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Special Zane Hodges Memorial Issue EDITOR	3-12
We Believe in Assurance of Salvation ZANE C. HODGES	13-30
Assurance and Works: An Evangelical Train Wreck ZANE C. HODGES	31-35
The New Puritanism Part 1: Carson On Christian Assurance ZANE C. HODGES	37-51
The New Puritanism Part 2: Michael S. Horton: Holy War with Unholy Weapons ZANE C. HODGES	53-66
The New Puritanism Part 3: Michael S. Horton: Holy War with Unholy Weapons ZANE C. HODGES	67-79
We Believe in Rewards ZANE C. HODGES	81-90
Regeneration: A New Covenant Blessing ZANE C. HODGES	91-97
Justification: A New Covenant Blessing ZANE C. HODGES	99-105
Legalism: The Real Thing ZANE C. HODGES	107-119
The Moralistic Wrath Dodger Romans 2:1-5 ZANE C. HODGES	121-128
How to Lead People to Christ Part 1: The Content of Our Message ZANE C. HODGES	129-140
How to Lead People to Christ Part 1: Our Invitation to Respond ZANE C. HODGES	141-151
Book Reviews	153-171

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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.”

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SPECIAL ZANE HODGES MEMORIAL ISSUE

ROBERT N. WILKIN

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

INTRODUCTION

Zane C. Hodges went to be with the Lord on November 23, 2008 at the age of 76. He has a long history with this journal (see below), including having written 19 articles and having served as Associate Editor for many years.

The journal articles he has left us are profound, timeless, ground-breaking, and thought-provoking.

We chose eleven of his journal articles, many of which deal with assurance of salvation. We also chose one of his newsletter articles since it fits well with the other articles, and since it was one of Zane's most personal.

The articles were written between 1988 and 2005. Five of these articles were written after Zane had a devastating heart attack that nearly took his life in 1997.

As we put this issue together we were struck afresh by what he wrote. We hope you will share our joy as you read this memorial issue.

WHY A WHOLE JOURNAL WITH ARTICLES BY ZANE C. HODGES?

GES Owes Its Birth to Zane Hodges

I arrived at Dallas Theological Seminary in the Summer of 1978 as green as they come. I was Free Grace, but I really couldn't defend it from Scripture very well.

Within three semesters I had heard about a professor who had a unique method of exegeting the New Testament. He had a unique name too: Zane Hodges. Thus in my fourth semester I

took my first course from Zane, on the Book of Hebrews. I was hooked.

What captured my attention was the way in which he harmonized Scripture. He did not study a passage in total isolation from what he knew from other Scriptures. Indeed, he amazed me when he answered questions in class since it was clear that he had already considered how other texts related to the one he was studying. I can't recall anyone stumping him during the Q & A.

His Free Grace views were an encouragement to me. But what I learned is that the view is much broader than I thought at the time. I came to see that the doctrine of eternal rewards is an integral part of Free Grace theology, as is the doctrine of temporal chastisement.

I ended up taking courses from Zane on Acts, Hebrews, James, 1-3 John, and textual criticism. He was also my first reader, or advisor, on my masters's thesis and doctoral dissertation, both of which dealt directly with Free Grace issues (perseverance and repentance, respectively).

I was on campus in early 1985 to finalize details surrounding my doctoral dissertation. I saw a notice that referred to a *conference on the gospel* to be held later that year. Two main speakers were listed, both DTS professors: Zane C. Hodges and S. Craig Glickman.

Several months later I found out the conference was canceled due to insufficient response. That struck me as ridiculous. People needed to hear what Zane and Craig had to say. *I* needed to hear what they had to say.

I had been a member of the Evangelical Theological Society since 1982. The idea of having a similar sort of organization for Free Grace people began to take shape in my mind after I learned of the cancelation of that gospel conference. By the summer of 1986, I sent out the first GES newsletter.

In January of 1987, there were several regional meetings of GES people. One was in Dallas at Zane's church, Victor Street Bible Chapel. He took a prominent role in that meeting.

GES Owes Its Growth and Development to Zane Hodges

Zane was one of the first board members of GES. From 1987 until 1995 he was an integral part of the board. He helped

formulate many of the policies that have guided this ministry ever since.

I doubt we ever would have started a journal without the involvement of both Zane and his good friend, Dr. Art Farstad. I had no experience in writing or editing for a journal, but they had plenty. Art was the first editor of the journal and Zane served as the first associate editor.

In the early years I relied heavily on Zane to help me with articles (newsletter and journal) I was writing. But even after I stopped receiving his edits on a regular basis, he was always there to discuss passages or articles with me.

WHY DID WE SELECT THESE SPECIFIC ARTICLES?

Reading all these articles together, and reading them again (many of them I had not read in over a decade) had a powerful impact on me. If you have read all these articles before, you should be prepared to be surprised by the power they have to move you again, especially when read together. I highly recommend reading all these articles in a short period of time, certainly a week or less. By doing so the cumulative impact of these articles will hit you in a way that magnifies the effect of the independent articles.

WE BELIEVE IN ASSURANCE OF SALVATION (JOTGES, AUTUMN 1990)

At the 2006 GES Annual Conference a dispute arose over the issue of whether a person had to believe that what he receives by believing in Jesus is *everlasting*. It appeared that over one-third of those present believed that a person could be born again who had never believed that his salvation could not be lost.

At the time some people were suggesting that this was a new teaching by Zane Hodges and others. Yet sixteen years earlier, in this 1990 article, Zane clearly made that very point under the heading, "Assurance Is an Inseparable Part of Saving Faith" (see pp. 22-25).

This article has an excellent discussion of assurance by faith in what Jesus promised, totally apart from our works. In the

conclusion, Zane even briefly touches on the danger of making trust in Christ something different than believing in Him.

**ASSURANCE AND WORKS:
AN EVANGELICAL TRAIN WRECK
(*GRACE IN FOCUS*, MARCH-APRIL 1994)**

In this article Zane began by discussing the view of assurance held by John MacArthur, who adopted a Puritan view. Then in an amazingly personal touch, Zane discussed a conversation he had with Dr. Campbell, then the President of DTS. He told Dr. Campbell that some DTS faculty at the time were contradicting the seminary's statement on assurance.

Zane then cited two examples of reviews written by Dr. Darrell Bock in 1989 and Dr. Robert Pyne in 1993 in which they expressed the very view of assurance that Zane had told Dr. Campbell was being taught.

Zane was then given a copy of Pyne's class notes on assurance in an effort to prove to him that Dr. Pyne was not teaching anything contrary to the seminary's statement. In this article Zane quotes from these notes, showing that Pyne indeed contradicts the statement.

**THE NEW PURITANISM PART 1:
CARSON ON CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE
(*JOTGES*, SPRING 1993)**

The Puritans were the English branch of Reformed theologians. The Puritans argued that one could not have assurance simply by believing in Jesus, but that instead one must look to his works to have some measure of conviction that he might actually be a believer.

Here Zane starts a short series on *the new Puritanism*. He selects famed exegete and theologian D. A. Carson as his lead example. This article is beautifully done. I especially enjoyed the conclusion. There Zane shows that Carson, when speaking of assurance and perseverance, "comes close to double-speak" (p. 50). Zane was being gracious here. Carson was indeed guilty of double-speak.

**THE NEW PURITANISM PART 2:
MICHAEL S. HORTON: HOLY WAR
WITH UNHOLY WEAPONS
(JOTGES, AUTUMN 1993)**

The other new Puritan Zane chose to discuss was Michael Horton. Since he had much to say about Horton, Zane broke the discussion into two parts. In this first part Zane points out false statements and distortions that Horton makes. One thing that jumps out of this article is the discussion of the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Zane actually prints a transcript of part of the exchange between Anne Hutchinson and the Deputy Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The transcript surprised me with its vitality. Reading it moves you back 250 years and lets you see the Free Grace issue played out then as well. And it is clear that the issue was not that Mrs. Hutchinson was teaching that the Christian is without laws or commands. The issue was that she did not believe that assurance was based on one's works.

