis’ death and burial, etc. However persuasive his argument, one thing is certain. Whether or not you *believe* Elvis is alive has nothing to do with your will. The only question is, Are you persuaded? If you said, “I *choose* to believe that Elvis is alive,” the question would still remain, “But do you *believe* he is alive?” You are either persuaded by what you have heard that it is true, or you are not. You either believe it or you don’t. If you are persuaded, you cannot genuinely “choose” to not believe; and if you are not persuaded, you cannot somehow “will” yourself to believe. The only question is one of evidence: As you freely examine it, do you believe it, or not?

The same is true of biblical faith in the gospel. We are either persuaded or we are not. We either believe or we don’t. The exercise of the will is involved in our openness to the gospel message (we must be willing to listen; cf. Rom 10:17), but faith is simply the persuasion that the gospel message is true.

<sup>21</sup>MacArthur’s interpretation of John 3:14-15 is a classic expression of this idea: “In order to look at the bronze snake on the pole, they had to drag themselves to where they could see it.” See John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 46. Obviously, if saving faith is accurately expressed in such terms, then it surely involves the will (and works!). Notably, Scripture records only the need to see the bronze serpent in order to be saved, not the misleading idea of “dragging oneself.”

<sup>22</sup>I am indebted to Zane Hodges for this illustration.



One reason many assume that the will is part of saving faith is the use of the imperative (with the verb *pisteuō*) in salvation contexts. Indeed, a key issue in the discussion of what “faith” is depends on how the word is used. If *pisteuō* (or any verb, for that matter), when used in the imperative, invariably implies a willful action, then the will certainly is included in saving faith. But is this so?

Perhaps no salvation text is better known than Paul’s admonition to the Philippian jailer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Here the verb *pisteuō* is in the imperative. One way to read this kind of statement is as a command: “Believe this!” If this is understood, then the person addressed is being told to do something—namely, to believe. But to say that the imperative *requires* this understanding is false. Indeed, as we have already shown, a command to “believe” something is inherently absurd, since to truly believe something requires an inner persuasion that that which is being believed is true.

Instead, the call to believe in Acts 16:31 seems to represent what is called a *conditional imperative*.<sup>23</sup> This use of the imperative functions like the protasis in a conditional sentence, and the following result functions like the apodosis. Taking into account the injunctive force of the imperative, the meaning of Paul’s admonition in Acts 16:31 becomes something like this: “*If* you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (and I hope you do), *then* you will be saved.” The imperative is therefore not a command to exercise the will, but an acknowledgment of a fact—that those who believe in Jesus (and Paul hopes the jailer will join their ranks!) have eternal life.<sup>24</sup>

What of those passages in which the imperative of *pisteuō* is not conditional? An example of this is Jesus’ call to “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). In these cases, the imperative is effectively an appeal to the audience to consider what has been presented, and to weigh what has been seen and heard.<sup>25</sup> The speaker is entreating the

<sup>23</sup>See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 489-92.

<sup>24</sup>Of the fifteen uses of *pisteuō* in the imperative mood in the New Testament, Mark 11:24, Luke 8:50, and Acts 16:31 appear to have this usage.

<sup>25</sup>Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 276-82.

listeners to believe, but the implicit call is to consider the merits of the gospel of Jesus Christ since, if they do this, they will become persuaded of its truth—and believe.<sup>26</sup> With apologies to Josh McDowell, the biblical writers and evangelists said, “Here is evidence that demands a verdict! Don’t ignore it; consider it, honestly examine it, and if you believe it, you will be saved.” Faith *does* come by hearing (Rom 10:17), or by seeing (cf. John 10:38; 14:11)—and it is *that evidence* which all unbelievers are responsible to consider.

### DOES FAITH INVOLVE THE AFFECTIONS?

Having concluded that the will is not part of faith, we can move on to the other element in the *TGOS* definition of faith, that being “the affections.” An object of our “affections” is something we love and desire. We can feel affectionate toward a person; we can even have these feelings for a pet, or inanimate objects, or something with sentimental value. The question remains, What does affection have to do with faith? Feelings vary greatly in conversion experiences—from sadness for our sins and the price that Christ had to pay, to joy at the freedom we have in Him. What kind of feelings authenticate faith? How many different feelings are needed? And how much “affection” must a person feel for his or her faith to be real? It is inconceivable that a person would experience the same “affection” toward Christ at conversion that he might realize later, after coming to a deeper realization of his own sinfulness and the price paid by Christ on the cross.

Imagine for a moment a person who was adopted as an infant, who is now grown up, and has been searching for years to find his birth parents. One day, he is informed that they have been found. While he *believes* this and looks forward to meeting them, he doesn’t know much

<sup>26</sup>See Wallace, 487-88, and his discussion of the *Request Imperative*. The implicit nature of a command/request to “believe” is similar to other biblical commands to “rejoice” or to “love.” Jesus’ command to “love the Lord your God” (Matt 22:37) is a request for His followers to consider God’s great love for them. We truly love God only when we recognize that He first loved us (1 John 4:19).



about them. What were the circumstances of his birth? Why was he put up for adoption? After meeting them, he learns that they gave him up at birth instead of aborting him, and the awareness of the price they paid in carrying him to term instead of ending his life before birth fills him with gratitude. Did he really believe that they were his parents at the first? Of course. Did the amount of affection he felt toward his parents have anything to do with whether or not he *believed* in them? Of course not. Affections are a result of growing knowledge and appreciation for what someone has done for us, and have nothing to do with faith.

## THE WILL AND THE AFFECTIONS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Where *do* the will and the affections enter into the equation of salvation and faith? I submit that they are two parts of a growing Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ. The New Testament presents us with the picture of Christ as the Bridegroom, and all those who are His in this age as the bride. Obviously, the heavenly Bridegroom loves His bride—He died for her! His love cannot increase; it is already infinite. But the Spirit draws believers into an ever-deepening experience of love and devotion to our heavenly Bridegroom. We call this *progressive sanctification*—becoming more like Christ, growing in grace.

What makes up this love in which we grow? Robert Sternberg, a Yale University psychologist, suggests that human love involves three elements: passion, intimacy, and commitment.<sup>27</sup> While passion refers to the physical expression of human love which doesn't enter into a spiritual relationship, the other two elements, intimacy and commitment, do.

The element of "the will" corresponds to *commitment* in Sternberg's model. Rather than being a part of saving faith, the will becomes affective once we have believed, when we have the capacity to "will"

<sup>27</sup>Robert Sternberg, "A Triangular Theory of Love," *Psychological Review* 93 (1986): 119-35. For a brief and practical discussion of this breakdown, see Less Parrott III and Leslie Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before (and After) You Marry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 33-36.

to follow Christ, obey Him, and serve Him. This capacity does not exist before one believes, and to include it in saving faith leaves the unregenerate sinner in an impossible position of being required to *do* something of which he is incapable. Similarly, the idea that saving faith includes a “willingness” to persevere in the spiritual life is impossible.<sup>28</sup> The battle of the Christian life is real, and involves the exercise of our wills; but we must never confuse that struggle with the free gift of salvation.

The element of “the affections” corresponds to *intimacy* in Sternberg’s model. Again, rather than having anything to do with saving faith, this describes the emotional side of a growing relationship. Just as intimacy should grow over the course of a marriage, so too in a growing relationship between the Christian and the heavenly Bridegroom there will be an increase in these “affections.” But any attempt to make affections a part of saving faith are misplaced. Saving faith is being persuaded that what God in love did for me through His Son Jesus Christ is true. As we recognize and respond to His love, we in turn come to love Him more and more.

## A NEW DISTINCTION IN CHRISTIANITY?

If the Roman Catholic-Reformed Evangelicals union stands, then we are witnessing, and helping to define, a new division with Christendom. For half a millennium, the most obvious division has been between those who followed Reformation teaching and those who held to Roman Catholic dogma. Now, it seems, the “road back to Rome” to which Radmacher alluded a decade ago is proving prophetic.<sup>29</sup> Galling as it may be to Lordship theologians and their kin—Classical Reformed theologians, they now find themselves in league with Roman Catholicism. What has been shrouded by animus for centuries has now been exposed by a modern *Pax Romana*.

On the other side are those who hold to faith as nothing more or less than faith, having nothing to do with works—or, to be precise, the will, affections, or a changed life—but being the persuasion that when

<sup>28</sup>MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 78, 87.

<sup>29</sup>Earl D. Radmacher, “First Response to ‘Faith According to the Apostle James’ by John F. MacArthur, Jr.,” *JETS* 33:1 (March, 1990): 40-41.

Jesus offered eternal life to those who believed in Him, He spoke the truth. These alone have assurance of eternal life, resting as it must on faith alone, and *not* “a faith that works,” or any other such amalgam of human faith with human efforts. We may expect, as has occurred before in church history, that those who insist on human effort will misrepresent those who gladly offer the gift *absolutely free*. But may we always stand firm, knowing that our faithfulness is gaining for us *not* eternal life, but eternal *rewards*, when we finally meet our Savior.





# **THE CHALLENGE FOR SPIRITUAL VISION: AN EXEGESIS OF HEBREWS 12:1-3**

**FREDERIC R. HOWE**

Cincinnati, OH

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Some years ago, Art Farstad wrote an article entitled "Go for the Gold!"<sup>1</sup> In that article he encouraged his readers to strive for excellence in living the Christian life. He explained the meaning of 1 Cor 9:24 and its usage of the term *brabeion*, "prize," in light of the Greek athletic games. The background for this appeal to "go for the gold" certainly was the imagery of the foot race as a vivid portrayal of progressive sanctification in Christian life. Because this was a favorite theme in the life and ministry of Art Farstad, it seems fitting to pay tribute to him with a study of a remarkable passage in the New Testament, wherein the challenge for the Christian is set forth in terms of the Greek athletic contests. We shall examine Heb 12:1-3, seeking to understand and apply some of the key terms in this passage. Unless otherwise noted, all references are from the New King James Version.

## **II. THE CONTEXT OF HEBREWS 12:1-3**

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews begins chapter 12 with a highly descriptive particle, *toigaroun*. The first part of 12:1 states, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." The word "therefore," *toigaroun*, a triple compound inferential particle, can as well be translated "consequently." It points the reader back to chapter 11 and the recounting of the faithful deeds of the "hall of faith" individuals. William L. Lane explains the link between chapters 11 and 12:

In 11:39-40 the writer comments upon the recital of past faithfulness, bringing the catalogue of chap. 11 into direct

<sup>1</sup> Art Farstad, "Go for the Gold!" *The Grace Evangelical Society News* (July-August 1994) 1, 4.

relationship with his audience. The “attested witnesses” who died without receiving the ultimate fulfillment of the promise are juxtaposed to “us,” the Christian community for whom God had planned something better. In 12:1 the same two groups are mentioned for a second time: “we” Christians are to demonstrate our faithfulness, knowing that we are surrounded by the host of attested “witnesses” surveyed in 11:4-38...The climactic comment in 11:39-40 provides the basis for the moving appeal addressed to the community in 12:1-13. The conclusive particle at the beginning of 12:1...“consequently,” marks the point of transition...<sup>2</sup>

The Old Testament believers portrayed throughout chapter 11 are certainly the ones referred to by the phrase “cloud of witnesses.” One is struck by the vividness of the language in this passage, and the author’s choice of descriptive words, some of which occur nowhere else in the New Testament. “Since we are surrounded” translates the words *echontes* (present active participle of *echō*) and *perikeimenon* (present middle participle of *perikeimai*). Literally, the phrase reads, “Having so great a cloud of witnesses lying around us.” Most translations rightly give the first participle a causative sense, and render the complete phrase “since we are surrounded” as NKJV, or “seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” as in the ASV, 1901. The imagery suggests an athletic event taking place down in an arena, with the tiers of the amphitheater filled with spectators.

One must guard against oversimplifying the picture here, and inferring that these Old Testament heroes of the faith are now lined up in the seats above, witnessing the present race. The key to a balanced understanding of their role is the phrase *nephos marturōn*, “cloud of witnesses.” The word for witness is *martys*. We can easily see the English word *martyr* as reflective of the Greek word meaning “witness.” The importance of this word lies in the fact that they bore witness or testimony to God’s sovereign grace and faithfulness. Think of the term “witness” as meaning “testifier” or “example.” The stress is not on the idea that *they observe us*, but rather that *we look to them and studiously observe them* as exemplary individuals who set the pace for endurance

<sup>2</sup>William L. Lane, “Hebrews 9–13,” *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), Vol. 47B, 403-404.



in faith. As Hugh Montefiore states, “This *great cloud of witnesses* are not merely onlookers of the present contest, but they have given their own witness of faith by their own past lives (cf. xi. 39), some even to the point of death, *martus* here is approaching its later sense of martyr.”<sup>3</sup>

The central truth stated here, therefore, is that these Old Testament heroes of faith are testifiers (witnesses) to God’s care and providence. Concerning the thought that these are now actually observing us, Homer Kent wisely notes, “Their experience now stands as a testimony to us as to what pleases God... To draw from this the notion that the dead are presently viewing the activities of believers on earth is not supported by other Scripture, and is to press the illustration in 12:1 beyond its necessary limits.”<sup>4</sup>

### III. THE CHALLENGES FOR BELIEVERS

Having set the framework and background, the author moves directly into some specific challenges for believers. The close interrelationship of the terms setting forth the author’s urgent exhortation must be noticed. These terms are: “...let us lay aside...let us run with endurance...looking unto Jesus” (12:1-2). As participants in the arena of life’s experiences, Christians are challenged to some crucial actions. First, they are exhorted to lay aside every weight. The word translated “lay aside” is *apothemenoi*, second aorist middle participle from *apotithēmi*. Translations give this word a hortatory meaning—“let us lay aside”—rather than the participial sense of simply “having laid aside.” Lane suggests that the reason for translating it in this manner rests in the main verb in the sentence, *trechōmen*, “let us run.”<sup>5</sup> This present subjunctive, clearly hortatory in nature, can easily be translated, “let us keep on running.”

The flow of the author’s reasoning is best seen by noticing that the main verb, *trechōmen*, as a pivotal term, is preceded by a participle,

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1964), 213.

<sup>4</sup> Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 257.

<sup>5</sup> Lane, “Hebrews 9–13,” 398.

*apothemenoi*, and followed by a participle, *aphorōntes*. The closely knit structure of this striking appeal can be seen as follows:

let us lay aside  
every weight and sin

let us run with  
endurance

looking unto Jesus

*apothemenoi*

*trechōmen*

*aphorōntes*

The author now moves directly into his challenge for Christian discipline. The background is the long distance race, not the sprint. In this athletic contest, runners are to divest themselves of any encumbrance which would hinder them. The word “weight” (*onchos*) appears nowhere else in Scripture. It here signifies anything which will be an impediment or hindrance in running the race. The author seems to make a distinction between “every weight” and “the sin which so easily ensnares us.” F. F. Bruce states:

There are many things which may be perfectly all right in their own way, but which hinder a competitor in the race of faith; they are “weights” which must be laid aside. It may well be that what is a hindrance to one entrant in this spiritual contest is not a hindrance to another; each must learn for himself what in his case is a weight or impediment. But there are other things which are not perfectly all right in their own way but are essentially wrong; there is “sin which so readily ensnares us.” Our author is not referring so much to some specific sin, but to sin itself, as something which will inevitably encumber the runner’s feet and trip him up before he has taken more than a step or two.<sup>6</sup>

Whether the phrase “and the sin which so easily ensnares us” is a further clarification of “every weight,” or an added and different dimension of more serious offenses, is a debatable point. It would seem that the position of Bruce, as noted above, where he differentiates between the two elements of “weight” and “sin,” is more accurate. The word *euperistaton* which describes the sin is variously rendered “entangles,” “does so easily beset,” “clings so closely.” Lane comments,

<sup>6</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 335-36.

## The Challenge for Spiritual Vision: An Exegesis of Hebrews 12:1-3 29

“The writer warns his audience to guard against sin in any form because it will distract them, causing them to look away when they should be fixing their gaze upon Jesus (12:2).”<sup>7</sup>

The appeal to the readers is that they take the necessary steps of self-discipline to deal with areas of their lives which hinder vital spiritual progress. Indeed, this is a persistent theme in other passages of the New Testament, such as 1 Cor 9:24-27. In that passage, Paul builds upon the imagery of the athletic contest or race and, using himself as an example, urges believers to self-control. It is well to contemplate at this point the vital application of this truth to ourselves, as we all strive to grow in grace, knowledge, wisdom, and self-control. We ask ourselves pointedly, “Where do we find the inward strength and stamina to do this?”

We receive this strength, most assuredly, from God Himself. Philippians 4:13 furnishes a meaningful cross-reference to Heb 12:1-3. Paul there rejoices, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

In determining what things hinder us from vital spiritual progress, our Sovereign God will, as we seek His wisdom, make known to us the areas where we need to make significant changes in behavior patterns or attitudes. These “weights” or “sins,” as our Hebrews passage notes, impede our progress. In the same context where Paul refers to “pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,” (Phil 3:14) he adds, “as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you” (3:15). William Hendriksen explains this as follows:

If the Philippians will adhere to the rule as laid down, then if with respect to this or that minor point of application their views should be defective, God, through His Spirit, will unveil to their hearts and minds the truth also regarding such a matter.<sup>8</sup>

The next phrase of Heb 12:2 states, “and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” “Let us run” is *trechōmen*, present active subjunctive from *trechō*. The present tense of this main verb in the sentence clearly can be a point of stress—“let us keep on running.” Drawing upon God’s enabling, believers must respond to the challenge for consistency and fortitude in the Christian race. This contest is

<sup>7</sup> Lane, “Hebrews 9–13,” 409.

<sup>8</sup> William Hendriksen, “Philippians,” *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 177.



described as being “set before us” (*prokeimenon*, present middle participle). The nuance of “keeping on” is again couched in the present tense. It is not stretching the language or logic of the passage to note that the prescribed or specific course set before us unfolds continually, and the believer is to keep at the task of running that specific course or pattern of life. Naturally, the figure of speech cannot be pressed beyond limitation, but each Christian “runner” can be seen as following a prescribed course, thus not really competing with others, but striving to excel up to his or her potential in this lifestyle of Christian conquest.

The running is to be done with endurance (*hupomonē*). Guthrie explains the term, “The exhortation *let us run with perseverance* is the positive side to the shedding of unnecessary burdens. It is this positive side which carries the emphasis in the Greek. It is an action which requires effort.”<sup>9</sup>

The most significant summons is contained in verse 2: “looking unto Jesus.” The key word is *aphorōntes* (present active participle of *aphorāō*). The present tense has a distinct durative sense of keeping on looking unto Jesus. The verb means to look away from distraction, to look with concentration steadfastly unto Jesus. His human name is central here, for He is the supreme example for human beings. As true God and true man, He shared human nature, apart from sin, as Heb 4:14 makes abundantly clear. The earnest plea, therefore, is to challenge the believer to gaze with concentration, with attention, unto Jesus Himself.

The Lord Jesus Christ is described significantly in verse 2 as “the author and finisher of *our* faith.” The word *author* translates *archēgos*, meaning pioneer or author. This word rises in importance here to the stature of a full Christological description or title. Lane comments, “In the light of the athletic metaphor, it is proper to recognize...the nuance of ‘champion’ demonstrated for the term in its first occurrence in 2:10...Jesus is the...exemplar, the champion of faith.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, *archēgos* has crucial importance in its stress upon the example Jesus set in His obedience to the will of God. However, as the NKJV, NASB and ASV translate the term as “author,” there is another strand of meaning that must be observed. As the author, or even pioneer of

<sup>9</sup> Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 249.

<sup>10</sup> Lane, “Hebrews 9–13,” 411.

the faith, or of faith itself (*tēs pisteōs*), Jesus is seen as the pathfinder, or trailblazer of faith in every era, not just in the present. Bruce captures this nuance as follows, "...he went before *them* as truly as he has gone before us...Jesus...is perhaps envisaged here as having led all the people to God, from earliest times, along the path of faith, although, since his incarnation and passion, his personal example makes his leadership available to his people in a way that was impossible before."<sup>11</sup>

The other word used of Christ here is *teleiōtēs*, "finisher, completer or perfecter." The word appears nowhere else in the New Testament. Homer Kent explains this term, "He was not only a perfect exemplar of faith Himself (by His perfect trust in the Father), but brought objective completion to the facts of the Christian faith (on which our subjective faith reposes) by His death, resurrection and exaltation."<sup>12</sup>

The latter part of verse 2 provides the interpreter with an exegetical problem. It states, "...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God." This problem hinges on the meaning of *anti*, the Greek preposition translated as "for" in the phrase "for the joy that was set before Him." One view is that *anti* here maintains the sense of "in exchange for," and the meaning therefore, is that Jesus, in exchange for the glory which He had with the Father in the preincarnate state, accepted the cross and the shame involved in this cruel death. The implication is that He renounced a joy already in His possession in exchange for shame and death by crucifixion.<sup>13</sup>

Another view is that *anti* means "for the sake of" or "because of." In this perspective, the joy is that of accomplishment of the redemptive sacrifice on the cross, within the pathway laid out before Him in the eternal counsel or plan of God. Thus, throughout His suffering, Jesus kept before Himself the prospect of ultimate victory, and this leads to the completed joy of His triumph after going through the suffering.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 337.

<sup>12</sup> Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 259.

<sup>13</sup> Selected sources presenting this view are Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 215; Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, reprint edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), IV: 538-39.

<sup>14</sup> Selected sources presenting this view are F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 339; Donald A. Hagner, "Hebrews," *New International Biblical*



In his exhaustive treatment of this passage, William L. Lane offers an alternative vantage point. He takes *anti* to mean “instead of” or “in place of” and refers it to the joy that was available to Him at the precise moment of His choice to go on and endure the cross:

Renouncing the joy that could have been his, he endured a cross, disregarding the shame associated with crucifixion...Underscored is the fortitude of faith demonstrated in the choice Jesus made...the joy was within Jesus’ grasp...It has reference to a precise historical circumstance in which Jesus was confronted with a supreme moral choice. He could embrace the joy that was available to him or a humiliating death upon a Roman cross...He deliberately chose to renounce the joy proposed to him in order to share in the contest proposed for us...The “joy that was within his grasp” was that of being delivered from an impending and degrading death.<sup>15</sup>

The second of these three views seems preferable. The joy of ultimate accomplishment of victory over death fits the context of the passage. There is a close-knit tie between “the race that is set before us” and “the joy that was set before Him.” The view that interprets this joy as preincarnate felicity and joy that Christ shared with the Father does not do justice to the historical pattern of the entire passage. This eternal joy was not something “set before Him” but something which He willingly “set aside” in His incarnate ministry. Lane’s view, while argued forcefully, is also less viable, in light of the steadfast and unflinching motivation that led the Savior throughout His entire life to His sacrificial death on the cross. The term “joy” does not seem to explain even a possibility of deliverance from Calvary, or an option of accepting some kind of proffered deliverance from the sacrifice foreordained from before the foundation of the world.

The text then continues to trace the Redeemer’s pathway of suffering and ultimate glorification. Hebrews 12:2b declares, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame,

---

*Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 214; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 523-24; Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 259.

<sup>15</sup> Lane, “Hebrews 9–13,” 413.



and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Any discussion of this passage must take serious note of the agony of death by crucifixion, doubtless the most despised form of death in the Roman Empire, reserved for the worst offenders. The author uses the phrase *hupemeinen stauron*, “endured a cross,” which nowhere else in the New Testament speaks of crucifixion. Lane explains its full significance. “The phrase treats the death of Jesus...as an ordeal inflicted through the opposition of sinners (12:3). It places his death under the specific modality of the harsh reality of crucifixion in antiquity.”<sup>16</sup>

The triumph of the victory of Christ over death is highlighted with these significant words, “...has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The verb translated “has sat down” is *kekathiken*, perfect active indicative of *kathisō*. The stress in the perfect tense is clearly on the fact that this action, the ordeal of Calvary, has been completed fully and exhaustively, and its results now stand, attested by Christ’s seated dignity. In tracing this pathway of suffering leading ultimately to the position of triumph at the right hand of the throne of God, the author takes note of the same pathway (from crucifixion to glorification) that Paul wrote of in Phil 2:5-11.

#### **IV. THE CONTEMPLATION URGED UPON BELIEVERS**

Sensing the need for encouraging his readers, the writer concludes this three-verse segment with the words, “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls” (12:3). The word translated “consider” is *analogisasthe*, aorist middle imperative from *analogizomai*. This is another word appearing only once in the Greek New Testament. Contained in its breadth of meaning is the idea of calculating, of considering, even to the point of serious reflection. The challenge is for readers to contemplate the unfailing endurance of the Lord as He went through the experience of suffering and death. When they grow weary as runners in the race set before them, they must consider by reflective comparison His overwhelming steadfastness in the face of extreme suffering. In other words, the comparison generated

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 414.

by this appeal will cause them to realize that they, even under extreme duress, have not endured anything like He did, therefore they must take heart and persevere.

Hebrews 12:3 also contains a textual problem of interest. In place of the words “against Himself” (*eis heauton*)<sup>17</sup> many key textual sources give the reading “against themselves” (*eis heautous*). Weighing carefully the arguments for each reading, F. F. Bruce cogently concludes in favor of “against Himself” with these well chosen words. He states that the singular reading (*eis heauton*), “yields the only tolerable sense in the context, as is recognized by the RSV and (presumably, though not expressly) by the NEB. Riggensbach does not exaggerate when he describes the plural reading as ‘very strongly attested, but absolutely meaningless’ (*ad loc.*, ZK, 391).”<sup>18</sup>

The contemplation of Christ urged upon the readers is an antidote to growing weary and faint-hearted. It is reminiscent of other admonitions in this same epistle, such as 10:35-36, “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance.”

## V. CONCLUSION

We have examined some of the great words in this important passage. We observed the context of Heb 12:1-3, and suggested that it relates closely to the preceding chapter. The conclusion can be reached that Christians, whether first-century readers of the epistle or present-day believers, should look back upon the past examples of faith from the Old Testament. This retrospection can be a source of encouragement. Then, we are urged to look forward as we run the race, living the life of discipleship. The urgency to run with endurance is set before us. We are to do certain things in order to pursue the course. Negatively, we are to lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily ensnare us; and positively, we are to look unto Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of the faith. The exhortation to “look” unto Jesus is the ground for this anticipatory view of the triumphant Lord of glory who finished His course. We look unto Jesus in contemplation, in “considering” Him as

<sup>17</sup> The Majority Text reads *eis auton*, which also means, “against Himself.” Ed.

<sup>18</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 333.

the conqueror of adversity and suffering, and as the exemplar *par excellence* for spiritual vision.

In the beginning of this discussion, we referred to Art Farstad's article "Go for the Gold." His words can provide a fitting end to this study. Art reflected upon the imagery of running the race, and stated, "Thankfully for us, it is God who 'umpires' or rules on our performance...Unlike the judges in athletic contexts, schools, or even the Olympics, the Lord is omniscient, completely just, and also merciful. He'll award just the right *brabeion* to every Christian 'runner' in the game of life."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Farstad, "Go for the Gold," 4.





# **A VOICE FROM THE PAST:**

## **THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST<sup>1</sup>**

### **PHILIPPIANS 3**

**J. N. DARBY<sup>2</sup>**

This is an epistle that gives us the proper experience of the Christian, that is, the power of the Spirit of God working in him in his path; and consequently, we get the spirit and character in which a Christian should walk down here. In chapter 2 we see the graciousness of the spirit in which Christ walked. He always went down and humbled Himself, even down to the cross, and then God exalted Him as man to His right hand: even as Antichrist exalts himself, and is abased. Christ is the bright and perfect example of “He that humbles himself shall be exalted.” In chapter 3 you get the energy of the Spirit.

Now, we cannot have too distinctly and clearly before our souls the great basis of the completeness of redemption. In the first place, the putting away of sins and sin too—the putting away of all that the first Adam produces, and then our introduction into a totally new place—an entirely new standing—we have peace with God. Jesus, “was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 4:25–5:1). That is not all. Our peace is in Christ, and there is no possibility of condemnation for a person in Christ. We see the efficacy of the work of Christ, we get

<sup>1</sup>This article is excerpted from *Notes of an Address. Helps in Things Concerning Himself*, Vol. 2, 1892, pp. 14-24. Scripture text has been changed from the KJV to the NKJV for ease in reading.

<sup>2</sup>John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was a nineteenth century protagonist for grace who gained a reputation for controversy for taking a stand against the politics of his own church (he was originally a priest in the Church of Ireland).

He was a remarkable linguist, outstanding in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, German, Dutch, and Italian, and competent in Spanish. Darby had a strong influence on the American Bible Conference movement, the Scofield Reference Bible, and fundamentalism.

the certainty of sins put away, are sealed by the Holy Ghost; consequently we are only waiting for Christ to come and take us to glory. That is our place, and all our duties flow from the place we are in, even as in natural things. We are brought into Christ-made children of God, sons of God; then our duties flow from that place. "Therefore be followers of God as dear children" (Eph 5:1). Again, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6). Therefore, the first great thing is to know our place: not only that we are forgiven (though that is the first thing we need), not only that we are guilty, but the believer finds out a great deal more than that, he finds out that he is lost. Guilty brings in the thought of judgement; but if we are lost we do not think of judgement, because we are ruined already. I speak not only of what I have done, but where I am—outside Paradise, and totally ruined already. We are lost in our own condition. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" (Rom 8:18). So that I do not say merely that I am justified, but that I am saved, and in Christ. I do not believe we get into full liberty till we understand we are totally lost and saved—not only what we have done, but what we are.

It is important that the Christian should distinctly get hold of that, for it is what redemption means. As with Israel in Egypt, the blood upon the door-posts saved them from the judgement of God; but besides that, God took them out of Egypt, and put them into Canaan. We "are not in the flesh but in the Spirit" (Rom 8:9). It is a new condition and place altogether, and this is deliverance, not only forgiveness and justification, but deliverance; and, therefore, in Romans 7 it is not "How shall I get forgiveness?" but "who shall deliver me?" The answer is, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:25). He finds his sins blotted out; defiled, he is washed; having offended, he is forgiven; guilty, he is justified; God has made that perfectly clear forever. But the old man is dead before God, and the new man is in Christ. Christ is my righteousness. I was lost, without hope in myself, but now I am in Christ before God. That is my deliverance. In Romans 5 you are justified; but in Romans 8 "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (v 1). To find out, practically, that I am lost, is a very different thing from finding that I am guilty; because, if lost, I have finished my whole history, and I must get my whole condition made new (thank God it is, in Christ). If I am guilty, I may hope to get forgiveness; but if I am lost, I must get a new condition



altogether—a totally new creation in Christ Jesus. When I have this redemption, the effect is to leave me, as a matter of fact, down here, being thus delivered, and then I begin to run the race; for you and I have in this world to go through the wilderness (to find ourselves in heavenly places too). God has minded that we should be thus exercised to discern good and evil, and what we get in this chapter is power in that course. We have to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:1-2). It is the expression, in Philippians 3, of the experience of one who was running the race faithfully.