**THE NEW PURITANISM PART 3:
MICHAEL S. HORTON: HOLY WAR
WITH UNHOLY WEAPONS
(JOTGES, SPRING 1994)**

Though he is criticizing Horton once again, Zane's tone in this article shifts slightly when he reports about Horton's Bible church background (pp. 74-78). But he goes on to show that when he, like Horton, faced similar misgivings over some of what he had been taught about sanctification, Zane did not resort to Puritanism, but to further study of the Word of God. Horton's sojourn led him to reject the notion of imperatives in the Christian life. One might easily pass over this line in Horton. Yet once Zane points it out, it is clear that Horton has allowed a theological position to blind him to some important truths of Scripture.

WE BELIEVE IN REWARDS (JOTGES, AUTUMN 1991)

Here is a fantastic introduction to the doctrine of rewards. Zane begins by answering objections that some Free Grace people have. Some think that the doctrine of rewards contradicts the grace of God. Selfishness, another concern some have with this doctrine, is skillfully dispatched by Zane as well.

To round out the discussion, Zane shows that the doctrine of rewards is not the only Biblical motivation to obey God. He discusses love and gratitude, God's temporal discipline, and God's temporal blessings.

As I read this article again, I was struck by how much my teaching on rewards has been influenced by this short article.

REGENERATION: A NEW COVENANT BLESSING (JOTGES, AUTUMN 2005)

One thing this article illustrates is that Zane Hodges did not simply memorize doctrines taught to him: he studied the Scriptures to see if what he had been taught was exactly right (Acts 17:11). I recall being taught about the New Covenant at Dallas Theological Seminary and being left with lots of unanswered questions. One of the biggest of these questions is how the New Covenant could be for Israel, yet we in the Church partake of its blessings.

The explanation given here is simple, clear, and Biblical.

Another major question largely left unanswered in seminary was how people were saved in the OT. Zane here does a masterful job of answering that question as well, showing that the new birth is a New Covenant blessing, and that even before the New Covenant was established, God regenerated people "in anticipation of the sacrificial work of Christ" (p. 96).

This is an amazing article. Read it carefully and read it more than once.

JUSTIFICATION: A NEW COVENANT BLESSING (JOTGES, AUTUMN 2006)

Once again, Zane shows the power of meditating on the Word of God. Instead of repeating politically correct statements on justification and forgiveness, Zane explores what the Bible actually says. His comparison between forgiveness and justification is truly outstanding.

Within the discussion of forgiveness and justification is a super discussion of the so-called *final judgment* of believers. He shows that there is no *final judgment* for Christians. He even discusses how the Judgment Seat of Christ is far different than the Great White Throne Judgment.

LEGALISM: THE REAL THING (JOTGES, AUTUMN 1996)

Many people do not realize that our first national conference was not held in 1996. Of course, we have advertized our conferences that way, with the 2009 conference being the 14th annual conference. However, that is because 1996 was the first year in which we started having *consecutive* annual conferences.

We had a major national conference with over 100 in attendance in Dallas in 1988 at Criswell Bible College. Zane spoke on this topic: "Legalism: The Real Thing." I was moved by his talk then, and when we published it eight years later. Now, as we republish this article, I'm impacted all over again.

Zane's discussion of antinomianism is outstanding. So is his discussion of Fuller's contention in *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?*

Many Free Grace people are not familiar with the proposed three uses of the Law. Zane explains these and shows why the so-called third use of the Law is not Biblical. The Law of Moses is not the guide for believers today on how we are to live the Christian life.

Acts 15:1, 5 also is discussed by Zane in this article. That discussion is fantastic as well.

This article is a must read for many reasons. Though originally delivered over twenty years ago, it is right on target in 2009 as well.

THE MORALISTIC WRATH DODGER (JOTGES, SPRING 2005)

Romans 2:1-16 has long been problematic for Free Grace people. Zane deals with many of the problems in this article on Rom 2:1-5.

What I particularly loved was his discussion of the word *repentance* (*metanoia*) in Rom 2:4. As he points out, that is the only use of the word in all of Romans. His discussion of repentance in this article is a wonderful primer on the subject.

Zane's discussion of "the day of wrath" is also very helpful.

HOW TO LEAD PEOPLE TO CHRIST PART 1 (JOTGES, AUTUMN 2000)

This article and the second part which followed were based on a 1999 conference message. They caused quite a stir in Free Grace circles. However, the reaction was not immediate. Other than a response we published in our journal by Greg Sapaugh, there was very little written in response for seven years.

In the Spring of 2007 an article appeared entitled, "The Tragedy of the Crossless Gospel, Pt. 1." It was the first of many articles in a series that ultimately became an 800-page book (copyright 2009) whose subtitle is *A Biblical Response to the Crossless Gospel Regarding the Contents of Saving Faith*.

When the first article appeared, I researched the expression *the crossless gospel*. I found that it was used by A. W. Tozer to denounce the Free Grace message because it did not require the unbeliever to take up his cross and follow Christ to be born again.

Now a Free Grace person was using the same pejorative expression, but in a completely new way: to denounce what Zane had written as being heretical. A cottage industry developed as bloggers found new ways to twist and distort what Zane had written.

In this article Zane says that what a person must believe to be born again is that Jesus gives everlasting life to all who believe in Him. He indicated that it was hypothetically possible to believe that and not know about Jesus' death and resurrection.

Reading this article again showed me how far off base these *crossless gospel* charges really are. It is hard for me to understand how a person could make that charge after reading this article. But maybe that is the problem. Critics did not read, or did not carefully read, what Zane wrote. They gained an impression and then set out to slay that impression. Unfortunately, the impression was a false one.

Take care to note Zane's mention of *the gospel* in this article. He clearly and unequivocally says that the gospel is about the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is certainly not a *crossless gospel*. He also has a whole section on "Preaching the Cross" in which he says that "the gospel gives us the wonderful answer" to "why men should trust Christ for eternal life" (pp. 138-139). He concluded that section by saying, "The preaching of the cross greatly facilitates the process of bringing men to faith in God's Son" (p. 139).

That the word *gospel* does not appear anywhere in the text of the Gospel of John is a point Zane made which has yet to receive a reply by his Free Grace critics.

HOW TO LEAD PEOPLE TO CHRIST PART 2 (JOTGES, SPRING 2001)

In Part 2 of this article on leading people to Christ, Zane focuses on various evangelistic invitations. The very first one is inviting people to believe that Jesus died on the cross as a summary statement of what he must believe to be born again: "Whenever I hear that nowadays, I get extremely uncomfortable." Note well that it is not the preaching of the cross of Jesus' resurrection or deity that makes him extremely uncomfortable.

He goes on to show that the Bible repeatedly states the object of saving faith without putting the death of Christ on our behalf as part of the summary statement.

His second reservation is with the idea of inviting people to do a two-step: believe in the facts of the gospel (step 1) and then personally trust Jesus with your eternal destiny (step 2). Note

that Zane emphasizes that “the facts of the gospel” have “instrumental value” “in bringing men to faith in Christ.” Again, Zane indicates that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the facts of the gospel and that those truths are valuable to lead people to faith in Christ. That is not a crossless gospel. It is not a crossless message.

Asking Jesus into one’s heart is a common invitation and Zane Biblically rejects it. Likewise he rejects the invitation to commit oneself to Christ in order to be born again. And he gives additional reasons why *trust* is not an improvement over the Biblical call to *believe*.

He ends with a super discussion of inviting people to believe in Jesus for eternal life, focusing on John 6:35-40.

Ten years later these two articles are very powerful. For those who skimmed them in the past and did not read them carefully, here is an opportunity to see what Zane actually wrote and to check out his arguments from the Word of God.

WE BELIEVE IN: ASSURANCE OF SALVATION¹

ZANE C. HODGES

I. INTRODUCTION

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

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

In sharp contrast with both Arminian and Lordship thought stands the biblical doctrine of assurance. In his First Epistle, the Apostle John states, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, *that you may know that you have eternal life...*” (1 John 5:13a; italics added).