Sin is never mentioned in the epistle; what you find in Paul was, that the power of the Holy Ghost was there. It was not that the flesh was not there, for he had a thorn in the flesh, but there was power to keep it down. You get complete deliverance here, entire freedom, for he was running his race free; and another you see is power, Christ’s power. He was perfectly free, or he could not have run on in that power, and also (which is practically a great thing), he had an object, which gave him singleness of eye and purpose. You get the man set perfectly free: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). The principle of sin, in which I was lost, is dead and gone for faith, because Christ has died, and, therefore, I say I died: “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 7:11). The life that I have in Christ, and as to the flesh, I say, “I died upon the cross.” That is the place the apostle was then in, and there was power, because “The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). There is Christ’s power. His grace is sufficient for us; therefore we can never excuse ourselves if we commit sin, because Christ’s grace is sufficient for us. His strength is made perfect in weakness. It is not that the flesh is not there; but a dead person does not act. We fail; but the Christian condition is, “You are dead.” If there is carelessness and want of prayer, failure does come; but there is no excuse for it. If Christ is in me, there is life and power, and the flesh is a dead thing. *It is not that Christ has died for your sins, but you have died with Christ; that is where real freedom comes in, and power comes in too because Christ is there.*

You will always find that where Christ’s power is in us, Christ is the object of our life, as in Galatians 2, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (v 20). And then he adds, “And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith

in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (v 20). There is the object: wherever Christ is the power of life in us, Christ is the object of that life. Christ having become a man, and gone into glory, God has given the object of our delight also, and given us His Spirit to enable us to make it so. It is a wonderful thing to see that God has so set Christ before us, and given us His Spirit, and a new nature, to be able to enjoy Him, linking us thus with himself.

The next thing is, "that I may gain Christ" (3:8). That is what he means by "That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me," (3:12), and now he says, "I want to possess Him." He is not looking at the salvation wrought out by Christ, but at the end; and therefore he says, at the close of the chapter, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (3:20-21). It is the salvation we are expecting that he speaks of now.

We have the man freed, and with power; and we have the man with Christ as his object and nothing else: and there is where we all are, and it is just a question of our faith as to how far it is true of us practically. It all depends on how far Christ is our object. You have the graciousness of deportment in chapter 2. Here we get the active energy of the Spirit of God; and mark, it is where there is one single object that there is practical energy and power. "A double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways" (Jas 1:7). In some things, he acts like a Christian; in others, he does not. If he has two or three objects, he is unstable, but if he has one object he walks with energy.

Now what characterized the apostle was that he had given up all things; not did "count them as rubbish" (Phil 3:8), but "do" now! Can we say that? At the moment of our conversion we all felt that all we had in the world had been deceiving us, and leading us to hell and its horrors. The pleasure, wealth, riches, ease, everything that was gain to us as men in the world, can we say of them, "I do count them but rubbish that I may gain Christ?" Paul was not satisfied with having counted, but he says, "I do count," and further than this, "All this will only hinder me." Like a man running a race, he has on a beautiful cloak, we will suppose; he finds it hinders him, and he throws it off.

It is the object we have that always characterizes us—blest be God, we have it in Christ unto everlasting life. It was not any uncertainty with the apostle, it was not that he doubted that Christ had laid hold of



him, but he wanted to get Christ. There was this honest purpose of heart—the man was free, he had Christ's strength; and then there was this purpose of heart-spiritual energy and activity. There are two things which go together. The first, "that I may gain Christ," and then our resurrection from the dead, that is, our own glory, which comes in as the second thing. First, "that I may gain Christ," it was Christ Himself who possessed his heart; still he says, "if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:11).

Well, I can have but one thing as my object. If I am making tents, as Paul did, I shall do it well; it is our duty as Christians to be patient and gracious in meeting with hard men—wrong doers. You will find that everything is judged of entirely by the object a man has. If he wants to get a thing, he will spend his money without stint to get it—he estimates everything by his object. An avaricious man will say of a spendthrift, "Did you ever see such a fool!" And the spendthrift will say of one fond of money, "he might as well have a stone, for his money is no good to him." The moment I get Christ as my object everything else will be as dross and dung, and there will be no want of lowliness, *because the nearer we get to Christ the less we think of ourselves*. I want to know Him, and the Spirit of God is not grieved. The path of the just grows brighter and brighter until the perfect day. His heart is more capable of knowing Christ, and he knows him better—he is not thinking of self. It is a privilege held out to us that we shall be so perfect that we shall only think of the Lord, and in any measure as we are near Him now, *we think of Him and not of ourselves*. The Christian looks at himself as forgiven, as justified, but as perfect, and going to be like Christ and with Christ. He has a new place; he is in Christ; he has it by the Spirit in faith now, and he wants actually to possess it.

Now how far can our souls say we are actually delivered, not only forgiven, but delivered? I do not mean that if you are careless you will not slip into sin, but there is a positive deliverance; we are not in the flesh at all. The world is there, Satan is there, and I have to watch every moment to have Christ sufficiently before my mind. You will find that nine-tenths of the things that are temptations to us would be no temptations at all if we walked with Christ. See a mother who has heard that her child has met with an accident on the railway, and lies at the station suffering; how she hastens to the spot, and does not even think of the show and vanity in the shop windows she may have to



pass. Another time she might linger there, but not now. If our souls are filled with Christ, as I said, nine-tenths of the things that are temptations to us we shall not think of at all. It is living as Christ—"By the words of Your lips, I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer" (Ps 17:4). The great mass of the temptations we should escape altogether, because we should be thinking of something entirely different. God has called me up to be with Christ and like Christ, and now I am after that, and am looking for nothing else. We all have some object that we follow with energy and life, and can we say that it is Christ, and that that is the one thing that governs our hearts from day to day?

The Lord give us beloved, to know what that true liberty is; "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty" (2 Cor 3:17)—liberty with God and from the things around: though we still have to contend, and shall have, too, yet it is with the joy of Christ in our hearts as we go on. God has called us in sovereign grace to be with Himself, like and with Christ forever, and where the soul is full of the Holy Ghost, there is joy and sustained freshness.

# **GRACE IN THE ARTS:**

## **C. S. LEWIS'S THEOLOGY: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN RANSOM AND REEPICHEEP**

**JAMES TOWNSEND**

Bible Editor  
Cook Communications  
Elgin, IL

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Would you like to pretend that you haven't just read the title above and to try your hand at a trivia quiz? Here goes. Who was the gentleman who:

- a) was converted to Christianity while riding to the zoo in a sidecar of his brother's motorcycle?
- b) had his Christianity affirmed by Dr. Bob Jones but questioned by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones(!)?
- c) would never have been a professor if the entrance math exam (which he failed to pass twice) hadn't been conveniently dropped as a requirement?
- d) taught at colleges spelled with one letter's difference—Magdalen and Magdalene?
- e) smoked at least sixty cigarettes a day—between pipes?
- f) lived in the same house for thirty years with a woman to whom he wasn't married?
- g) had tiffs with the other leading Anglican literary critic of his time (T. S. Eliot)?
- h) had as his longest lifetime friend a homosexual (Arthur Greeves)?
- i) died the same day as President John F. Kennedy?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The sources and background for the trivia quiz are as follows:

a) Kathryn Lindskoog, *C. S. Lewis: Mere Christian* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1973), 8.

This composite trivia quiz does not sound like the personality profile of a candidate for the “Evangelical of the Year.” Then again, modern conservatives probably wouldn’t have picked three murderers (or accomplices to murder), such as Moses, David, and Paul were, to have authored nineteen books of God’s inspired Word! In light of this, it’s rather amusing that C. S. Lewis—so much read by Evangelicals—would probably be turned away from many of their churches if he were an aspiring pastoral candidate.

In the subtitle for my article, I placed Lewis: “Somewhere between Ransom and Reepicheep.” These two Rs are characters in Lewis’s fiction. The fictional Dr. Elwin Ransom is a Cambridge philologist (as Lewis was) whose first name has the same letters (except the substitution of an “n” for an “s”) as Lewis’s last name. Ransom appears in Lewis’s space trilogy as the Christian character whose chosen role is to save the world. Another of Lewis’s fictional characters, Reepicheep, appears in his *Narnia* series. Reepicheep, an oversized mouse with a needle-like sword, possesses chutzpah disproportionate to his mouselike size. Therefore, I raise the question: did Lewis see himself as Ransom or Reepicheep—or a bit of both? Was he the chosen apologist of the age,

---

b) The source for Bob Jones is my memory. I think I read it in something Mark Noll wrote. J. I. Packer, “Still Surprised by Lewis,” *Christianity Today* (September 7, 1998), 56, indicated Martyn Lloyd-Jones “doubt[ed] whether Lewis was a Christian at all.”

c) Lindskoog, *Mere Christian*, 6.

d) This is common knowledge. He taught at *Magdalen* [pronounced MAWD-linn] College at Oxford University and later at *Magdalene* College at Cambridge University.

e) A. N. Wilson in *The Chicago Tribune* (February 25, 1990), Section 14, 5.

f) This is common knowledge.

g) George Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times*, 258, and other biographers.

h) A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 274. Also Nevill Coghill, Christian professor of literature at Oxford, was reportedly homosexual, according to Wilson.

i) This is common knowledge. The writer Aldous Huxley also died the same day.



whose role was to save the planet (like Ransom) or was he merely a minor critter with an oversized sense of the daredevil, taking on all comers (like Reepicheep)?

Lewis's friend, clergyman Austen Farrer, asserted: "You cannot read Lewis and tell yourself that Christianity has no important moral bearings, that it gives no coherence to the whole picture of existence, that it offers no criteria for the decision of human choices...."<sup>2</sup> Lewis became a Christianized version of movie swordsman Errol Flynn with his apologetics swordplay. Like Robert Louis Stevenson's swordsman in *Kidnapped*, Alan Breck Stewart, he was (to borrow Austen Farrer's image) "a bonny fighter."<sup>3</sup> Lewis's long-term friend Owen Barfield noted that Lewis's former student John Lawlor had reported that in Lewis's presence he felt like he was "wielding a peashooter against a howitzer."<sup>4</sup> John Beversluis called Lewis "the 20<sup>th</sup> century's foremost defender of the faith."<sup>5</sup> Lewis's apologetics was so barbed because his learning was so encyclopedic. William Empson believed Lewis "was the best read man of his generation, one who read everything and remembered everything he read."<sup>6</sup> Lewis was reputedly Oxford's most popular lecturer for many years. By 1978 MacMillan had "published more than fourteen million copies of Lewis' books."<sup>7</sup>

Biographical sources are particularly rich for Lewis since many of his friends wrote biographies about him. Lewis's father left a "mass of diaries, letters, and papers" and Lewis's brother, Warnie, spent "several years typing the 3,563 pages that make up the eleven volumes of Lewis Papers...which cover the years 1850-1930."<sup>8</sup> In addition, there is the

<sup>2</sup> Austen Farrer in Jocelyn Gibb, ed. *Light on C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1965), 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>5</sup> John Beversluis, "Beyond the Double Bolted Door," *Christian History* (vol. 4, no. 3): 28.

<sup>6</sup> A. N. Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1990), 161.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Bechtel, "C. S. Lewis: Apostle of Joy," *The Christian Reader* (July-August, 1978): 8.

<sup>8</sup> Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 119.

“million-word diary of Warnie Lewis”<sup>9</sup> and Lewis’s extensive correspondence, including close to 300 letters interchanged with lifetime friend Arthur Greeves.

## II. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Riding in the upper story of the family omnibus of C. S. Lewis’s chromosomes was a paternal great grandfather, Joseph, a Methodist minister, and a maternal great grandfather, Rev. Hugh Hamilton, who had been Bishop of Ossuary in Ireland. Lewis’s maternal grandfather, Rev. Thomas Hamilton, was an Anglican chaplain in Rome and rector of St. Mark’s Anglican Church in Dundela. With all this religious genetic baggage, it is surprising that C. S. Lewis’s own father and mother were rather nominal Anglicans.

Lewis’s mother, who died of cancer when he was only eight years old, had graduated from Queen’s College in Belfast, Ireland with first-class honors in logic and second-class honors in mathematics. Lewis described his father, Albert, as “almost without rival the best raconteur [or storyteller] I have ever heard...”<sup>10</sup> However, as with Fyodr Dostoevsky and Robert Louis Stevenson and their fathers, Jack’s (C. S. Lewis’s lifelong nickname) relationship with his father was always strained. Albert was a Belfast court police lawyer.

After Jack’s mother died, he increasingly bonded with his brother, Warnie. As an adult, Warnie became a noted British major, was a member of the Inklings group, wrote seven books on seventeenth-century France, and, sadly, was subject to alcoholic binges.

Both Lewis and his wife-to-be were precocious learners. Jack “knew both Greek and Latin by the age of six.”<sup>11</sup> By ten years old he had read Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Similarly, Joy Davidman had “read H. G. Wells’s *Outline of History* at age eight and promptly announced her atheism.”<sup>12</sup> Though Lewis’s childhood home was not especially happy

<sup>9</sup>George Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), xiii.

<sup>10</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Collins Press, 1955), 10.

<sup>11</sup>Walter Hooper, *Through Joy and Beyond: A Pictorial Biography of C. S. Lewis* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. 1982), 16.

<sup>12</sup>Lyle W. Dorsett, *And God Came In. The Extraordinary Story of Joy*



or religious, he was taken to St. John's Anglican Church twice each Sunday where, he reported, "I here heard the doctrines of Christianity... taught by men who obviously believed them."<sup>13</sup>

Jack attended four different boys' schools from 1908 to 1914 and presented a bleak picture of them in his autobiography. He became a young atheist and owned up to sexual immorality on one occasion.

From 1914 to 1917 Jack studied privately (to prepare for Oxford) with his father's former college headmaster, W. T. Kirkpatrick (affectionately known as the "Great Knock"). Young Lewis expected Kirkpatrick to be maudlin like his father, but was jolted upon their initial meeting by the atheist Kirkpatrick's rigorous grilling in logic over the most mundane matters. Three years of logical dueling left an indelible impression upon the malleable mind of Lewis, the future apologist. During that time Jack "found that he could think in Greek."<sup>14</sup> Little wonder, since practically all Jack did for three years was to translate the Greek and Latin classics under Kirkpatrick's tutelage. Kirkpatrick reported to Jack's father (September 16, 1915): "He is the most brilliant translator of Greek plays I have ever met," and (on April 7, 1916): "He has read more classics than any boy I ever had—or indeed I might add than any I ever heard of..."<sup>15</sup>

Also during his younger years, Jack formed a lifelong friendship with Arthur Greeves, due to their mutual interest in "northernness" or Norse mythology. Greeves's harsh father was of a strict Plymouth Brethren background. Ironically, Lewis and Greeves later crisscrossed in their theological thinking. Whereas Lewis moved from atheism to Christianity, Greeves shifted from conservative Christianity on through Unitarianism, Bahai, and Quakerism.

Jack's entrance to Oxford University was interrupted by World War 1, in which he was wounded with shrapnel and once (to his relief) found sixty German soldiers emerging from the fog with their hands up surrendering to him. Before entering battle, Jack had compacted with his friend Paddy Moore that if Paddy should die, he would assume

---

*Davidman: Her Life and Marriage to C. S. Lewis* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1983), xi.

<sup>13</sup> Hooper, *Through Joy and Beyond*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1984), xxii-xxiii.



responsibility for Paddy's mother (and sister). As a result, the forty-five-year-old Mrs. Moore moved in with eighteen-year-old Jack. Her daughter, Maureen, was then eleven. Virtually all Lewis biographers agree that young Jack had a romantic crush on Mrs. Moore—though only the warts-on biographer A. N. Wilson concludes that theirs was an explicitly sexual relationship. For thirty years they occupied the same house, and when senility forced her to enter a nursing home, Jack visited her each day for a year until she died.<sup>16</sup>

Lewis failed the entrance math exam to Oxford twice, but it was then waived for returning soldiers. At University College, the oldest of the thirty Oxford colleges, Lewis graduated with honors in Greek and Latin classics, English literature, and philosophy.

On October 12, 1916, Lewis penned his position in a letter to Arthur Greeves: "I think that I believe in no religion. There is absolutely no proof for any of them, and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even the best. All religions, i.e., all mythologies...are merely man's own invention—Christ as much as Loki. In every age the educated and thinking [people] have stood outside [religion]."<sup>17</sup>

Slowly Lewis's view shifted. On June 3, 1918, he again wrote Greeves: "I believe in no God, least of all in one that would punish me for the 'lusts of the flesh'; but I do believe that I have in me a spirit, a chip, shall we say, of universal spirit..."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to his reading of George MacDonald, Lewis seemed to be surrounded with Christian influence at Oxford. Owen Barfield, a lawyer, would later become an anthroposophist. Nevill Coghill ("clearly the most intelligent and best-informed man in that class...a Christian")<sup>19</sup> was later to become Merton Professor of English at Oxford. Hugo Dyson was an Anglican. J. R. R. Tolkien, a Roman Catholic, taught Anglo-Saxon at Oxford.

From 1925 to 1954 C. S. Lewis was a tutor and lecturer at Magdalen College at Oxford. Lewis lost four different professorships while at

<sup>16</sup> Lindskoog, *C. S. Lewis: Mere Christian*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Hooper, ed., *They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914-1963)* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1979), 135.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 170.

Oxford, and so in 1954 he moved to take the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at rival Magdalene College at Cambridge University, where he remained until 1963.

During those middle years, Lewis was to write of his ideological safari: "My own progress had been from 'popular realism' [atheism] to Philosophical Idealism; from Idealism to Pantheism; from Pantheism to Theism; and from Theism to Christianity."<sup>20</sup>

On December 21, 1929, Lewis—upon reading John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*—wrote: "I...am still finding more and more the element of truth in the old beliefs [that] I feel I cannot dismiss...There must be something in it; only what?"<sup>21</sup> In this pre-conversion period Lewis wrote: "I felt as if I were a man of snow at long last beginning to melt."<sup>22</sup> As a result, in 1929 Lewis was converted to theism. He journaled of that experience: "I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed; perhaps, that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England," but this conversion "was only to Theism. I knew nothing about the Incarnation."<sup>23</sup>

Lewis's autobiography zeroes in primarily upon his conversion to theism (in 1929) rather than on his conversion to Christ (in 1931). In fact, his Christian conversion almost seems anticlimactic.

That his views had not settled into concrete is apparent from his letter of January 9, 1930 to Arthur Greeves: "In spite of all my recent changes of view, I am...inclined to think that you can only get what you call 'Christ' out of the Gospels by...slurring over a great deal."<sup>24</sup> In a letter of January 30, 1930 to Greeves, he "attribute[d] everything to the grace of God..."<sup>25</sup> On March 21, 1930 Lewis wrote to A. K. Hamilton Jenkin that what he held "is not precisely Christianity, though it may turn out that way in the end."<sup>26</sup> During this period Lewis was attending the morning university chapels. By January 10, 1931 his

<sup>20</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 200.

<sup>21</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 98.

<sup>22</sup>Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 179.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 182, 184.

<sup>24</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 104.

<sup>25</sup>Walter Hooper, ed. *Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 338.

<sup>26</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 106.



brother “was beginning to think the religious view of things was after all true.”<sup>27</sup>

The critical change came in September of 1931. The night of September 19, Lewis walked and talked (until around 4 a.m.) with J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson about myth and Christianity. Hugo Dyson’s “main point was that Christianity works for the believer. The believer is put at peace and freed from his sins.”<sup>28</sup>

On September 28, 1931, at age thirty-two, Lewis was “riding to the Whipsnade zoo in the sidecar of Warren’s motorcycle. ‘When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did.’”<sup>29</sup> According to 1 John 5:1 and 5, all those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God are “born of God.” To Arthur Greeves on October 1, 1931, Lewis wrote: “I have just passed from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ—in Christianity.”<sup>30</sup>

From June 1930 to August 1931 he’d been reading Brother Lawrence’s *Practice of the Presence of God*, Thomas Traherne’s *Centuries of Meditation*, William Inge’s *Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion*, Richard Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, and others. In December of that year Lewis began “communicating,” that is, taking communion in his local Headington (Anglican) church.

Lewis’s fame as a Christian did not emerge until his BBC radio broadcasts (which later developed into the book *Mere Christianity*) and his 1942 publication of *Screwtape Letters*. About the same time students founded the Oxford University Socratic Club for Christians, agnostics, and atheists to have discussions, and Lewis served as president of the club for twenty-two years.

One highly significant Socratic Club debate occurred on February 2, 1948. Lewis had a debate with a woman—Elizabeth Anscombe, a Roman Catholic philosopher who would later be professor of philosophy at Cambridge University. Anscombe’s position was opposed to that of Lewis’s chapter 3 in his book *Miracles*, namely, that “Naturalism is Self-refuting.” “The meeting is said to have been the most exciting

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>28</sup>Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times*, 226.

<sup>29</sup>Lindskoog, *C. S. Lewis: Mere Christian*, 8.

<sup>30</sup>Hooper, *Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 425.



and dramatic the Socratic [Club] has ever seen."<sup>31</sup> John Beversluis observed, "Although hardcore [Lewis] loyalists disagree, the unanimous consensus of those actually present was that Anscombe had won hands down..."<sup>32</sup> George Sayer, Lewis's former student and friend, asserted that Lewis told him: "I can never write another book of that sort" [as *Miracles*] "and he never did. He also never wrote another [distinctly] theological book [except *Reflections on the Psalms*]."<sup>33</sup> Any analyst who is a gender equalitarian can easily point to at least fifty references in Lewis's fifty-something books where his traditionalist views on gender would be offensive (at best) to an equalitarian; some would think him a misogynist. The blow to Lewis's ego at being defeated philosophically and publicly by a woman would have proven psychologically very difficult for him.

In light of his known views on the issue of gender, it seems all the more ironic that when Lewis was fifty-eight he married a woman who was ultra-outspoken. Joy Davidman was an intellectual American Jewess (an ex-Communist) with practically a photographic memory. She entered college at age fourteen, graduated at nineteen in 1934, and got her master's degree from Columbia University in 1935 after three semesters.<sup>34</sup> By age twenty-four she had authored a book of poetry. However, her marriage to Bill Gresham proved disastrous, since he was an alcoholic, physically abusive, and a womanizer. After her divorce, she and her two young sons wound up on the doorstep of C. S. Lewis in Oxford in 1952.

To protect her from being extradited back to America and the abusive Gresham, she and Lewis underwent a civil marriage in 1956. (Later Bill told Joy—despite his profession of Christianity: "I am not a Christian and will probably never be one since I cannot...accept ["the basic doctrines"]..."<sup>35</sup>

In 1957 when it became apparent that Joy had cancer, she and Lewis underwent a religious marriage ceremony and she moved into his home. At that hospital bedside wedding, Reverend Peter Bide prayed

<sup>31</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 227.

<sup>32</sup>Beversluis, *Christian History*, 29.

<sup>33</sup>Sayer, *Jack: C. S. Lewis and His Times*, 308.

<sup>34</sup>Dorsett, *And God Came In*, xi.

<sup>35</sup>Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 237.

for her healing, and her cancer went into remarkable remission for several years. In 1960 Joy “died at peace with God.”<sup>36</sup> Lewis himself died in 1963 on the same day as President Kennedy and Aldous Huxley.

### III. BOOKS

Lewis penned over fifty books, some of them compiled posthumously. There are seventeen biblical, theological, and philosophically related works, fourteen works of literary criticism, twenty of a more imaginative literary nature (including seven children’s books, four science fiction thrillers, and four books of poetry—two of these penned as a youthful atheist), and three compilations of his letters.

His close friend Walter Hooper claimed that Lewis “was a failed poet,”<sup>37</sup> presumably because Lewis’s early ambition was to become a poet and because T. S. Eliot (whose poetry Lewis strongly disliked) proved to be a successful poet. England’s two most famous Christian literary critics of their epoch never hit it off—despite the fact that their mutual friend, writer Charles Williams, got them together for an experimental lunch (which failed).

Lewis’s first two books of atheistical poetry were published under a pseudonym—Clive Hamilton (his first name and his mother’s maiden name). Interestingly, even his first book written as an unbeliever borrowed a biblical title—*Spirits in Bondage* (1919), a phrase suggested by 1 Peter 3:19.

Two years after his Christian conversion, Lewis transformed his philosophical and experiential journey into an allegory—*The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933). His first intellectual volume, *The Allegory of Love* (1936) is considered by some to be “his greatest scholarly book.”<sup>38</sup> It earned Lewis the Hawthornden Prize and was the catalyst for his most meaningful male friendship with Charles Williams.

From 1938 to 1945 he was engaged in publishing his space fantasy in a trilogy. The first two books land the reader on Mars and Venus

<sup>36</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 89.

<sup>37</sup>Hooper, *Through Joy and Beyond*, 83.

<sup>38</sup>Calvin Linton, “C. S. Lewis Ten Years Later,” *Christianity Today* (November 9, 1973), 4.



(under other names). Regarding the second of the trio Richard Cunningham said: "*Perelandra* is the most hauntingly beautiful and theologically important of the [space travel] trilogy."<sup>39</sup> The last and bleakest of the trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, had its theological counterpart in his 1943 *The Abolition of Man*. Concerning this last volume Peter Kreeft wrote: "*The Abolition of Man* contains the most important and enlightening single statement about our civilization that I have ever read..."<sup>40</sup>

*The Screwtape Letters* (1942) proved Lewis's most popular seller. The seven-book *Narnia* series was also perennially popular, though Lewis was hurt by J. R. R. Tolkien's negative criticism of it. The final book in the series, *The Last Battle*, won the Carnegie medal in 1956.

Lewis's most massive volume was *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (1954). He frequently abbreviated it OHEL since it was one of the multi volume set entitled the "Oxford History of English Literature." A. N. Wilson appropriately appraised the tome by saying that it "must rank as about the most entertaining work of criticism ever written."<sup>41</sup>

*Surprised by Joy* (no sure relation to his wife's name) was his autobiography, written eight years prior to his wife's death. Lewis considered the allegorical *Till We Have Faces* (1956) his best book. At least fifteen of his books were released after his death. Kathryn Lindskoog questioned the authenticity of *The Dark Tower and Other Stories* (1977).

#### IV. THEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Friends accused Lewis of a rumpled dress and a somewhat rumpled theology too. In explanation, Clyde Kilby wrote: "It is not correct to say that Lewis has a 'theology,' if by that term is meant a systematic, all-embracing complex like that of John Calvin or Karl Barth."<sup>42</sup> Yet,

<sup>39</sup> Richard Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 147.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Kreeft, "Western Civilization at the Crossroads," *Christian History* (vol. IV, no. 3), 26.

<sup>41</sup> Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 241.

<sup>42</sup> Clyde Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 147.



as Elizabeth Elliot wrote in a 1982 interview for *Discipleship Journal*, Lewis claimed he was no theologian, "but he was. He covered the whole field of theology in popular, understandable language."<sup>43</sup>

Not only did Lewis dress in a rumpled theology (like the rather unsystematic John Wesley), but he was somewhat like quicksilver in that he was difficult to pin down or classify. In *Mere Christianity* he professed to be promulgating only the beliefs which all orthodox Christians commonly hold. As a Christian supernaturalist he once observed "how much more one has in common with a *real* Jew or Muslim than with a wretched liberalizing, occidentalized specimen of the same category."<sup>44</sup>

In two of his books he acknowledged accepting "the Nicene or Athanasian creed."<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Lewis appeared as "an unorthodox champion of orthodoxy."<sup>46</sup> Below we will survey Lewis's treatment of the salient subjects of the traditional theological categories.

## A. THE BIBLE

Naturally one who espouses Darwin's theory of human biology forces a different view of some parts of the Bible than the traditionally accepted evangelical viewpoint. This was the case with Lewis.

On the positive side, Lewis owned: "The Scriptures come before me as a book claiming divine inspiration."<sup>47</sup> Also he wrote that "all Holy Scripture [including even the imprecatory psalms] is in some sense—though not all parts of it in the same sense—the word of God."<sup>48</sup>

The following statement would seem to categorize Lewis as neo-orthodox in his understanding of the Bible: "Naivete, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed [from the pages of the Bible]. The total result is not 'the Word

<sup>43</sup> Jerry Root, "Following That Bright Blur," *Christian History* (vol. IV, no. 3), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 5 and *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 189.

<sup>46</sup> Edgar W. Boss, "The Theology of C. S. Lewis," Th.D. dissertation at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary (1948), 269.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 102.

<sup>48</sup> Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 22.

of God' in the sense that every passage, in itself, gives impeccable science or history. It carries the Word of God..."<sup>49</sup>

In his books Lewis amplified on his understanding of the Bible's inspiration: "The earliest stratum of the Old Testament contains many truths in a form which I take to be legendary, or even mythical...things like Noah's Ark or the sun standing still upon Ajalon," while in the New Testament "history reigns supreme."<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere he wrote, "The first chapters of Genesis, no doubt, give the story in the form of a folktale..."<sup>51</sup> Referring to the notion that "every sentence of the Old Testament has historical or scientific truth," Lewis admitted: "This I do not hold, any more than St. Jerome did when he said that Moses described Creation 'after the manner of a popular poet' (as we should say, mythically) or than Calvin did when he doubted whether the story of Job were history or fiction."<sup>52</sup> Again, Lewis penned: "The Old Testament contains fabulous elements" which would include "Jonah and the Whale, Noah and his Ark,...but the Court history of King David is probably as reliable [historically] as the Court history of Louis XIV."<sup>53</sup>

Lewis appraised the New Testament documents as falling in the realm of authentic history—and so at this point he was anti-Bultmannian. He opined: "As a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are, they are not legends."<sup>54</sup> In another context he reiterated: "I was by now too experienced in literary criticism to regard the Gospels as myths."<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere Lewis stated that finding "a 'historical Jesus' totally different from the figure in the Synoptic tradition...I confess is a mode of 'research' I heartily distrust."<sup>56</sup>

Not only did Lewis widen his view of inspiration to include Old Testament myths, but he also allowed for the "inspiration" of later extra-biblical material. He once wrote (in a May 7, 1959 letter) to Clyde Kilby: "If every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights,

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>50</sup> C. S. Lewis, *They Asked for a Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 158.

<sup>51</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 92.

<sup>53</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 57-58.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>55</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 188.

<sup>56</sup> C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 29.



then all true and edifying writings, whether in Scripture or not, must be *in some sense* inspired.”<sup>57</sup> With reference to the writing of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Bunyan said: “It came,” and Lewis remarked: “*It came*. I doubt if we shall ever know more of the process called ‘inspiration’ than those two monosyllables tell us.”<sup>58</sup>

After researching such preceding material, Edgar Boss concluded: “Lewis does not accept the plenary verbal theory of Inspiration.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Lewis analyst Richard Cunningham deduced: “Lewis did not believe in the infallibility or the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.”<sup>60</sup> Michael Christensen’s conclusion differs when he says that Lewis’s “example proved that one can be a dedicated evangelical, accept the full authority of Scripture, yet disbelieve in inerrancy.”<sup>61</sup> Of course, in order to buy Christensen’s conclusion one would have to present a formulated definition of what constitutes an “evangelical.”