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

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

¹This article appeared in the Autumn 1990 issue of *JOTGES*, making it the first journal article *JOTGES* published by Zane Hodges

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

II. ASSURANCE IS BASED ON THE PROMISES IN GOD'S WORD

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

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

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

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

² Many but by no means all. Indeed, Raymond E. Brown (*The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982], p.608) writes: "What is the reference for... 'these things'? Many scholars (Alexander, Brooke, Klöpper, Schnackenburg, Schneider) refer it to 5:1-12 or to the last verse of that unit." Brown himself takes the reference to be to the whole epistle, but obviously there is no consensus view among technical commentators.

³ This approach to the epistle seems traceable to the work by Robert Law entitled, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1909). At least, Law's work popularized this conception of 1 John.

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

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

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

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

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

he who does not have the Son of God does not have life
(1 John 5:9-12).

From these words it is clear that John is insisting on the believability of the “witness (= testimony) of God.” This “testimony,” he asserts, can be either accepted or rejected. If we accept it, we have internalized that testimony so that the believer has that testimony “in himself”—in his heart (v 10a). To reject this testimony is to make God out to be a liar (v 10b). Obviously the issue here is the truth or falsity of what God declares.

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

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

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

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

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

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word
and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life,

and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

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

Even more simple (if that is possible) is John 6:47, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."

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

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

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

III. ASSURANCE MUST NOT BE BASED ON OUR WORKS

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

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

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

We should have known this fact all along. After all, did not the Apostle Paul write, "But to him *who does not work* (italics added) but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness..." (Rom 4:5)?

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

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

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

Furthermore, Paul also wrote, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace *but as debt*." (Rom 4:4; italics added). And later he said: "And if by grace, then it is no longer of

works; *otherwise grace is no longer grace*. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; *otherwise work is no longer work*" (Rom 11:6; italics added). "Grace and works," says the Apostle, "are mutually antithetical. Works are rewardable endeavors, the pay they gain is a matter of obligation. Thus to say that a thing is by grace is to exclude works—or it is to so change the nature of grace that it is no longer grace at all!"⁴

But despite these clear distinctions, many forms of theology hopelessly mix grace and works. This is precisely what is being done by Lordship thought. Salvation, we are told, is by grace, but assurance is impossible apart from works.⁵ Thus I can be sure that God has been gracious to me only if I work hard for Him! God's *goodness* to me in Christ thus is held hostage to my *performance* for Him. In the process grace ceases to be grace, as Paul said.

It is pure sophistry to argue that what is meant in such theology is only that works are produced by grace and are simply its necessary results. On the contrary, if I cannot get to heaven apart from the regular performance of good works, those works

⁴ Commenting on Rom 4:4-5, Anders Nygren has written refreshingly: "With that [the statement of 4:3] Paul has reached a point which is of utmost importance in his interpretation. Here he can tolerate no mistiness. He must insist on clear and precise characterization. He tolerates no indecision between faith and works. He sets forth a clear either/or. Either it depends on works—and then boasting can continue, since it is not by grace but by his own merit that man is judged righteous. Or it depends on faith—and then all else is excluded, works, merit, wages, boasting; and then it is indeed the justification of the sinner. In other words, it is no longer a matter of our works, but of God's. Faith always has the action of God as its correlative. Faith is what it is because of its dependence on God. When Paul speaks of faith, he never means, so to say, a mere psychological operation; for faith is always determined by its object. Thus he speaks, in this connection, of faith as 'faith in him who justifies the ungodly.' Only in this way, that God acts and we allow Him to act, can the righteousness of God come to us. Thus, by the nature of the case, the righteousness of God cannot be other than the righteousness of faith. Scripture testifies for Paul, in the passage cited, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'" See Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), 169-70.

⁵ Cf. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 23: "Genuine assurance comes from seeing the Holy Spirit's transforming work in one's life..." MacArthur means, of course, that assurance comes by seeing "good works" in our lives. Attributing such works to the Spirit does not change the fact that he is still talking about our "works"—i.e., what we do, rather than what Christ has done on the Cross.

become as much a condition for heaven as faith itself. Many theologians who hold to the kind of synthesis we are discussing, honestly admit that good works are a condition for heaven!⁶ But in so saying, they run their ship aground against Rom 4:4 and 11:6, and indeed against the whole biblical doctrine of grace.

We said earlier that we believe that all born-again Christians will do good works. We believe it, however, because it appears to be the only rational inference from the scriptural data. But, let it also be said clearly, it is an inference. No text of Scripture (certainly not Jas 2:14-26!) declares that all believers will perform good works, much less that they cannot be sure of heaven unless they do.⁷ *No text says that!*

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

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

But there can be, of course, self-delusion based on our works. And anybody who believes he has verified the reality of his justification by his own good deeds has experienced that delusion in spades.⁸ In fact he has forgotten the searing words of our Lord to

⁶See, for example, Samuel T. Logan, Jr., “The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (1984): 26-52. Note the statement, on p. 43, that “evangelical obedience is an absolute necessity, a ‘condition’ in man’s justification.” Thus Logan bids farewell to Pauline theology!

⁷Editor’s Note: For an extended and documented discussion of Jas 2:14-26, see the author’s commentary on James: *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 58-72.

⁸I.e., “to the nth degree.” Ed.

a self-righteous young ruler, “So Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.’” (Luke 18:19).

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

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

Those who travel the first route are traveling the highway of self-righteousness. They are utterly blind to the reality that they are evil people whose lives are still infinitely remote from the perfect holiness of God. The claim they make that their lives are “good enough” to verify their salvation clashes blatantly with our Lord’s assertion: “No one is good but One, that is, God.” Such claims are the very essence of Pharisaism and are perfectly exemplified by the Pharisee who prayed, “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.’” (Luke 18:11).

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

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

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

IV. ASSURANCE IS AN INSEPARABLE PART OF SAVING FAITH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

life” necessitates the conclusion that I have eternal life at the moment of my faith.

But someone may ask: Is it not possible to believe in Christ and not find out until later that I have eternal life? The answer to this question is “no” if by “believe in Me” we mean the same thing as John meant by these words.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

affirmed Jesus to be the “Christ” she was affirming Him to be precisely such a Person as He had just described Himself to be.

But Martha could not have believed this truth without realizing that she herself had eternal life. *If the “Christ” guaranteed resurrection and eternal life to the person who believed Him to be the “Christ,” then by believing this Martha knew that she had what He guaranteed!* In other words, to believe in Him was to accept His guarantee of eternal salvation. To doubt the guarantee (for any reason whatever) was to doubt that Jesus was the “Christ.”

The bottom line, therefore, is exactly what John states in his First Epistle, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1; italics added). There are *no* exceptions to this! “Whoever” is the pivotal word here. Belief that Jesus is the Christ—that is, the One who assures the believer of future resurrection and of eternal life—is *saving* belief. A faith which has as its content “Jesus is the Christ” (in the Johannine sense) is *saving* faith. But to believe this is to *know* that I am saved. Assurance, therefore, is inseparable from—and part of the essence of—saving faith.⁹

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

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

In fact, once we have become preoccupied with what we imagine ought to be the “effects” of faith, we have destroyed the true focus of faith. We have withdrawn its gaze from the external and

⁹ We do not mean to imply that a person who has found assurance through faith in Christ can then never lose that assurance. We simply affirm that at the moment of saving faith assurance is a part of that faith. Yet Satan knows well how to attack a believer’s faith and how to create doubts. But, of course, Satan cannot undo the regenerating work of God in the one who has already believed. For a discussion of this significant issue, see Dr. Charles Stanley’s excellent chapter, “For Those Who Stop Believing,” in *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1990), 73-83. See also Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas and Grand Rapids: Redención Viva and Zondervan, 1989), 103-113.

unchanging “testimony” of God and focused instead on the shifting “testimony” of our own hearts and lives.