## B. GOD AND HIS WORK

Because Lewis adhered to the traditional orthodox view of God (though he always managed to derive fresh insights from it), we will pause only briefly on this subject. Though *Out of the Silent Planet* is fictional, Lewis was representing his own view when he commented: “There was one God [according to the hrossa or inhabitants of the planet Malacandra]...[who] made and still ruled the world.”<sup>62</sup> In arguing for monotheism as over against dualism, Lewis affirmed: “You cannot accept two conditioned and mutually independent beings as the self-grounded, self-comprehending Absolute.”<sup>63</sup>

Lewis subscribed not only to the unity of God but also to the Trinity. He wrote: “In God’s dimension...you find a being who is three persons

<sup>57</sup>Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis*, 153.

<sup>58</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 147.

<sup>59</sup>Boss, “The Theology of C. S. Lewis,” 39.

<sup>60</sup>Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith*, 90.

<sup>61</sup>Michael J. Christensen, *C. S. Lewis on Scripture* (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1979), 91.

<sup>62</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1938), 22.

<sup>63</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 22.



while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube.”<sup>64</sup>

On the subject of divine predestination, Lewis's views come through his fiction in the mouth of Dr. Ransom who held: “Predestination and [human] freedom were apparently identical. He could no longer see any meaning in the many arguments he had heard on this subject.”<sup>65</sup> (Later we will see that Lewis would be classified as Arminian.)

In the matter of God's creation, Lewis had no difficulty in being committed to theistic evolution. Lewis called man “the highest of the animals.”<sup>66</sup> He also acknowledged: “If by saying that man rose from brutality you mean simply that man is physically descended from animals, I have no objection.”<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere he said: “What difficulties I have about evolution are not religious....”<sup>68</sup>

Lewis made the following distinction: “Evolutionism is something quite different from Evolution as the biologists understand it.”<sup>69</sup> Concerning the former, Lewis stated: “In my opinion the modern concept of Progress or Evolution (as popularly defined) is simply a myth, supported by no evidence whatever.”<sup>70</sup> Consequently, while he denied uniformitarian evolution as an inevitable theory of all human development, Lewis declared, “I am assuming that Darwinian biology is correct.”<sup>71</sup> Obviously theistic evolution is not considered kosher by many Evangelicals, though such Bible scholars as A. T. Robertson, B. B. Warfield, and Augustus Strong either espoused it or did not rule it out as a live possibility.

<sup>64</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1943), 142.

<sup>65</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Scribners, 1972), 127.

<sup>66</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 139.

<sup>67</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1962), 72.

<sup>68</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1958), 97.

<sup>69</sup>Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 58.

<sup>70</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1952), 101.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

## C. CHRIST

In *Mere Christianity* Lewis referred to “Christ, the Man who was God.”<sup>72</sup> In *The Problem of Pain* he spoke of “the Incarnate God” and the Son “co-eternal with the Father.”<sup>73</sup> In *The Weight of Glory* Lewis mentioned “the humanity of Christ” and “His deity.”<sup>74</sup> The liberal scholar Norman Pittenger blamed Lewis “for believing that Jesus claimed deity because the fourth Gospel says He did,” to which Lewis replied: “I think that Jesus Christ is (in fact) the Son of God.”<sup>75</sup> To Arthur Greeves (December 26, 1945) Lewis wrote that at Bethlehem “God became man.”<sup>76</sup>

One of the sad realities is that as a young man, Arthur Greeves had adopted the Christian view and Lewis the atheistic one. Later Greeves wandered through Unitarianism and other quagmires. Lewis replied to his letter (December 11, 1949): “Your doctrine, under its old name of Arianism, was given a...very full run for its money. But it didn’t last.”<sup>77</sup> Lewis asked his friend, “If [Christ] was not God, who or what was He?” He concluded: “The doctrine of Christ’s divinity seems to me not something stuck on...but something that peeps out at every point [of the New Testament] so that you have to unravel the whole web to get rid of it...and if you take away the Godhead of Christ, what is Christianity all about?”<sup>78</sup> In *Mere Christianity* Lewis includes his belief in “the Virgin Birth of Christ.”<sup>79</sup>

Lewis also tackled an explanation of what is commonly called “the eternal generation of the Son.” He wrote: “One of the creeds says that Christ is the Son of God ‘begotten, not created’...[which] has nothing to do with the fact that when Christ was born on the earth as a man, that man was the son of a virgin.” Rather, “what God begets is God.”<sup>80</sup> This negative explanation clarifies somewhat but is not overly helpful.

<sup>72</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 142.

<sup>73</sup>Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 63, 45.

<sup>74</sup>Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 7.

<sup>75</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 178-79.

<sup>76</sup>Hoopar, *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 505.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 502-503.

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

<sup>79</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 7.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

Elsewhere he penned that "the one begets and the other is begotten. The Father's relation to the Son is not the same as the Son's relation to the Father."<sup>81</sup> Christ as "Son," Lewis observed, "cannot mean that He stands to God [the Father] in the very same physical and temporal relation which exists between offspring and male parent in the animal world;" this doctrine involves a "harmonious relation involving homogeneity."<sup>82</sup> The normally ingenious and down-to-earth Lewis left his readers in the complicated and heady realms of theological disquisition on this doctrine, but (let's face it) who has ever heard a clearly illustrated exposition of it from a pulpit? In one more attempt Lewis declared: "The Son exists because the Father exists; but there never was a time before the Father produced the Son."<sup>83</sup> Lewis would probably have done better to steer clear of this subject altogether.

Two other of Lewis's Christological opinions are interesting. In speaking of the *kenosis* (Philippians 2:7) he stated: "I certainly think that Christ, in the flesh, was not omniscient—if only because a human brain could not, presumably be the vehicle of omniscient consciousness...."<sup>84</sup> In another comment, bearing upon John 3:13, Lewis claimed "Christ's divine nature never left [heaven] and never returned to it."<sup>85</sup> For one who never claimed to be a theologian, Lewis certainly managed to involve himself in some intricate theological twine. Nevertheless, he was emphatic about retaining the full deity and humanity of Christ as addressed in the early Christian creeds.

Lewis exquisitely represented Christ in His death and resurrection under the image of the lion Aslan in the *Narnia* series. There Aslan is villainously killed, but comes back to life again. It is a lovely metaphor in fantasy form.

## D. HUMANITY AND SIN

On the matter of human will, Lewis wrote: "God willed the free will of men and angels in spite of His knowledge that it could lead in some cases to sin and thence to suffering: i.e., He thought freedom

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>82</sup>Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 137.

<sup>83</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 150.

<sup>84</sup>Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 134.

<sup>85</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1947), 53.



worth creating even at that price.”<sup>86</sup> In his radio broadcast Lewis indicated that God “gave [humans] free will. He gave them free will because a world of mere automata could never love...”<sup>87</sup>

Lewis once argued: “The infinite value of each human soul is not a Christian doctrine. God did not die for man because of some value perceived in him. He loved us not because we are lovable, but because He is love.”<sup>88</sup>

On the subject of human sin, Green and Hooper comment that “many find it difficult to accept Lewis’s belief in a literal...fall of man and his fundamentalist doctrine of original sin...”<sup>89</sup> While Lewis did hold to a serious doctrine of sin, one wonders if the preceding two authors have overstated their case by attaching the qualifiers “literal” and “fundamentalist” to their assessment, since Lewis did regard Genesis 3 mythically. He wrote: “The Fall consisted in Disobedience<sup>90</sup>...while the Fall *consisted in* Disobedience, it *resulted*, like Satan’s [fall], *from Pride*...”<sup>91</sup> As Dr. Ransom, the Christian in *Perelandra*, pictorially put it: “We are all a bent race.”<sup>92</sup> On a broader canvas Lewis brush-stroked: “A sound theory of value demands...that good should be the tree and evil the ivy. Evil has...its parasitic existence.”<sup>93</sup>

Concerning the doctrine of “total depravity,” Lewis wrote: “I disbelieve that doctrine.”<sup>94</sup> Yet he may have misunderstood the nature of the doctrine due to its nomenclature, for in the same section he wrote that “we all sin” and are “in some respects a horror to God” and “vile.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, in his radio broadcasts he told thousands of listeners: “The first step [for us] is to create, or recover, a sense of guilt.”<sup>96</sup>

<sup>86</sup>Hooper, *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 514.

<sup>87</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 158.

<sup>88</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Fern-Seed and Elephants and Other Essays Upon Christianity* (Glasgow: Fontana and Collins, 1975), 20.

<sup>89</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 188.

<sup>90</sup>Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, 68.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>92</sup>William Luther White, *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 130.

<sup>93</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 23.

<sup>94</sup>Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 66.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>96</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 202.

## E. ANGELS, THE DEVIL, AND DEMONS

Lewis was quite traditional here as he stated: "No reference to the Devil or devils [demons] is included in any Christian Creeds, and it is possible to be a Christian without believing in them. [However,] I do believe such beings exist..."<sup>97</sup> Elsewhere Lewis reported:

I do...believe in devils [or demons]. That is to say, I believe in angels and I believe that some of them, by abuse of their free will, have become enemies to God and, as a corollary, to us. These we may call devils. They do not differ in nature [I think the term "constitution" might be better than "nature"] from good angels, but their nature is depraved. Satan, the leader or dictator of devils, is the opposite not of God but of Michael.<sup>98</sup>

In other words, Satan is inferior to God; there is no true dualism.

## F. SALVATION

### 1. Substitutionary Atonement

Since *JOTGES* was conceived in response to a concern over soteriology, we will spend considerable space here. In commenting upon his friend Charles Williams's poem, Lewis offered this commentary: "The Atonement was a Substitution, just as Anselm said: 'All salvation, everywhere and at all time,...is vicarious.'"<sup>99</sup> This, however, appears to be Williams's view rather than Lewis's.

In *The Allegory of Love* Lewis referred to a poem whose "theology turns on a crudely substitutional view of the Atonement."<sup>100</sup> In *Mere Christianity* Lewis indicated that he did not accept the substitutionary view of atonement.<sup>101</sup>

Arthur Greeves's cousin, Sir Lucius O'Brien, claimed that the atonement was not taught in the Gospels. Lewis countered that the atonement must have been an integral part of Christ's teaching because

<sup>97</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 56.

<sup>98</sup> Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 193.

<sup>99</sup> Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis, *Taliessen Through Logres* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 307.

<sup>100</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 262.

<sup>101</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 57-58.

“the Apostles...did teach this doctrine in His name *immediately* after His death.”<sup>102</sup>

Unless Lewis altered his opinion in later years, it would appear that he saw some difference between vicarious and substitutionary atonement, for he wrote: “In the Incarnation we get...this idea of vicariousness of one person profiting by the earning of another person. In its highest form that is the very center of Christianity.”<sup>103</sup> Lewis’s apparent devaluing of substitution led Edgar Boss to conclude that Lewis held “the Example Theory [of the Atonement] with a very important modification. Mr. Lewis is a supernaturalist, while the Example Theory is usually held by Naturalists.”<sup>104</sup> However, I do not think Lewis would have wished to be so neatly pigeonholed into that single category. For him this was the bottom line: “Christ’s death redeemed man from sin, but I can make nothing of the theories as to how!”<sup>105</sup>

## 2. Justification by Faith

Two analysts of very different stripes articulated one major weakness in the expression of Lewis’s soteriology. A. N. Wilson asserted: “If the mark of a reborn evangelical is a devotion to the Epistles of Paul and, in particular, to the doctrine of Justification by Faith, then there can have been few Christian converts less evangelical than Lewis.”<sup>106</sup> In fact, the Methodist minister who reviewed *Mere Christianity* claimed that the book “does not really mention...the central Christian doctrine of Justification by Faith.”<sup>107</sup> From the other end of the theological spectrum, J. I. Packer spoke of Lewis’s “failure ever to mention justification by faith when speaking of the forgiveness of sins, and his apparent hospitality to baptismal regeneration....”<sup>108</sup>

## 3. Salvation by Grace

Readers of this journal will nonetheless rejoice in Lewis’s emphasis on the doctrine of *grace*. In *Reflections on the Psalms* he summarized:

<sup>102</sup>Hooper, *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 436-37.

<sup>103</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 85.

<sup>104</sup>Boss, “The Theology of C. S. Lewis,” 190.

<sup>105</sup>White, *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis*, 144.

<sup>106</sup>Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 137.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup>J. I. Packer, “Still Surprised by Lewis,” *Christianity Today* (September 7, 1998), 56.



"We are all in the same boat. We must all pin our hopes on the mercy of God and the work of Christ, not on our own goodness."<sup>109</sup> In another context Lewis declared: "We are saved by grace...In our flesh dwells no good thing."<sup>110</sup> In his allegory *The Great Divorce*, Lewis describes a man who wants only his "rights," and who has "done my best all my life" and now exclaims, "I'm not asking for anybody's bleeding charity." A former earthling responds to him: "Then do. At once. Ask for the Bleeding Charity. Everything is here for the asking and nothing can be bought."<sup>111</sup> In *Studies in Words* Lewis referred to "'we humans in our natural condition,' i.e., unless or until touched by [God's] grace" or "untransformed...human nature."<sup>112</sup>

In his radio broadcasts Lewis remarked:

I think everyone who has some vague belief in God, until he becomes a Christian, has the idea of an exam or of a bargain in his mind. The first result of real Christianity is to blow that idea into bits...God has been waiting for the moment at which you discover that there is no question of earning a passing mark in this exam or putting Him in your debts.<sup>113</sup>

Later Lewis said that such an awakened individual "discovers his bankruptcy" and so says to God: "You must do this. I can't."<sup>114</sup> He elaborated: "Christ offers [us] something for nothing...."<sup>115</sup> In connection with good works he stated: "[You are] not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already."<sup>116</sup>

Probably Lewis's finest statement on salvation by grace was formulated in the longest book he ever wrote, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*. He said:

On the Protestant view one could not, and by God's mercy, expiate one's sins. Like an accepted lover, he feels that he has done nothing,

<sup>109</sup>Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 18.

<sup>110</sup>Lewis, *Fern-Seed and Elephants*, 24.

<sup>111</sup>Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 34.

<sup>112</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 54.

<sup>113</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 125.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 127-28.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

and never could have done anything to deserve such astonishing happiness. All the initiative has been on God's side, all has been free, unbounded grace. His own puny and ridiculous efforts would be as helpless to retain the joy as they would have been to achieve it in the first place. Bliss is not for sale, cannot be earned, "Works" have no "merit," though of course faith, inevitably, even unconsciously, flows out into works of love at once. He is not saved because he does works of love; he does works of love because he is saved. It is faith alone that has saved him; faith bestowed by sheer gift.<sup>117</sup>

While the exegete might wish to finesse the preceding statement somewhat (for example, making it more objective and not so experiential, as in "happiness," "joy," "bliss"), certainly Lewis's most lengthy explication of salvation by grace through faith falls clearly under the rubric of the orthodox Protestant understanding of salvation.

#### 4. Conditions of Salvation

Another strategic question to ask is: What condition or conditions does Lewis prescribe for receiving the gift of salvation? In his radio broadcast he averred: A Christian "puts all his trust in Christ."<sup>118</sup> In the lengthy quotation above (footnote 117) Lewis stated: "It is faith alone that has saved him; faith bestowed by sheer gift."<sup>119</sup>

In an interview with *Decision* magazine's Shirwood Wirt, Lewis indicated: "It is not enough to want to get rid of one's sins. We also need to believe in the One who saves us from our sins. Not only do we need to recognize that we are sinners; we need to believe in a Savior who takes away sins."<sup>120</sup> Wirt then asked Lewis if he "made a decision at the time of [his] conversion." Lewis answered that at that time he felt he "was the object rather than the subject."<sup>121</sup>

William Luther White summarized: "Lewis repeatedly made the point that...salvation comes as a result of faith in God's grace, not as the product of human moral effort."<sup>122</sup> In a broadcast Lewis stated: "The

<sup>117</sup>Lewis, *English Literature*, 33.

<sup>118</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 128.

<sup>119</sup>Lewis, *English Literature*, 33.

<sup>120</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 260.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>122</sup>White, *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis*, 145.

business of becoming a son of God...has been done for us. Humanity is already 'saved' in principle. We individuals have to appropriate that salvation. But the really tough work—the bit we could not have done for ourselves—has been done for us. We have not got to try to climb up into spiritual life by our own efforts."<sup>123</sup> Lewis was asked in an open session: "Can't you lead a good life without believing in Christianity?" To this he replied that Christianity "will teach you that in fact you can't be 'good' (not for twenty-four hours) on your own moral efforts...we cannot do it..."<sup>124</sup>

In another open session on April 18, 1944, a factory worker who apparently thought Lewis was unclear said, "We don't qualify for heaven by practice, but salvation is obtained at the Cross. We do nothing to obtain it..."<sup>125</sup> Lewis rejoined as follows:

The controversy about faith and works is one that has gone on for a very long time, and it is a highly technical matter. I personally rely on the paradoxical text: "Work out your own salvation...for it is God that worketh in you." It looks as if in one sense we do nothing; and in another case we do a damned lot...and you must have [salvation] in you before you can work it out.<sup>126</sup>

If we had only the preceding statements, subscribers to this journal could probably feel fairly at ease with Lewis's soteriology. In other places, however, he mentions other conditions besides believing, uses different terminology, or is just plain murky. As a sampling of the murky approach in the April 18, 1944 open session, someone asked him: "How can I find God?" Instead of replying with something on the order of Acts 16:31, Lewis answered, "People find God if they consciously seek from Him the right attitude." Later he added that all people "were created to be in a certain relationship to God" and "God wants to give you a real and eternal happiness."<sup>127</sup> While Lewis's answers to the worker weren't anti-biblical, they seem unduly vague.

<sup>123</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 156-57.

<sup>124</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 112.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 49-50.



In other contexts Lewis asked readers: "Will you...repent and believe?" (as the narrator was speaking to an apostate Episcopalian bishop).<sup>128</sup> On the radio he announced: "Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness."<sup>129</sup> When Lewis's fictional, demonized scientist *on another planet*, Weston (the Un-man), writhes against another demonic attack upon him, the Christian Dr. Ransom orders him: "Repent your sins."<sup>130</sup> (In the last two statements there is no mention of believing in Christ for salvation.)

Lewis said that repentance "is not something God demands of you before He will take you back...; it is simply a description of what going back is like."<sup>131</sup> As Lewis put it so colorfully, repentance calls us to move "full speed astern."<sup>132</sup> He also depicted repentance as a self-surrender. In another place Lewis proclaimed: "The guilt is washed out...by repentance and the blood of Christ."<sup>133</sup>

On one of his radio broadcasts Lewis declared: "There are three things that spread the Christ life to us: baptism, belief, and...the Lord's Supper."<sup>134</sup> His meaning and his order of arrangement of the items are unclear.

Even more baffling is this notation in Lewis's anthology of quotes from George MacDonald: "I am sometimes almost terrified at the scope of the demands made upon me, at the perfection of self-abandonment required of me; yet outside of such absoluteness can be no salvation."<sup>135</sup> Indeed, if an "absoluteness" of "perfection" is required of us, who then can be saved? In a literary context Lewis wrote confusingly that Vergil the pagan poet "cannot have had Christian faith, hope, and charity without which no man can be saved."<sup>136</sup> These kinds of statements would certainly be mystifying to the biblically untutored.

<sup>128</sup>Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 42.

<sup>129</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 38.

<sup>130</sup>Lewis, *Perelandra*, 136.

<sup>131</sup>Christensen, *Lewis on Scripture*, 33.

<sup>132</sup>Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 101, and *Mere Christianity*, 87.

<sup>133</sup>Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 61.

<sup>134</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 62.

<sup>135</sup>C. S. Lewis, *George MacDonald: 365 Readings* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1947), 144.

<sup>136</sup>Williams and Lewis, *Taliessen Through Logres*, 305-306.

On the question of "Can one lose salvation?" Lewis has to be categorized as an Arminian for his answer would be "yes." Screwtape's role, say Lewis's biographers, was "to secure the damnation of a young man who has just become a Christian."<sup>137</sup> In *The Last Battle* Susan is "of her own free will 'no longer a friend of Narnia' [that is, a believer]. Lewis is taking into consideration the fact that many people drift into apostasy."<sup>138</sup> Even Dr. Ransom, a committed Christian in the trilogy, realizes that "everlasting unrest...might be my destination."<sup>139</sup> After John (in *The Pilgrim's Regress* allegory) is "converted," he is informed by his Guide: "You all know that security is a mortal's greatest enemy."<sup>140</sup>

In one article Lewis quoted some from the fourth-century Athanasian Creed: "'Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.'" Lewis commented:

The author...is not talking about unbelievers, but about deserters; not about those who have never heard of Christ, nor even those who have misunderstood and refused to accept Him; but those who have...really believed, then allowed themselves...to be drawn away into sub-Christian mode of thought.<sup>141</sup>

Naturally this Arminianism did not yield much "blessed assurance." Even though his wife—at her death—said, "I am at peace with God," Lewis labored: "they tell me she is at peace. What makes them so sure of this? Why are they so sure that all anguish ends with death?"<sup>142</sup>

As an Arminian Lewis espoused an unlimited atonement. In *The Great Divorce* he observed: "All may be saved if they so choose" (which included people on the bus ride from hell).<sup>143</sup> To his old friend Greeves he wrote, "About half of [*Beyond Personality*] is taken up with the...doctrine...that all men can become sons of God...."<sup>144</sup>

<sup>137</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 192.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>139</sup>Lewis, *Perelandra*, 111.

<sup>140</sup>Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, 176.

<sup>141</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 205.

<sup>142</sup>C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Walker and Co., 1985), 24.

<sup>143</sup>Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 201.

<sup>144</sup>Hooper, *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 504.

## 5. The Fate of Moral Non-Christians

Beyond the parameters of traditional Arminianism, however, Lewis expected that some non-Christians would be saved. "Though all salvation is through Jesus, we need not conclude that He cannot save those who have not explicitly accepted Him in this life."<sup>145</sup> On the radio he announced: "We do know that no [one] can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him."<sup>146</sup>

In the children's *Narnia* series, the lion Aslan is Lewis's Christ-figure. In *The Last Battle* deceivers say: "[The god] Tash and Aslan are only two different names for You Know Who." Later they use the hybrid or compound name Tashlan to make their point. At the end of this last book in the *Narnia* series one of the outsiders, a Calorman named Emeth (which is the transliteration of the Hebrew word for "truth"), who has been a life-long worshiper of Tash, approaches Aslan. To this Tash-server Aslan says, "Son, thou art welcome." Emeth counters, "I am no son of Thine but a servant of Tash." Aslan rejoins: "All the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me."<sup>147</sup> This is a clear indicator that for Lewis the non Christ-worshiper may be received into heaven. Similarly, in another fictional setting, Jane Studdock, an unbeliever, says to Ransom the Pendragon: "I know nothing of Maleldil [the Christ-figure]. But I place myself in obedience to you." To her acknowledgment Ransom replies:

It is enough for the present. This is the courtesy of Deep Heaven that when you mean well, He always takes you to have meant better than you know. It will not be for always. He is very jealous. He will have you for no one but Himself in the end. But for tonight, it is enough.<sup>148</sup>

This issue raises the question of Christianity in relation to other world religions. Lewis said: "I couldn't believe that 999 religions were

<sup>145</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 102.

<sup>146</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 65.

<sup>147</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1956), 31, 156.

<sup>148</sup>C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1946), 229-30.



completely false and the remaining one true."<sup>149</sup> Similarly he stated: "We are not pronouncing all other religions to be totally false, but rather saying that in Christ whatever is true in all religions is consummated and perfected."<sup>150</sup> Kathryn Lindskoog wrote: "Lewis expressed hope that many true seekers like Akhenaton and Plato, who never had a chance to find Christ in this life, will find Him in the next one."<sup>151</sup>

## G. THE CHURCH

Lewis was an Anglican Christian who sought to preserve what he considered the common core of centrist Christianity. His late-in-life secretary (an Anglican-become-Roman Catholic) recalled: "I remember the first (and only) time I mentioned 'low' and 'high' churchmanship in [his] presence. He looked at me as though I had offered him poison. 'We must *never* discuss that,' he said...."<sup>152</sup>

### 1. Baptism and Communion

J. I. Packer felt that Lewis bordered on espousing baptismal regeneration even though this is not a prominent strand in his fifty-plus books. Lewis did attach special significance to Communion in his writings. In answer to a factory worker, Lewis commented: "If there is anything in the teaching of the New Testament which is in the nature of a command, it is that you are obligated to take the Sacrament and you can't do it without going to Church."<sup>153</sup> In the same vein Lewis preached: "Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object present to your senses."<sup>154</sup> In regard to the preceding sentence A. N. Wilson concluded that Lewis "clearly had a full belief in the Eucharistic Presence" or he wouldn't have made such an assertion.<sup>155</sup>

When Jack and Warnie were out walking one day, they passed a church sign that declared that "the Blessed Sacrament...should be treated with 'special reverence.'" Over lunch the two brothers argued

<sup>149</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 54.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>151</sup>Lindskoog, *C. S. Lewis: Mere Christian*, 94.

<sup>152</sup>Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, xi.

<sup>153</sup>Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 61.

<sup>154</sup>Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 15.

<sup>155</sup>Wilson, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 174-75.

about this. Warnie said if one was a Roman Catholic, then “the aumbry contains our Lord and...even prostration is hardly reverence enough.” However, if one is Anglican, then it “contains but a wafer and a little wine, and why in front of that should one show any greater reverence than in any other part of the church?”<sup>156</sup> Jack sought to find a middle ground between the two views.

To the less sacramentally minded, Lewis acknowledged that he got “on no better with those who tell me that the elements are mere bread and mere wine, used symbolically to remind me of the death of Christ.”<sup>157</sup> Rather, he thought: “Here is big medicine and strong magic.”<sup>158</sup> Elsewhere he owned: “My ideas about the sacrament would probably be called ‘magical’ by a good many modern theologians.”<sup>159</sup>

## 2. Confessing Sins to a Priest

Only some years after conversion did Lewis make auricular confession to an Anglican priest. He wrote (on October 24, 1940) that “the decision was the hardest I have ever made...”<sup>160</sup> From that time on he made regular confession to a priest.

## H. LAST THINGS

Richard Cunningham summarized Lewis’s eschatology by observing that he believed in “purgatory, heaven, hell, the second coming, the resurrection of the body, and the judgment.”<sup>161</sup> As a young atheist Lewis wrote (on October 18, 1916) that he could do without “a bogey who is prepared to torture me forever and ever if I should fail in coming up short to an almost impossible ideal. As to the immortality of the soul, ...I neither believe nor disbelieve...”<sup>162</sup> Early after his conversion experience he thought very little of an afterlife and rewards.

Praying for the dead and a concept of purgatory pretty well go hand in hand. Lewis “emphatically believed in praying for the dead.”<sup>163</sup>

<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, 102.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>160</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 198.

<sup>161</sup>Cunningham, *C. S. Lewis: Defender of the Faith*, 124.

<sup>162</sup>Hooper, *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 138.

<sup>163</sup>Lindskoog, *C. S. Lewis: Mere Christian*, 141.

He prayed for his wife after she died. He thought that John Henry Newman had the right idea—that saved souls before God's throne would ask to be thoroughly cleansed. Consequently, this necessitated a purgatory, though not as in a medieval doctrine of torture. In this way there would exist "Purgatory (for souls already saved) or...Limbo (for souls already lost)."<sup>164</sup> A television interviewer pointed out to Lewis that he "believe[d] in Purgatory." To this Lewis returned: "But not the *Romish* doctrine." (The Anglican view is found in Article XXII of *The Book of Common Prayer*). Lewis likened purgatory to sitting in a dentist's chair, saying: "I'd *rather* be cleaned first."<sup>165</sup> Of course, most evangelicals believe this viewpoint founders upon the perfect purification which has already transpired in the crosswork of Christ (Hebrews 1:3; 9:15; 10:2, 10-12, 17-18).

Concerning Lewis on the Second Coming, William Luther White said: "Edgar Boss attributes to Lewis the belief that 'Jesus is literally, personally coming again.' ...However, I am unable to find in Lewis anything to support this apparent fundamentalist position."<sup>166</sup> But the *prima facie* reading of Lewis certainly makes it sound as if he champions an orthodox view of Christ's Second Coming. Kathryn Lindskoog asserted: "Lewis found it impossible to retain our belief in the divinity of Christ and the truth of our Christian revelation if we abandon...the promised, and threatened, Return [of Christ]."<sup>167</sup>

Lewis wrote illuminatingly of the wonders of heaven. He also spoke about hell. In one of his last published stories (disputed by Kathryn Lindskoog as to its authorship) Lewis had Dr. Elwin Ransom assert: "A man can't be *taken* to hell, or *sent* to hell; you can only get there on your own steam."<sup>168</sup> This is in line with Lewis's Arminian soteriology, as when he remarked: "The doors of hell are locked on the inside."<sup>169</sup> Yet when Lewis depicted hell fictionally in *The Great Divorce*, only one of the bus riders visiting heaven preferred to stay there; all else preferred their misery.

<sup>164</sup>Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 124.

<sup>165</sup>Green and Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 234.

<sup>166</sup>White, *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis*, 193.

<sup>167</sup>Lindskoog, *C. S. Lewis: Mere Christian*, 34.

<sup>168</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Dark Tower and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1977), 49.

<sup>169</sup>Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 127.



To Arthur Greeves he wrote:

About Hell. All I have ever said is that the N. T. plainly implies the possibility of some being finally left in 'the outer darkness.' Whether this means...being left to a purely mental state...or whether there is still some sort of environment, something you could call a world or a reality, I would never pretend to know.<sup>170</sup>

Also Lewis clarified his opinion when he penned: "Whether this eternal fixity [of hell] implies endless duration—or duration at all—we cannot say."<sup>171</sup> Therefore, once more Lewis's view cannot be labeled typically evangelical.

## I. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Predictability was not the trademark of C. S. Lewis. Nor was his an assembly-line theology. The liberal scholars of his day regarded him as a mousely Reepicheep in his attack upon their "assured results" of biblical criticism. Yet, because of his denial of biblical inerrancy, conservatives could not regard him as their knightly Dr. Ransom. When it came to New Testament historicity, Lewis siphoned off of his own expertise in the field of literary criticism to deny the Bultmannians free reign (or rein). Similarly his popularity as a BBC speaker and in spiraling book sales (especially children's fantasies!) made him unpopular with some scholarly colleagues in the Oxbridge world.

Lewis navigated well within the orbit of orthodoxy when it came to regarding God as a trinity and Christ as deity. Here he stood in sync with the historic position of Christians since antiquity. Not only did he embrace the full supernaturalness of the Father and Son (while commenting only rarely upon the Spirit), but he accepted the bonafide existence of angels, demons, and Satan as invisible, supernatural personalities.