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

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

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

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

V. DABNEY’S REJECTION OF CALVIN’S VIEW OF ASSURANCE

Long before the contemporary debate over the terms of salvation and over the grounds of assurance, a 19th century Reformed theologian, Robert L. Dabney, had strenuously objected to Calvin’s view that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. He even goes so far as to charge Calvin (and Luther!) with over-reacting to Roman Catholic dogma. Thus, in a treatise written against Plymouth Brethren theology, Dabney asserts:

The source of this error [of the Plymouth Brethren] is no doubt that doctrine concerning faith which the first Reformers, as Luther and Calvin, were led to adopt from their opposition to the hateful and tyrannical teachings of Rome. This mother of abominations denies to Christians all true assurance of hope, teaching that it is neither edifying nor attainable. Her purpose is clear: the soul justified by free grace, and

assured of its union to Christ, would no longer be a practicable subject for priestcraft and spiritual despotism. These noble Reformers, seeing the bondage and misery imposed by this teaching upon sincere souls, flew to the opposite extreme, and (to use the language of theology) asserted that the assurance of hope is of the essence of saving faith. Thus says Calvin in his Commentary on Romans: 'My faith is a divine and spiritual belief that God has pardoned and accepted *me*.' According to these divines, it is not enough for a penitent soul to embrace with all its powers the gracious truth, 'Whosoever believeth shall be saved,' while yet its consciousness of exercising a full faith is confused, and remaining anxieties about its own salvation mar its peace. Such an act of soul is not admitted by them to be even a true yet weak faith; they hold that until the believer is assured that *Christ has saved HIM*, there is no exercise of saving faith at all. This old error is evidently the source of Dr. [César] Malan's view of faith, which, as visitors to Geneva twenty years ago remember, he was so sure to obtrude upon all comers. Now our Plymouth Brethren and their sympathizers have a contempt and mistrust for great ecclesiastical names and church authorities, which prevents their employing the recognized nomenclature of historical theology on this and many other subjects. Hence they prefer to express their peculiarities in terms of their own, less discriminating than the old. We do not find them indeed deciding that 'the assurance of hope is of the essence of a true saving faith;' but we find them in substance reviving *this extravagance of the first Reformers* [italics added here only], and pressing its corollaries.¹⁰

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

¹⁰ "Theology of the Plymouth Brethren," in *Discussions by Robert L. Dabney, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Texas, and for Many Years Professor of Theology in Union Theological Seminary in Virginia*, ed. C. R. Vaughan, vol.1: *Theological and Evangelical* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1890), 173.

Now, I assert that Calvin...was incautious enough to fall into the erroneous statement, that no faith was a living faith which did not include essentially both the assurance of faith and the assurance of hope. He is not satisfied that even the weak, new believer shall say, 'I believe, with head and heart both, that Christ saves *all who truly come to him*, and I accordingly try to trust him alone for my salvation, and so far as I have any hope, rest it on him alone.' He requires every one to say, in substance, I believe fully that Christ *has saved* me. Amidst all Calvin's verbal variations, this is always his meaning; for he is consistent in his error. What else is the meaning of that definition of which M. N. himself quotes from the *Institutes*: 'Our steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence *toward us*.' But I will show, beyond all dispute, that the theological 'Homer nodded,' not once, but all the time, on this point. See then *Institutes*, Book III., Chap. II., Sec. 16. 'In short, no man is truly a believer, unless he be firmly persuaded that God is a propitious and benevolent Father to *him*,...and feel an undoubted expectation of salvation.' *Commentary*, on Rom. viii. 16: 'The opinion consequently stands, that no one can be called a son of God *who does not know himself to be such*.' On Romans viii. 34: 'Because our faith is naught *unless we certainly persuade ourselves that Christ is ours*, and that the Father is propitious to Us in him.' On I Cor. ii. 12: 'Let us know, therefore, that this is the nature of faith, that the conscience has from the Holy Spirit a certain testimony of the divine benevolence towards itself.' On 2 Cor. xiii. 5: 'Paul here testifies, *that whoever doubt whether they possess Christ, are reprobate*.' Is M. N. satisfied? *Heidelberg Catechism* (not written by Calvin, but by two of his pupils): 'What is faith?' (Qu. 21)... 'A certain trust,' 'by which I acquiesce in God, certainly concluding that remission of sins, and eternal righteousness and life, *have been bestowed*, not on others only, but *on me also*,' etc. *Genevan Catechism* (written by Calvin himself): It is 'a certain and stable knowledge of God's paternal benevolence *towards us*.'

When I represented Calvin's view of faith, as substantially set forth in his *Commentary on Romans*, as amounting to this: 'My faith is a divine and spiritual belief that God has pardoned and accepted me,' M. N. said that if it were so (which he disputes), 'Homer must have been nodding when it slipped in.' Have I not showed that it is there, and everywhere in

Calvin, and that it did not ‘slip in,’ but is his deliberate opinion? M. N. has *confessed that it is untenable*. Why then should there be any more difference between us, except that while I cherish a great, I do not feel an *indiscriminate* admiration for this Reformer?

I will complete this part of my proof as to Luther also, who shared Calvin’s error. The *Augsburg Confession*, written by Melancthon, but under Luther’s eye, says, Art. IV., the Lutherans also teach that men are ‘justified gratuitously on account of Christ by faith, *when they believe themselves* to be received into grace, and their sins to be pardoned on account of Christ.’¹¹

Obviously, by charging Calvin and Luther with “extravagance” in reacting to Roman Catholic teaching, Dabney is confessing that his own theology is closer, by so much, to Catholicism than the theology of the Reformers! His candor on this subject is refreshing compared to the “fudging” done by some contemporary theologians. What, in fact, could be more candid than this assertion:

1. That Calvin and Dr. Malan, and the Plymouth Brethren, hold a definition of the nature or essence of saving faith which is, in one respect, contrary to the Westminster Confession and to the Scriptures, as well as to the great body of the confessions of the Presbyterian Churches, and of their divines since Calvin’s day. I said, by way of apology for the earliest Reformers, and most notably, Luther and Calvin, that they were betrayed into this partial error by a praiseworthy zeal against the opposite and mischievous error of Rome, who seeks to hold believers always in doubt of their salvation...M. N. will not have it so; then he will needs have his admired leader discredited, for as sure as truth is in history, Luther and Calvin did fall into this error, which the Reformed churches, led by the Westminster Confession, have since corrected.¹²

Thus Dabney *insists* on the gap that separates his theology from that of the Reformers!

¹¹ Ibid., 216-217.

¹² Ibid., 215.

VI. CONCLUSION

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

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

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

A. Jesus Is the Christ

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

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

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

B. The One Who Believes That Jesus Is the Christ Possesses Divine, Unending Life

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

It is "the testimony that God has given of His Son" (1 John 5:10). And by itself—altogether apart from the help of good works!—*God's testimony* furnishes a totally sufficient basis for our personal assurance of salvation. Furthermore, this testimony

is permanently recorded for us in His holy Word. It is always there to be relied on.

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

ASSURANCE AND WORKS: AN EVANGELICAL TRAIN WRECK¹

ZANE C. HODGES

The controversy over Lordship Salvation reached high visibility in 1988 with the publication of John MacArthur's book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Since then the discussion has taken a significant turn. Increasingly the issue of assurance has come to the forefront of the debate.

MacArthur himself published a book on assurance (*Saved Without a Doubt*, 1992) and returned to the subject again in the volume *Faith Works* (1993; see pp. 157-73). His view of assurance can hardly be distinguished from the one that has been so prominent in the Puritan and Reformed traditions. In this view, the evidence of good works is *an indispensable verification of saving faith*. Without works there can be no certainty at all that one is saved.

For instance, MacArthur writes in *Faith Works*:

The evidence we seek through self-examination is nothing other than the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), the proof that He resides within. It is on this testimony that our assurance is confirmed.²

This way of stating the issue, however, is disingenuous. What would “unconfirmed assurance” be for MacArthur? The answer is that it would be *false* assurance (see *Faith Works*, pp. 172-73). The bottom line then is this: Any assurance *we think we have* could be *fallacious* unless it is verified by works. But false assurance can be more candidly described as a spiritual *delusion*. If at the moment of faith I cannot discriminate between true assurance and a spiritual delusion, then clearly works become the true basis for genuine assurance.

The logic of this is inescapable. Under this Puritan view, the man who “thinks” he has believed cannot be sure that he really has done so until he performs works.

¹ Originally published in the GES newsletter, then called *The GES News*, March-April 1994.

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 171-72.

From this perspective, the biblical promises that the believer in Christ *has* eternal life are stripped of their value. Verses like John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; etc. (or even Acts 16:31 or Rom 4:5) contain no adequate basis for assurance at all, for I cannot know if they apply to me unless I do good works. The transparent fallacy in this ought to be evident to all. Instead, by a devious piece of sophistry, we are told that we cannot know that we have truly believed these promises until we produce the fruit of good works.

What results from such a theology is a psychological absurdity. It amounts to this:

- A. I think I believe John 3:16, but
- B. I won't know for sure that I do until I obey God's commands!

If anyone supposes that such ideas are really taught in Scripture, they need to think again. *Of course*, a person knows whether he believes something or not! When Jesus asked the former blind man, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" he replied quite positively, "Lord, I believe" (John 9:35, 37). And he had not yet done a single good work!

This problem has been glossed over by many evangelicals who ought to think about it more carefully.

In 1986, before I left Dallas Seminary where I had taught for 27 years, I conferred with the new president, Dr. Donald Campbell, in his office. When I was invited by him to express my theological concerns with the Seminary, I referred to Article XI on assurance in the Seminary's doctrinal statement, which reads as follows:

We believe it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Savior and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude, and obedience (Luke 10:20; 22:32; 2 Cor 5:1, 6-8; 2 Tim 1:12; Heb 10:22; 1 John 5:13).

In speaking to Dr. Campbell, I emphasized that if good works are *an indispensable verification of saving faith*, then the Seminary's doctrinal statement could not possibly be true. No one

could possibly have real assurance on the very day they trusted Christ since their faith has not yet been “verified” by works. I also indicated to him that I was aware that things were being taught in the classroom that implicitly contradicted Article XI.

I do not recall Dr. Campbell expressing his own convictions on the points I raised on that occasion. However, in a conversation over breakfast the other day, he made clear to me that he holds that good works are *not* an indispensable verification of saving faith. I am confident that Dr. Campbell’s position on assurance, and that of GES, are the same.

Regrettably, some published materials written by DTS faculty members confirm my earlier concern. First there was Dr. Darrell Bock’s review of MacArthur’s *The Gospel According to Jesus* which showed significant confusion on the subject of assurance (see *Bib Sac*, Jan-Mar, 1989, pp. 21-40; see my review in the *GES Journal*, Spring 1989, pp. 79-83 and especially pp. 81-83). Darrell has told me both in person and in writing that his position is “soft lordship” salvation—a view that would have been rejected by the founder and first president of Dallas Seminary, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer.

Second there was Dr. Robert Pyne’s recent review of MacArthur’s book *Faith Works*. In the review, Pyne explicitly agrees with MacArthur’s call for both “subjective” (or, “moral”!) and “objective” (or, “doctrinal”!) grounds for assurance, the former being intended, in Pyne’s words, “to answer the question, ‘Is your faith real?’” Pyne then goes on to say that “MacArthur seems correct in arguing that assurance is *not really complete* without both elements.”³

In our recent conversation, Dr. Campbell and I discussed Pyne’s review of MacArthur’s *Faith Works*. Dr. Robert Wilkin had previously critiqued Pyne’s stated agreement with MacArthur on assurance in *The GES News* (Nov-Dec 1993) as being inconsistent with Article XI of the Seminary’s doctrinal statement. Dr. Campbell passed on to me several pages from Pyne’s notes in his class on soteriology (the theology of salvation). He felt those notes showed agreement with Article XI.

Despite my high personal regard for Dr. Campbell, I cannot agree with him on this. Instead, the notes seem to me to justify Bob Wilkin’s criticism. One paragraph from the notes follows:

³ *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (October-December 1993), 497-99.

Ideally, assurance that is grounded in one's belief in the biblical promises is then strengthened by the legitimacy of one's Christian experience. If this is the case, it would not be possible to see either area of testimony as *truly complete in the absence of the other*. Those who claim to know God might invalidate that claim by their behavior (Titus 1:16), and those who hope for salvation on the basis of their behavior alone have no reason to be confident. The profession of faith is certainly primary (1 John 5:13), but *it does not stand alone* (James 2:17). [Italics added.]

This is far from clear. It is semantically illicit to call something "assurance" if it is not "truly complete" in the absence of good works and if it "does not stand alone." That would amount to only a tentative conclusion. A *tentative conclusion* that I am saved, based on God's promises alone, is not the same as assurance.

Further, if people possessing this so-called "assurance" can later "invalidate" it "by their behavior," we are back to square one. The original "assurance" was a delusion which could not be recognized as such apart from subsequent "behavior." Thus *any* presumed "assurance" at conversion *might be* delusional and works *must* become the true basis for knowing whether one's faith is real or not. This is MacArthur's position exactly.

Strictly speaking, Pyne only states that one can "invalidate" his "*claim*" to know God by subsequent behavior. But presumably Pyne must mean that this "claim" is based on the person's "assurance." If Pyne does *not* mean that, the confusion is compounded. A reference to a *mere* "claim" is totally out of place in a discussion on personal assurance.

How then does Pyne differ from MacArthur, with whom he says he agrees on assurance? As far as I can tell, hardly at all. The disclaimer in Pyne's review that "the apparent lack of fruit cannot provide conclusive evidence of an unregenerate position, as MacArthur seems to imply," does not really touch the issue of assurance at all. Could a person without "apparent fruit" possess *real* assurance on the basis of God's promises alone? If not, neither could he possess it on the day he trusts Christ.

Finally, it is not enough to call "good works" a "secondary" grounds for assurance. Under the pressure of the debate with the Free Grace movement, some Reformed writers are now doing exactly that. But the question at issue remains whether these "secondary" evidences are *indispensable* to genuine assurance.

If someone insists that they are, biblical assurance is still subverted.

My point is this. The evangelical church is both confused and inconsistent in its discussion of the relationship between works and assurance. If such confusion can exist at Dallas Seminary with its crisp and perceptive doctrinal affirmation on assurance, it is no wonder that this confusion is pervasive in the modern church.

With regard to assurance and works, the evangelical community has experienced a theological train wreck!

THE NEW PURITANISM PART 1: CARSON ON CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE¹

ZANE C. HODGES

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Over the last year or so a growing number of books and articles has appeared targeting the Free Grace movement for critique and rebuttal. These publications mention the Grace Evangelical Society and its literature. This is a positive development. GES definitely wishes to have its views seriously discussed in the marketplace of ideas.

It might be possible to describe these writings as presenting what is known as “Lordship Salvation.” But this designation, though widely used, does not indicate the true historical antecedents of the movement in its present form. The term could be used with equal ease to describe many who are Arminian in theology. Yet the major “Lordship” writers of today are not Arminian, however much they tend toward conclusions similar to those of Arminians (e.g., on assurance). Instead, these writers describe themselves as Calvinists. But John Calvin himself, were he alive today, would probably disown them because they more closely resemble the scholastic theology that *resisted* the Reformation than Calvin’s own theology.²

In deference, therefore, to the many Calvinists who hold a biblical theology of grace (e.g., R. T. Kendall, M. Charles Bell, Charles C. Ryrie), we refuse to describe the writers we are talking about as Calvinists. Instead, it would be better to identify them with the theology that became predominant in Puritan thought and which was, in significant respects, a rejection of certain basic concepts of Reformation theology. Hence my series title is “The New (i.e., contemporary) Puritanism.”

¹This article appeared in the Spring 1993 issue of *JOTGES*.

²For just one of the points on which this seems true, see Paul Holloway, “A Return to Rome: Lordship Salvation’s Doctrine of Faith,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 4 (Autumn 1991): 13-21.

In this series we will consider some of the more significant recent literature produced from this particular theological perspective. In the process we will seek to determine how fairly, and how effectively, these writers have confronted the Free Grace movement.

In a recent issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal*, D. A. Carson, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL, has written an article entitled, "Reflections on Christian Assurance." Carson is a well-known scholar and a prolific writer. Since his presentation is reasonably well-balanced, it seems logical to begin this series with him.

I. PEJORATIVE LANGUAGE IN CARSON

Although a scholarly "distancing" generally prevails in Carson's article, there are a few places where emotive and pejorative language break through. I will mention three such places.