He refused to confine himself to one stated formulation of an Atonement theory, and he was Arminian on the extent of the Atonement and the question of whether salvation could be lost. Ironically, while he believed some Christians could lose their salvation, he believed some non-Christians could receive their final salvation.

<sup>170</sup>Hoopar, *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves*, 508.

<sup>171</sup>Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 127.

As a member in good standing of the Anglican Church, Lewis accepted an Anglican position on purgatory and prayers for the dead, as well as practicing auricular confession of sins. He believed in a substantive reality to heaven and hell but was agnostic about matters such as the precise dimension and duration of hell.

While Lewis was not known for personal evangelism (for example, many of his students went through years of tutoring from him without ever learning that he was a Christian), ironically he became one of the most renowned international defenders of the Christian faith through his writings. Even when we disagree with some of his theological tenets, we are better off for his having forced us to grapple with his immense intellect. Like the local Christian congregation at Corinth, C. S. Lewis came up with some aberrant views and engaged in some heavy drinking, but he was never dull and the world has never been the same.





---

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

*Why Believe? Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God.* By C. Stephen Evans. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996. 154 pp. Paper, \$13.00.

This popular apologetics work was written in response to one of the author's former students who committed suicide as a result of struggles with faith. This real life tragedy is disclosed both in the preface and on the back cover. Consequently, the reader is gripped from cover to cover with the importance of being able to explain and defend the Christian worldview.

Although Evans is a professor of philosophy, he does a fine job writing for a popular audience. In thirteen chapters, Evans tackles every major objection to the Christian faith. He begins with faith itself. In this chapter, Evans unveils his foundational logic: "Each of us has a faith dimension. None of us can avoid faith in something or someone. We must believe in something or someone because we must have something or someone to live for" (p. 9). For Evans, the only question is who or what we will place our faith in.

Chapters two and three are a persuasive attempt urging the reader to ponder the existence of a God. He does this quite capably by raising doubt in the atheistic and agnostic worldviews. He then states that he "will attempt to show that a reasonable 'cumulative case' can be made for a particular kind of religious faith: Christianity" (p. 24).

In chapters four through six, Evans challenges the reader to consider three mysteries in which God has intervened: (1) the mystery of the physical universe, (2) the mystery of a moral order, and (3) the mystery of human personhood. It is this final mystery that stirs the soul. Evans argues these two truths: (1) God made man in His image. (2) God made man for a special purpose that includes a loving relationship with Himself. Evans then reasons that we must need God in some way. Particularly compelling are his sections entitled "The Need to Believe" and "The Craving for Eternity."

Chapters seven and eight present Jesus Christ as God's ultimate revelation of Himself. Evans capably presents the uniqueness of Christianity as demonstrated through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The emphasis here lies in the historicity and deity of Jesus, His claims, and His resurrection.

The remaining chapters address the issues of miracles, science, the Bible, suffering, and religion. Amidst these chapters, Evans responds to several well-known questions (e.g. "Are miracles possible?" "Is God a psychological crutch?" "Is Christianity sexist?" "Do all religions point to the same truth at the bottom?" etc.).

In his chapter on suffering, Evans is careful not to defend God. This results in a balanced and humble treatment of what may be the most problematic objection to Christianity. Evans tenaciously wrestles with man's freedom and the existence of evil. Concerning our attempt to understand and explain why and how God sovereignly uses mankind's freedom, he writes, "...we would have to have exhaustive knowledge of God's purposes in creation of His plans for eternity" (p. 101). His final conclusion is simple: "If God permits evil, then He must have a good reason, even if we don't know what that reason is. Our evidence for this is simply our total knowledge of God's character. God loves us, God cares about us, and God honors His commitments" (p. 103).

A helpful appendix entitled "Suggestions for Further Reading" categorizes 49 different apologetic books under 14 different headings. Great minds like Lewis, Moreland, Kreeft, Bruce, and Stott head up this list of exceptional tools. A minor disappointment is that Evans only included three new works in the ten-year interim between revisions of this book.

GES readers will cringe as Evans suggests, "It is clear that what is necessary to become a Christian is not merely acceptance of a proposition on the basis of evidence, but *a change in a person's whole orientation to life*" (p. 78, italics is the author's). However, he contradicts himself later with this biblical truth: "The new life in Christ is not something that must be earned or willed; it is a *gift*. Growth in the Christian life is a matter of realizing this more and more profoundly" (p. 122, italics his). I recommend this book as an outstanding apologetic tool.

**Keith R. Krell**

Associate Minister  
Suburban Christian Church  
Corvallis, OR



***Meekness and Majesty.*** By R.T. Kendall. Scotland, U.K.: Christian Focus Publications, 1992. 224 pp. Paper, \$7.99.

Most Bible students agree that Phil 2:5-11 is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. In these seven verses, the apostle Paul reveals more about Jesus Christ than possibly any other single passage. *Meekness and Majesty* is R.T. Kendall's exposition and application of these verses to the lives of his readers.

The thesis of this book is that if believers will become "meek," they will experience the "majesty" that can only come from Christ. Kendall begins by imploring that, like Christ, our attitude be one of meekness. He then concludes his first chapter with an emphasis on eternal rewards as they relate to meekness and servitude. This first chapter (an exposition of 2:5) expresses the thesis that will be fleshed out in the remaining chapters.

In the sixteen chapters that follow, Kendall explains what it means to develop a Christ-like attitude and how that will result in blessing in time and eternity. For Kendall, it is simple: "God's word to all of us is to let go of ourselves" (p. 35). How can we do this? By looking to Christ. Christ abandoned His rights, righteousness, riches, recognition, and reputation. "Without ceasing to be God He came to the earth and relinquished that ingredient by which men would see that He was fully God" (p. 106). While being fully God, He took on the form of a servant and dwelt with humanity. He then knelt in humility and obediently died on a cross for the sins of man. As a result of His death, the Father exalted and vindicated Jesus. \*Kendall challenges his readers to understand and apply the truths of this passage. If we do, Phil 2:5 will be true of us ("Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus"). The ultimate end will be true spirituality. "True spirituality is becoming nothing, letting God be God and desiring only the honor of His name" (p. 193).

If any paragraph of this book could be extracted as the sum of its worth, it would be the following: "We will participate in Christ's exaltation in proportion to our participation in His humility. The more we give up, the more we get back; the greater the humiliation, the greater the exaltation; the greater the battle, the greater the victory. Without the cross, there is no crown" (p. 104). It is worth mentioning that this is just one of numerous places where Kendall brings out the doctrine of rewards (e.g., see pp. 22-23, 33-35, 55-56, 58-60, 99-101, 120-123, 133).



Kendall also draws out the importance of unity in the church. He makes the point that unity was the reason Philippians chapter two was written. Paul reveals this in his context when he writes that his desire is that they would “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (1:27ff).

Many *JOTGES* readers will object to Kendall’s interpretation of Romans 10:9-10 (see also Kendall’s earlier work, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, Zondervan, 1984). Kendall states “The confession which is demanded in Rom 10:9 presupposes faith and repentance, for it embodies all that is true of the gospel and all that is necessary to have assurance of salvation” (pp. 201-202). For a better understanding of this passage see Dr. John Hart’s article “Why Confess Christ? The Use and Abuse of Romans 10:9-10” in the Autumn, 1999 *JOTGES*.

However, in answering the question “Why should we bow?” (and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, 2:10-11) Kendall makes the helpful observation, “We do not make Him Lord but merely acknowledge what is true. Our conversion does not change Him; conversion changes us so that we can see what is true” (p. 186). Throughout this work, Kendall is clear on the distinction between salvation and discipleship.

Kendall’s work is an invaluable aid for anyone who is preaching or teaching through the book of Philippians. Like all of his works, this book will also be a help to the Christian who desires to become more Christ-like in his worship and attitude. After reflecting on the contents of this book, Christian songwriter and worship leader, Graham Kendrick, wrote, “This subject is one of the greatest inspirations for worship I know.” *Meekness and Majesty* will do much to deepen your love and appreciation for the person and work of Christ.

**Keith R. Krell**

Associate Minister  
Suburban Christian Church  
Corvallis, OR

*Seven Reasons Not to Ask Jesus Into Your Heart.* By Dennis Rokser. Duluth, MN: Duluth Bible Church, 1998, 40 pp. Paper.

A woman approached me after a recent church service and stated that she had heard that I teach that it is not right to ask Jesus into your heart. She wanted to learn more about it. She said she was in the process of reading the booklet *Seven Reasons Not to Ask Jesus Into Your Heart*. When I asked her if she understood what she had read thus far, she replied “Yes, but it is so hard to let go of something you have been taught your whole life.”

Therein lies the problem. What a shock for her to find out that something she had been taught her whole life is not found in the Bible! This is Rokser’s reason #1. She assumed that because she was taught this at the Bible church she attended that it must be in the Bible and that it must be true. She was confused. But unfortunately confusion is not the only thing at stake here. One’s eternal destiny is also at stake because asking Jesus into one’s heart is “not how one is saved” (Rokser’s reason #2).

This booklet is helpful for several reasons. First, it is based on Scripture, containing over 30 Bible verses written out for the reader and many more references.

Second, while only 40 pages in length, it clearly delineates why this popular cliché is not biblically accurate. It also repeatedly explains what the gospel of grace is and what the one true biblical response to the gospel is—trusting entirely in Jesus Christ and His substitutionary payment made on the cross for the sin of all men.

Third, the booklet is easy to read and very practical, as the issues involved are explained in plain terms without theological jargon. This makes it a very effective tool for evangelism.

However, this booklet offers much more. Rokser, Pastor of Duluth Bible Church, explains that asking Jesus into your heart requires no understanding of the gospel (reason #3), confuses the means of salvation with the results of salvation (reason #4), and results in either no assurance of salvation or a false assurance of salvation (reason #5). As these reasons are addressed, the reader will be shown why one must understand the gospel, what the results of salvation are, and how the believer in Christ can have true biblical assurance of his salvation.

Included are several diagrams, illustrations, and personal examples to make the points exceptionally clear. Rokser provides a thorough exegesis of Rev 3:20, a verse often used to support asking Jesus into one's heart. He shows that this verse is not an offer of salvation to unbelievers but rather an appeal for fellowship to believers.

The seventh reason is perhaps the one that arouses the most reaction. Rokser states that asking Jesus into your heart does not clarify the condition of salvation, but confuses it, especially for children.

To complete his discussion, Rokser effectively addresses five objections people raise in support of asking Jesus into one's heart.

In an age where widespread theological confusion abounds, a clear understanding and presentation of the gospel is crucial—and the proper response to the gospel is paramount. This booklet is suitable for the searching unbeliever and the confused or hungry believer. It should be in the library of every pastor-teacher. This booklet is a mighty tool in the hand of the one who truly desires to honor God and His Word through a clear and accurate presentation of the gospel of grace and the only means of receiving this good news—faith alone in Christ alone.

**Shawn Laughlin**

Pastor

Itasca Bible Church

Grand Rapids MN

*Editor's note:* This review has been adapted and revised from one that appeared originally in *The Grace Family Journal* (Mar-Apr 2000) and is used with permission.

---

***The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament.*** By Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers, III. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998. 652 pp. Cloth, \$39.99.

I have had the privilege of knowing both Cleon Rogers Jr., who was one of the my Greek professors in seminary, and Cleon Rogers, III, who was a contemporary of mine in seminary. Both father and son are very gracious men.

Their book is a very helpful tool for the person who has a working knowledge of *Koine* Greek. It is set up in New Testament order,



beginning in Matthew 1:1 and ending in Revelation 22:21. By no means do they attempt to discuss every word in the Greek New Testament. Rather, they pick out one or more key words or phrases in each verse and comment on these. (Typically they select about four words or phrases per verse, but this is quite variable.)

As the title suggests, the authors provide linguistic and exegetical suggestions. For example, at 2 Cor 5:17 they comment on the word *ktisis*, saying, “creation. The one who is in Christ is part of the new creation” (p. 403).

For the pastor, there is much information here that provides colorful insight to sermons. For example, concerning *gymnos* in Jas 2:15 they state, “The term does not necessarily imply absolute nakedness; it was used of a person wearing only an undertunic and meant someone was poorly clad (Mayor)” (p. 558). Or, concerning the demons believing and *trembling* in Jas 2:19, “*phrissousin*...to bristle. It was used of the physical signs of terror, esp. of the hair standing on the end. The word often expresses only a high degree of awe or terror” (p. 558).

*JOTGES* readers will find their comments uneven on the gospel issue. For example, under 1 Cor 5:11 they begin well saying, “*onomazomenos* pres. pass. part. *onomazō* to name, to bear the name of” (p. 357). But then the very next words are, “His behavior shows that in truth he is not a Christian (Barrett). Concessive part., ‘although he is called’ (Kistemaker).” “To bear the name” is quite different than “although he is called.” The former suggests a genuine brother is in view. The latter leaves this in doubt.

This is also a helpful tool for a person who is translating the Greek NT, either a passage, or the whole NT.

I recommend this book for the serious student of NT Greek.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, TX



---

## PERIODICAL REVIEWS

---

**“Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,”** Grant R. Osborne, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 1999), 193-210.

Historical Criticism (hereafter HC) is a term referring to a number of methods which have been developed to determine what is historical in the Gospels (and the rest of the NT) and what is not. Using these methods, members of the Jesus Seminar, for example, have concluded that 82% of what the Gospel writers recorded as having been said by Jesus was not actually spoken by Him. They determined that these sayings were creations of the Gospel writers (including their alleged redactors).

Osborne, whose book *The Hermeneutical Spiral* I use in a course I am teaching on current issues in hermeneutics, doesn't deny that liberals use HC in this way. He suggests, however, that Evangelicals such as himself, Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, and others do not. He states they use it to aid them in understanding what God has said.

This is an extremely well written article. Osborne is an excellent apologist for his view. One needs to read this article very carefully in order to see areas in which the evangelical use of HC may indeed be a problem.

For example, I could not find one example by Osborne where HC enabled anyone to interpret any passage. He does point out that Evangelicals who use this method have come up with some very plausible harmonizations of Gospel texts. However, he seems to imply, without any evidence, that HC helped produce these harmonizations.

Osborne repeatedly criticizes a book by Thomas and Farnell called *The Jesus Crisis*, accusing the authors of overstatement. Yet he himself is guilty of the same thing in his critique.

He claims, for instance, that Thomas and Farnell “charge that HC makes it *impossible* for evangelicals to harmonize conflicting passages” (p. 200, italics added). His very next words are, “For instance, Thomas and Farnell say, ‘Historical criticism with its assumption of literary interdependence *has little room for harmonizing* apparent discrepancies



in parallel accounts of the Synoptic Gospels” (italics added). The charge is that they say HC makes harmonization *impossible*. The proof cited is that they say it leaves *little room for harmonization*. The proof is no proof at all. Clearly the authors are *not* saying that it makes harmonization impossible.

One of the most instructive sections is Osborne’s analysis of five contrasts between the evangelical use of HC and that of the Jesus Seminar. Unwittingly, in his statements, he admits some of the very points he so adamantly denies elsewhere in the article.

He states, “(1) The Seminar considers a saying guilty [of being unhistorical] until proven innocent, exactly the opposite of evangelical approaches” (p. 196). What is *exactly the opposite of considering a saying guilty until proven innocent*? It is *considering a saying is innocent until proven guilty*. He rightly faults the Jesus Seminar for being predisposed against historicity. While I’m glad he and other Evangelicals who use HC are predisposed *toward* historicity, I’m uncomfortable, as are Thomas and Farnell, with the fact that they find *any* of Jesus’ words unhistorical.