A. Virulent Emphasis

In one place Carson speaks of the Reformation's "virulent emphasis on *sola fide*."³ The term "virulent" is anything but a compliment, since it can suggest such ideas as "extremely poisonous," "pathogenic," "hateful," "obnoxious," or "harsh" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*). According to Carson this "virulent emphasis on *sola fide* led Luther to see assurance as an element of saving faith!" Moreover, he admits, "The same connection can be found in Calvin."

It turns out, then, that "virulence" is in the eye of the beholder—in this case, Carson. He goes on to point out that, "By contrast, the English Puritans...placed more of an emphasis on the role of a transformed life in lending assurance to the Christian mind and conscience."⁴ Precisely! And this is the fundamental issue in the debate today. Do we follow the Puritans in making a transformed life the lynch-pin of the doctrine of

³D. A. Carson, "Reflections on Christian Assurance" *Westminster Theological Journal*, 54 (1992), 3.

⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

assurance, or do we concur with the great Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Melancthon) that assurance is “of the essence of” (an indispensable part of) saving faith? For Carson, the latter view is the product of a “virulent emphasis” on *sola fide*!

Let it be frankly admitted that the Free Grace movement today shares the reformers’ emphasis and conviction at this point. Carson’s use of the word *virulent* in connection with this issue suggests an underlying displeasure with, and rejection of, the Reformers’ doctrine of assurance. This is precisely the contemporary mentality of the New Puritanism.⁵

B. Wretched “Easy Believism”

Not surprisingly, Carson also writes about “the wretched ‘easy believism’ of many in the Western world who, having professed faith, feel no pull toward holiness and no shame when they take the elements.”⁶ Of course, along with phrases like “cheap grace” and “mental assent,” “easy believism” is one of the jargon terms of the New Puritanism. Hardly ever are these expressions clearly defined and they become little more than religious “cuss words” to hurl at one’s opponents and thus they serve as a substitute for calm and reasoned debate. As the quoted words of Carson show, “easy believism” (whatever it is) is so obviously bad that it can be described as “wretched” without further ado.

But does the rest of Carson’s quote actually define this term? No, not at all. Carson speaks of people who have “professed faith” but are without a holy conscience. Are such persons saved? Not for Carson. But also not necessarily for anyone whom I know of in the Free Grace movement, either! As I have made clear in print, I emphatically do *not* believe that all professions of faith are real. I know of no Free Grace writer who would disagree with me about that.

⁵This mentality is by no means a new one. It is reflected clearly in the 19th century by Presbyterian theologian Robert L. Dabney. Dabney frankly states that Calvin and Luther were in error when they made assurance to be of the essence of saving faith. His immediate target was the Plymouth Brethren, who concurred with this view of the Reformers. See the two treatises, “Theology of the Plymouth Brethren,” in *Discussions by Robert L. Dabney*, vol. 1: *Theological and Evangelical*, ed. C. R. Vaughn (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1890), 169-213 and 214-28.

⁶Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” 5.

Why is this? First, to profess faith is not the same as believing, since the profession may be a lie. After all, Paul speaks of “false brethren” down in Jerusalem who apparently only pretended to be Christians (Gal 2:4). But second, the content or object of a man’s faith may be false. If the true biblical gospel is not what is believed, then of course the professed believer has believed something that will not save him. Regrettably, many people believe a “gospel” that is unbiblical. If that is all they have ever believed about the way of salvation, believing it will not save them. We are saved by believing *truth*, not error. That is to say, only the *true* gospel saves.

But the statement Carson makes about professed believers is equally fraught with difficulties. Such persons, says Carson, “feel no pull toward holiness and no shame when they take the elements.”⁷ Pardon me, but I thought only God could know if a person feels “no pull toward holiness” or “no shame when taking the elements”! Does Carson really mean that they *seem* to have no such “pull” and that they *seem* to have no “shame”? But that’s different. It is often true that men hide their innermost feelings and may only *appear* to lack these things. Is Carson talking about cases where, *as far as we can tell*, these things are absent? If not, does Carson know for a fact that such cases as he describes actually exist?

The imprecision here is almost hopeless. The reader cannot tell exactly what the writer means. Does the writer himself know? If so, he’ll have to tell us.

Meanwhile, the phrase “easy believism” (whatever it is!) consists of little more than imprecise code words for who knows what?

C. Happy to Speak of...

According to Carson, “Zane Hodges is happy [!] to speak of Christians ceasing to name the name of Christ and denying the faith completely...”⁸ This comment by Carson is close to being an unethical canard. How could I be “happy” to speak of such things?

Carson might claim that he only meant to say that these matters did not move me to change my theology. But Carson is too

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 28.

sophisticated a writer not to know better than that. The choice of the word *happy* will suggest to some that I maintain a kind of moral indifference to these things. But no one who has ever read any book of mine carefully, can fairly draw such a conclusion. I *do* believe that the Bible teaches that such awful sins can be committed by a Christian. But with biblical writers like Paul (2 Tim 2:16-21) and the author of Hebrews (chaps. 6 and 10), I am grieved that this is so. I am *not* happy about it!

Since the writers from the New Puritan school of thought stress the importance of holiness, perhaps they could set us all an example of chaste language which is fair rather than demeaning, relevant rather than *ad hominem*.

II. CONCESSIONS BY CARSON

One positive feature of Carson's article was his apparent willingness to concede some points that heretofore had been in debate. Of course, it is possible that, from Carson's viewpoint, none of the matters I list represent concessions *by him*. But at least, in the items cited, he appears to go against some of the widely-held positions of others in his school of thought.

A. The Debate over Kendall's Work

In his impressive historical study entitled *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: University Press, 1979), R. T. Kendall has argued that, starting with Beza in Geneva and Perkins in England, post-Calvin Calvinism departed from Calvin's own doctrine of faith and assurance. The result was the denial of a fundamental feature of Calvin's doctrine of saving faith: namely, a denial that assurance was of the essence of saving faith.

Carson does not side with those who categorically reject Kendall's position. Indeed, in a carefully nuanced paragraph on this debate, Carson begins by saying: "Certainly both sides of this essentially historical debate have full arsenals by which to take on the others' positions."⁹

But he goes on to add that "both sides recognize that the debate is not merely a historical one...but a doctrinal one with

⁹ Ibid., 5.

substantial theological and pastoral implications.”¹⁰ Although this sounds like a very modest concession, it is considerably more than that in reality. Considering that many in the New Puritan camp have firmly rejected Kendall’s conclusions, Carson’s unwillingness to come down clearly on that side of the issue speaks volumes.¹¹

Kendall’s thesis about the lack of assurance in Puritanism is relevant at another place in the article. There Carson has a lengthy quotation from I. Howard Marshall which ends with the words:

Whoever said, “The Calvinist knows that he cannot fall from salvation but does not know whether he has got it,” had it summed up nicely...The non-Calvinist knows that he has salvation—because he trusts in the promises of God—but is aware that, left to himself, he could lose it. So he holds to Christ. It seems to me the practical effect is the same.¹²

Carson’s concession here is grudging: “At a merely *mechanistic* level, I think this analysis is largely correct” (italics added).¹³ Why “mechanistic”? Surely Marshall’s analysis is right on target. Carson’s discussion (following the quoted statement on p. 21), is simply an effort to salvage some superiority for the Puritan view over the Arminian one. But doubt, discouragement, and despair are the frequent fruits of a lack of assurance in *both* of these branches of professing Christendom.

B. The Problem of 1 John 3:9

While not citing this verse explicitly, Carson nevertheless has it in mind when he discusses the Apostle John’s “insistence that believers do sin” in relation to the fact that, “At the same time, he repeatedly insists that sinning is *not* done amongst Christians.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kendall’s thesis was defended against his critics by M. Charles Bell in his doctoral dissertation done for the University of Aberdeen (1982) and published as *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985), 13-18. Also helpful in this whole discussion is A. N. S. Lane, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Assurance,” *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979): 32-54.

¹² Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” 20-21.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

This observation refers especially to the well-known tension between 1 John 1:8 and verses like 3:9 and 5:18.

What is Carson's view of the solution? It is actually a variation of the old "ideal" view. This view antedates the more widely known "tense solution" that appeals to the use of the present tense in the (alleged) sense of "does not keep on sinning." Instead of the tense view, Carson writes:

Various explanations have been advanced, but the *most obvious* is still the best: although both our experience and our location between the "already" and the "not yet" teach us that we do and will sin, yet every single instance of sin is shocking, inexcusable, forbidden, appalling, out of line with what we are as Christians.¹⁵

Thus does Carson silently reject the "tense solution" which has been by far the most popular one among those holding to the New Puritanism. The present author challenged this view as far back as 1981 and again in the new edition of *The Gospel Under Siege* (1992). I have called this widely-held view an idea whose time has come *and gone!*¹⁶ It has been abandoned by the most recent major commentators on 1 John: Marshall, Brown, and Smalley.¹⁷

I am not so sanguine as to believe that we will never hear the tense view again from the other side, but with Carson quietly turning his back on it I am tempted to declare victory here for the Free Grace position. After all, we can live with the "ideal" view as easily as Carson does!

Maybe more so.

C. The Greek Verb *Pisteuō* and Its Constructions

In two footnotes, Carson explodes the reliance some New Puritan writers have placed on the different constructions used with the Greek verb for *believe* (i.e., *pisteuō* used with *eis* plus an accusative and *pisteuō* used with the simple dative). Correctly Carson writes: "In reality, the small variation in form is typical

¹⁵ Ibid., italics added.

¹⁶ *The Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1992), 63-67.

¹⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Greek New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982); Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984).

of the Fourth Evangelist, who is well-known for his slight variations without clear-cut semantic distinction.”¹⁸

So much for another illicit argument that has sometimes been deployed against the Free Grace movement. Sophisticated linguists are not impressed by argumentation from grammatical over-refinements. The current discussion of soteriology will be greatly enhanced if we dispense with such over-refinements altogether.

III. “IN-HOUSE” INTERPRETATIONS BY CARSON

While the “concessions” mentioned above are to be valued, Carson nevertheless exhibits many “in-house” interpretations. By “in-house” I mean that they are quite common in the New Puritanism and are sometimes put forward as if they were self-evident. Space does not permit us to do more than mention a couple of these. In any case most of them are dealt with in my books, especially, *The Gospel Under Siege* (2nd ed., 1992).

A. Second Peter 1:10 and Assurance

Carson apparently takes this verse as most others in his school do, namely, as a call to perform good works so as to have reason to be sure of one’s election, but his reference to this text is too brief to bear discussion here (p. 2). Of course, Calvin did not take 2 Pet 1:10 in this way,¹⁹ nor is there any real reason to regard the text as relevant to one’s own inward assurance. Peter no doubt has demonstration to men, not to oneself, in view. In this sense, before the world, we *verify* our call and election by our lifestyle.

B. First Corinthians 3:1-4 and the Carnal Christian

As expected, Carson does not much like the distinction between “spiritual” and “carnal” Christians, though Paul plainly makes *some kind* of distinction in these verses, as Carson recognizes.

¹⁸ Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” 17.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Comm.* 2 Peter 1:10. M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, writes: “Even with regard to 2 Peter 1:10 (which was later used by Calvinists to justify the use of the practical syllogism [=testing one’s faith by one’s works]), Calvin refuses to refer this to man’s conscience as a means of discerning the certainty of our salvation” (p. 29).

What Carson appears to object to is “an absolute, qualitative distinction” between these categories.²⁰ But who in the Free Grace movement carries the distinction *that* far?

Since Paul compares carnality with babyhood (3:1), might we not ask whether to make a distinction between “babies” and “mature” people would also be making an “absolute, qualitative distinction” in the natural realm? If not (or even if so!), can we not also distinguish spiritual infants from the spiritually mature?

But Carson seems also to be worried about the term *carnal* being applied to “someone who made a profession of faith, followed the way of Christ for a few months, and then lived in a manner indistinguishable from that of any pagan for the next fifteen years, despite conscientious pastoral interest.”²¹ Yet here again we encounter the same confusion we met in Carson’s treatment of “easy believism.” Since Carson does not tell us what exactly the so-called profession of faith rested on, we have no way of knowing whether such a case is one over which we might disagree.

And why fifteen years? Would the case have the same meaning for Carson if the time covered were only ten years? Five years? Two? One? New Puritanism shows an understandable reluctance to address particulars of this sort, since addressing them will show how arbitrary examples like Carson’s are. Almost always the so-called examples are painted in such lurid and extreme colors that one never hears of the shades of gray that pastors on the field actually encounter.

And once more we meet the “fudge factor” of appearance versus reality. The case Carson hypothesizes is of a professed believer living “in a manner indistinguishable from any pagan.” Indistinguishable to whom? To God? Or to the New Puritans? Those are *not* the same thing!

Here it is easy to detect the “eagerness” with which New Puritan theology is ready to pronounce on cases of profession which are not followed by the fruits thought appropriate by New Puritanism. The proponents of this theology are anxious to rule on cases that they consider obvious, even though God may well know facts about real-life cases which can never be known by

²⁰ Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” 9.

²¹ Ibid.

finite man and which would significantly alter man's assessment if they *could* be known.

Carson's comments on false professions are all to be regarded as constructing arbitrary straw men which serve only to avoid the tougher questions at issue.

Finally, in his treatment of carnality, Carson errs in what apparently is supposed to be the Free Grace position. He states:

It [1 Corinthians 3] does not encourage us to think that it is possible to accept Jesus as Savior, and thus be promoted from the "natural" to the "carnal" level, in transit, as it were, to the "spiritual" stage, at which point one has accepted Jesus as Lord.²²

Carson offers us no documentation for such a view. I for one do not know where he can find any. This looks to me like a mere caricature which has been created in Carson's thinking by a flawed idea of what his opponents teach.

Carnality, in my view, is spiritual babyhood (1 Cor 3:1). It has nothing to do with the acceptance of Jesus as Lord any more than a child's infancy has anything to do with his "acceptance" of the authority of his father. The carnal Christian may well recognize (as the Corinthians obviously did) the Lordship of Christ. They were simply too immature to behave in a spiritual way and the Apostle Paul is asking them to face the true character of their conduct.

In the quoted statement, I see no resemblance between Carson's statements and the Free Grace position. Without the proper documentation, Carson's comments look like another straw man.

IV. CARSON AND GES

Carson is well aware of the existence of the Grace Evangelical Society and introduces us to his readers under a heading referring to "*a small but vociferous segment of evangelicalism.*"²³ I suppose a warm welcome to the evangelical scene was more than we could have expected from this writer. Why we are regarded as any more "vociferous" than the New Puritans themselves (if indeed we are so regarded) is a point that escapes me. No doubt

²² Ibid., 10.

²³ Ibid., 5, italics original.

the liberal media and elite regard politically active conservatives as “vociferous” too. But such pejorative terms are not likely to silence either them or us.

Carson incorrectly lumps all GES adherents together when he describes “our” view on repentance. He writes:

In the view of Hodges and his colleagues, trusting Jesus as Savior is all that is required for salvation. “Repentance,” in their view, must be understood in a narrowly etymological sense: it is a mental “change of mind” that accepts Jesus as Savior, but entails no necessary sorrow over sin or turning away from it.²⁴

Actually this is not my view at all, though it *is* the view of many of my fellow GES colleagues. My own view is carefully explained in my book, *Absolutely Free!*, in the longest chapter (chap 12, pp. 143-63), entitled “Repentance.”²⁵ Carson has not done his homework here.

Interestingly, Carson later claims that “it would take too much space...to demonstrate the methodological flaws inherent in Hodges’ treatment of repentance.”²⁶ Perhaps so. But in any case he should first *read* those views with enough care to get them right!

In discussing the Parable of the Soils (Mark 4:1-20), Carson (evidently) adopts the standard view within the New Puritanism that the first three soils represent the non-elect (see pp. 18-19). But he goes on to say that “several popular interpreters with the Grace Evangelical Society find this so uncomfortable that they reinterpret the parable.”²⁷ I suppose we *are* uncomfortable with the New Puritan approach to this parable, but only because it does not appear to square with the text.