His fourth point is also revealing: “(4) The criteria of authenticity [guidelines to decide what Jesus actually said] play a decisive role for them [the Jesus Seminar], while evangelicals give it only a limited role at best” (p. 196). Again, this admits what Thomas and Farnell are trying to say. The Evangelicals using HC do indeed use criteria to determine what Jesus actually said and what He did not. Osborne’s objection concerns how much one relies on these criteria, and implicitly on how much they find is not authentic. While this may be of some comfort to those who see a much higher percentage of Jesus’ words as being authentic, it is of little comfort to me. For if His words are not *all* authentic, then how can we be sure which ones are, and which are not?

Osborne’s final point of comparison concerns outlook: “(5) Radical skepticism is the name of the game for the Seminar, but evangelicals are optimistic about the historicity of the Gospels” (p. 196). I was startled to read that the best Evangelicals using HC can come up with is being “optimistic” about the historicity of the Gospels! What about certainty? Can we not be certain that every word that the Gospel writers attribute to Jesus are words He actually said?

This raises the question of *ipsissima verba* (the very words) versus *ipsissima vox* (the very voice). Osborne criticizes Thomas for saying, “The general impact (of evangelical HC) has been on the side of

assuming the gospel writers never reported...the *ipsissima verba*...of the Lord” (p. 203). He then goes on to show that Evangelicals using HC indeed teach that some of the very words of Jesus are recorded.

Osborne appears to have found a place where Thomas overstates the case. However, when he goes on in his statement, Osborne suggests that *ipsissima vox* means that authors were free to change the words of Jesus. For example, he writes, “Also, in Matt 7:11 Jesus says a loving Father will give ‘good things to those who ask him,’ while in Luke 11:13 the Father gives ‘the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.’ The sayings are virtually identical except for ‘good things’/‘Holy Spirit.’ It is again unlikely and unnecessary to argue that Jesus said both and much better to say that Luke has specified one of the most important of the ‘good things’ in light of his emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the book” (p. 204).

This is remarkable! In parrying Thomas’ charge, he suggests that Luke put words in Jesus’ mouth. This can in no way be described as an accurate paraphrase of what Jesus said. A narrow view of *ipsissima vox* allows that the reports may be accurate translations or paraphrases. But the Evangelicals who use HC have such a broad view of *ipsissima vox* that they see the Gospel writers *interpreting* Jesus’ sayings, and then recording their interpretations as what Jesus actually said! I heard precisely this same example used by a professor of NT studies when I was a doctoral student at Dallas Theological Seminary. It amazes me that Evangelicals are so bold as to now put these things in print in an effort to chastise those who do not imbibe in HC.

I recognize that Osborne and other Evangelicals who use HC claim to believe in inerrancy. They believe that the Holy Spirit inspired these interpretations, additions, and changes. However, they fail to explain why this is not dishonest. I agree with Thomas and Farnell that the authority of Scripture is under attack, whether intentionally or not.

This article is a very articulate defense for the use of HC by Evangelicals today. A careful reading of the defense shows, however, why it is both dangerous and unnecessary. HC offers nothing and takes away much.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*  
Irving, TX



**“A Biblical Theodicy,”** W. Gary Crampton, *The Trinity Review* (January 1999), 1-4.

Theodicy is a term for the theological problem of how an all-knowing, all-powerful God can allow evil and suffering to exist. It is usually stated this way: If God is omniscient and omnipotent, He could not only see to it that suffering doesn't exist now, but He could have arranged it so that suffering never occurred even once to anyone.

Crampton has written a very fine article in which he outlines the problem and ways in which people have criticized God for evil in the world. He gives some solid answers to the charges.

*JOTGES* readers should be aware, however, that Crampton writes from a strong Reformed perspective. His repeated references to the Westminster Confession are a bit bothersome. The Confession seems to play as large a role in his theology as the Bible. (Or, the Confession tells him how to interpret the Bible, which is even worse, since it makes the Confession his true guide.) In addition, he so emphasizes God's sovereignty as to minimize the importance and freedom of men in God's program. In spite of this, I highly recommend this article for the believer who is well-grounded in Bible truth.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, TX

---

**“Decoding the ‘Bible Code’,”** J. Paul Tanner, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June 2000), 141-59.

GES member Paul Tanner is Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies at Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary in Amman, Jordan. He makes a complicated subject seem simple.

Michael Drosnin shook up a lot of people with his book *The Bible Code*. He supposedly showed that there are lots of secret messages in the Bible, including specific mentions of Hitler and the Holocaust, the assassination of JFK, and the Gulf War.



Tanner methodically shows that by using Drosnin's methods, a person could come up with just about any message they desired to find. He demonstrates that this can be done not only with the Hebrew OT, but also with the English Bible, or with secular books.

There is no magic in the supposed Bible code. What takes place is a creative use of letters. Tanner shows that this method does not say that if we take every third letter, for example, through the OT, we get another complete account. It says that we should look for *equidistant letters*, ranging from every 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to more than a thousand letters apart. It says the words we are looking for can be spelled forwards or backwards. They may contain vowels (when it suits the searcher) or they may just contain the consonants.

Tanner totally and irrefutably debunks this hoax. I highly recommend this article to anyone who is interested (or bothered) by this supposed Bible code. His conclusion is excellent:

People do not need some "biblical crossword puzzle." Instead they need to read and meditate on the revealed truths of God's holy Word. They need to be engaged in Bible study to learn the marvelous truths that God has revealed, rather than being diverted by the speculative counting of letters (for which there is no divine sanction or apostolic precedent). Believers ought to have as their goal the pursuit of spiritual maturity....

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, TX

---

**"The Myth of 'Growth' in the Church Growth Movement,"**

David Dunlap, *The Grace Family Journal* (March-April 2000), 10-12.

This short article focuses on a surprising aspect of the Church Growth Movement (CGM). By definition, one would think that the CGM is producing *church growth*. And, of course, we all know the stories of churches that started with 5 families that grew to thousands of people in a few years.

This article makes two points. First, it suggests that by and large most “church growth” taking place today is due to transfers from other evangelical churches, not from evangelizing the lost.

The supposed proof for this is a 1990 Barna study that concludes that since 1980 the number of adult Americans identifying themselves as born-again Christians has remained *constant* at 32%. While this is interesting, we probably should question this result. Surely many Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and New Agers identify themselves as born-again, yet are not. If we add to this the many Protestants, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox who believe in works-salvation yet who also would identify themselves as born-again, the meaningfulness of the 32% figure is highly suspect.

It is possible, for example, that in 1980 the percentage of people who are actually born-again in America has gone up, even as the figure itself remained the same. In addition, even if the percentage is the same, that still means that many new people have come to identify themselves as born-again since in the last two decades many have died and many more have been born. (The Barna study was reported in 1990, making it at least ten years out of date. It says nothing of the situation between 1990 and today.)

An additional problem here is that transfer growth may be evangelistic growth as well. An unsaved person from an evangelical church who goes to a church that is clear on the gospel and comes to faith in Christ is indeed evangelistic growth. Ask any Free Grace pastor! Unfortunately, of course, an unsaved person who transfers from one unclear evangelical church to another unclear evangelical church and who remains unsaved is indeed transfer growth, but not evangelistic growth. So we should not assume that all who transfer are born-again people. Probably a large percentage are not.

This point in the article, while interesting, needs more analysis.

Dunlap’s second point is related to the first. He points out that 90% of all churches in the U.S. report attendance of 200 or less. He suggests that “most of them cannot afford any decrease in attendance.” He then cites a 1992 prediction by a church researcher that during the 1990s about 100,000 American evangelical churches, of the approximately 350,000 total churches, would close. The implication is that as the CGM raids smaller churches to create mega-churches, many of the smaller churches will fold up.

While Dunlap is surely right that *some* churches have folded and will fold in part due to the CGM, it is highly questionable that such a



high number have and will. Since the 1990s are over, we should be able to evaluate this prediction to some degree. If there are 350,000 churches of all types in the U.S., how many are evangelical? If we said half, or 175,000, then the prediction would mean that over half of all evangelical churches in America folded in the last decade. This is hard to believe. Rather than citing these figures uncritically, the author should have questioned them.

After all, the Lord Jesus promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. While there surely can be ebbs and flows in church history, the church will not be eliminated entirely. And even if the CGM does cause smaller churches to fold, this may not in all cases be bad. Not all small churches are clear on the gospel. Indeed, the majority of all churches, small or large, are not clear on the gospel. If a Mormon church folds, to give an extreme example, we should not regard this as a tragedy.

The underlying point here, however, is well taken. The author is urging that we consider church growth nationally, not in terms of isolated churches. In other words, there is a difference between *local church growth* and *national* (or universal) church *growth*. This is a very helpful point.

Dunlap quotes Church Growth expert C. Peter Wagner as admitting a difficulty in the movement: "I don't think there is anything intrinsically wrong with the church-growth principles we've developed, or the evangelistic techniques we are using. Yet somehow they don't seem to work...maybe something else is needed" (p. 11). Unfortunately, this quote is not taken directly from Wagner himself, but from a 1991 source which was quoting Wagner. We wonder if Wagner has been quoted fairly. What was in the material that was left out (note the ellipsis marks)? And, since the source is nearly ten years old, we might wonder whether Wagner still feels this way.

While this article fails to examine the issues critically, it nonetheless makes some good points for the discerning reader. I recommend it as a short but helpful article on some issues that need careful consideration.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, TX





---

## BOOKS RECEIVED

---

ALLEN, RONALD B. *The Majesty of Man: The Dignity of Being Human*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000. Pp. 224. \$11.99 (paper).

BAUCKHAM, RICHARD and TREVOR HART. *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999. Pp. xiv + 233. \$16.00 (paper).

*The Fundamentals for the Twenty-First Century: Examining the Crucial Issues of the Christian Faith*. Mal Couch, general editor. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000. Pp. 656. \$29.99 (cloth).

HUNT, DAVE. *An Urgent Call to a Serious Faith*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000. Pp. 200. \$9.99 (paper).

MAIER, PAUL L. *Eusebius The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999. Pp. 412. \$24.99 (cloth).

MANNINEN, SISTER MARY JEAN. *Living the Christian Story: The Good News in Worship and Daily Life*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. Pp. 118. \$12.00 (paper).

OSBECK, KENNETH W. *Amazing Grace: Illustrated Stories of Favorite Hymns*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999. Pp. 64. \$15.99 (cloth).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Hallelujah, What a Savior! 25 Hymn Stories Celebrating Christ Our Redeemer*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000. Pp. 128. \$15.99 (CD and book, paper).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Joy to the World! The Stories Behind Your Favorite Christmas Carols*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999. Pp. 112. \$8.99 (paper).

PEACE, RICHARD V. *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999. Pp. xv + 397. \$25.00 (paper).

SAUNDERS, STANLEY P. and CHARLES L. CAMPBELL. *The Word on the Street: Performing the Scriptures in the Urban Context*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000. Pp. xviii + 192. \$16.00 (paper).



# Grace Evangelical School of Theology:

## *Training Church Leaders Until Christ Returns*

- ✓ Biblical education in your own home via the internet
- ✓ Training within the local church
- ✓ Directly benefiting the local church
- ✓ Great biblical education at a reasonable cost
- ✓ An outstanding Bible-focused curriculum
- ✓ Excellent free grace faculty

### Fall 2000 Courses

Theology 301  
(Soteriology)  
4 hours  
Charlie Bing, Ph.D.

Bible 401  
(Survey of the Old Testament)  
3 hours  
Charlie Bing, Ph.D.

Greek 101  
(Basic Greek I)  
4 hours  
Gary Derickson, Ph.D.

Bible 402  
(Survey of the New Testament)  
3 hours  
Tony Badger, Th.D.

Greek 104  
(Intro to Exegesis, including  
Textual Criticism)  
3 hours  
Bob Wilkin, Ph.D.

Bible 405  
(Introduction to Hermeneutics)  
2 hours  
Steve Lewis, Ph.D.

Theology 303  
(Prolegomena & Bibliology)  
3 hours  
Hal Haller, Th.M.

Practical Ministry 702  
(Intro to Pastoral Ministry)  
2 hours  
TBA

For further information contact:

### **GRACE EVANGELICAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

PO Box 167128 • Irving, Texas 75016

Phone (toll free): 1-877-292-2522 • Email: [ges@faithalone.org](mailto:ges@faithalone.org)

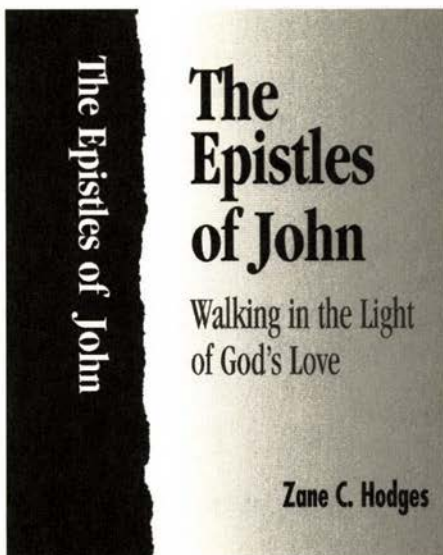
*Grace Evangelical School of Theology is a ministry  
of Grace Evangelical Society*

# *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love*

Zane C. Hodges  
(312 pages. \$17.95)

These three epistles have long been at the center of the gospel debate. Entire books on assurance have been written based on an extremely unfortunate misunderstanding of First John. Such books undermine assurance by wrongly pointing readers to their works, rather than Christ, for their assurance.

In this remarkable commentary the reader will find both solid exegesis and practical application. This is a commentary that is sure to equip and encourage believers until Christ returns.



---

Zane Hodges taught New Testament Greek and exegesis for 27 years at Dallas Theological Seminary. He is an internationally recognized New Testament scholar. He has written numerous books including *Absolutely Free!*, *The Gospel Under Siege*, and *Grace in Eclipse*. Zane lives in Mesquite, Texas.

---

To order any of these resources contact:

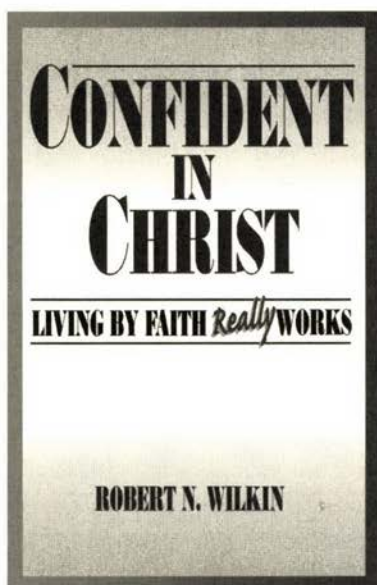
**Grace Evangelical Society**

Irving, Texas (972) 257-1160    [www.faithalone.org](http://www.faithalone.org)

# Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works

Bob Wilkin

(289 pages. \$9.95)



The Christian life begins and ends with faith. No one can become a Christian or please God in daily life except by faith. Unfortunately, some pastors and teachers have redefined faith to include works. In this book Bob examines sixteen “tough texts” from the New Testament through which we can better understand our true destination—the Christ-centered life.

---

## *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing*

Zane C. Hodges

(127 pages. \$6.00)

“I own many commentaries on James, but none of them captures the meaning of James so clearly and simply as this one. I recommend it above all others.”

Dr. Earl Radmacher, Chancellor,  
Western Conservative Baptist Seminary  
Portland, San Jose, Phoenix