In fact, Carson’s treatment of the parable is so imprecise in its terminology that others from his camp may be uncomfortable, too, when they read it. He notes, for example, that in the parable “two of the three fruitless soils sprout life.” A few lines further down he states (of the seed on rocky ground) that “this spiritual life proves transitory.”²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., 6.

²⁵ *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989).

²⁶ Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance,” 12.

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

²⁸ Ibid.

What can this possibly mean? Does “spiritual life” here equal eternal life? If so, how can it prove transitory unless, after all, the Arminians are right! (A conclusion we do not really entertain!) But if it is not *eternal* life, what is it? Is there *another* kind of spiritual life? Carson does not tell us.

But our understanding is further darkened when Carson goes on to write that to hold the GES view of the parable would mean “introducing a category for spiritual life that is nevertheless fruitless” and that to do so “is simply alien to the concerns of the chapter, and contrary to one of the driving motifs of all three Synoptic Gospels.”²⁹

But if *we* introduce a category of life that is fruitless (actually we do not), has not Carson himself introduced a category of spiritual life that is transitory and not eternal? Is this not a case of the pot calling the kettle black?

Actually, in the parable, the sprouts and the stunted grain of the middle two soils ought not to be called “spiritual life” at all. Instead, they are the *manifestations* of spiritual life. But *the life* is inherent in *the seed* which symbolizes the Word of God (Mark 4:14; see 1 Pet 1:22-25). As long as the seed remains in the soil (in the last three soils it *does* remain) *life is there*. Only its manifestations are lost in the rocky soil.

This is a perfectly straightforward view of the parable which should make no one uncomfortable unless (as is true in Carson’s case) it contradicts his theology!

I am happy that Carson has discovered GES. Perhaps the next time he writes about us he could aim for a higher level of scholarly precision.

V. CARSON AND “COMPATIBILISM”

In an extended section (pp. 21-26), Carson has appealed to what he calls “compatibilism.” Compatibilism, he claims, deals with the vexed question of the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility.³⁰ “Modern compatibilists,”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The famous (alleged) tension between the doctrines of divine sovereignty and human responsibility has been called by others an irresolvable paradox, or an antinomy. “Compatibilism” is Carson’s term for this, by which he means that these doctrines “are mutually compatible” even though they cannot be totally harmonized. See his discussion on p. 22.

he claims, "...do not try to show how the two propositions hold together,"³¹ and "compatibilism touches many subjects: election, the problem of suffering, the nature of prayer, and much else. What is not often recognized is that it bears directly on the nature of Christian assurance."³²

There follows a crucial statement by Carson:

For, on the one hand, we are dealing with a plethora of texts that promise God's sovereign commitment to preserve His own elect; on the other, believers are enjoined to persevere in faithfulness to the new covenant and the Lord of the covenant, to the calling by which they were called. This is nothing other than God's sovereignty and human responsibility dressed up in another form.

So we will, I think, always have some mystery.³³

The fallacy of this approach, however, is that it is dictated by Carson's own view of faith and assurance as being somehow related to perseverance in holiness. Since Carson shows no serious inclination to re-examine this premise of his own theology, he is left with the very tensions he claims must be handled by compatibilism. But even after these tensions are waved aside by Carson, what is left is *not* assurance at all.

What is left, in fact, is the *idée fixe* of the New Puritanism: namely, that the passages which command "faithfulness to the new covenant and to the Lord of the covenant" must be tied in with soteriological concerns. As long as this flawed premise is held to, adherents of Puritan thought can still not have genuine assurance.

If "assurance" were indeed a mystery, then it would be a deeply disquieting mystery to those who need assurance the most. Does Dr. Carson know beyond question that he himself is regenerate? If so, let him tell us *how* he knows.

The compatibilist cannot have a mystery and a confident answer too!

³¹ Carson, "Reflections on Christian Assurance," 23-24.

³² *Ibid.*, 25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

VI. CONCLUSION

There is certainly much more that can be said about the specific matters which appear in Carson's article, but space does not permit this. To respond to everything in Carson's discussion would almost require that our book, *The Gospel Under Siege* (2nd ed.) be reprinted here. The reader who wishes more discussion of the specific passages brought forward by Carson will find most of them addressed in that book or in *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*.

Let us here simply examine one of Carson's final, concluding observations. On the final page of his article he writes:

I have not argued that perseverance is the basis for assurance; rather, I have argued that failure to persevere undermines assurance. The *basis* of assurance is Christ and His work and its entailments.³⁴

This comes close to double-speak. *Of course*, New Puritan thought makes Christ and His work the *basis* of assurance even as they make it the *basis* of salvation. The trouble is that in New Puritanism one cannot *find* real assurance in Christ and His work (as Calvin so clearly taught that we could!), for any such supposed assurance is invalidated by the possibility that one may fail to persevere.

Thus the "failure to persevere" does more than to "undermine assurance" *after* the failure appears. It also undermines it *up front* as well, so that someone who believes in Puritan theology cannot be truly sure of salvation even at the supposed moment of conversion. And, indeed, he can never be sure before death, because only death forecloses the possibility of his "falling away."

I want to remind Carson that for Calvin such a person was not saved at all. In treating 2 Cor 13:5 (a favorite New Puritan text) Calvin writes:

Second, *this passage serves to prove the assurance of faith* [italics added], a doctrine which the sophists of the Sorbonne have so corrupted for us that it is now almost uprooted from the minds of men. They hold that it is rash temerity to be persuaded that we are members of Christ and have Him dwelling in us, and they bid us rest content with a moral conjecture, which is a mere opinion, so that our consciences remain

³⁴ Ibid., 24, italics original.

perpetually undecided and perplexed. But what does Paul say here? *He declares that those who doubt their possession of Christ are reprobates* [italics added]. Let us therefore understand that the only true faith is that which allows us to rest in God's grace, not with a dubious opinion but *with firm and steadfast assurance* [italics added].³⁵

Even if we demur, as I do, from Calvin's precise exposition of this Pauline text, Calvin's firm insistence that assurance is of the essence of true saving faith is quite plain here. He makes the same point in many other places as well.

The Grace Evangelical Society agrees with Calvin's conviction that saving faith, whenever it is exercised, carries with it a firm assurance. Apparently the New Puritans agree with "the sophists of the Sorbonne"!

³⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Public Domain), s.v. 2 Cor 13:5.

THE NEW PURITANISM PART 2: MICHAEL S. HORTON: HOLY WAR WITH UNHOLY WEAPONS¹

ZANE C. HODGES

I. INTRODUCTION

Michael S. Horton is the president of an organization known as Christians United for Reformation (CURE), with headquarters in Anaheim, California. As its journalistic arm, CURE publishes a magazine called *modernReformation* [sic], which promotes CURE's point of view. On the masthead of this magazine CURE is identified as "a non-profit educational foundation committed to communicating the insights of the 16th century Reformation to the 20th century Church."

The book under review here is a symposium volume entitled, *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992; 240 pp.) and is edited by Horton. He also contributed a preface, an introduction, and two out of the eight articles the book contains. Four other contributors (W. Robert Godfrey, Rick Ritchie, Kim Riddlebarger, and Rod Rosenblatt) are listed as "Writers" on the masthead of *modernReformation*. The two remaining contributors are Paul Schaefer, a freelance writer, and Robert Strimple, a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in California (as also is Godfrey, mentioned above).

Clearly there is no reason to quarrel with the designation "A CURE Book" which appears on the title page.

Michael S. Horton's name has achieved considerable visibility in recent years through a number of books, including *The Agony of Deceit* (which he edited) and *Made in America* (which he wrote). But it is probable that many to whom his name is known could not pinpoint his theology beyond saying that it was evangelical. However, as one reviewer of *Made in America* has noted:

¹This article appeared in the Autumn 1993 issue of *JOTGES*.

Horton's major concern is not with the country in general, but how quickly American evangelicals in particular abandoned the *Puritan ideal*, particularly its *Calvinistic theology* and world view, and accommodated themselves to whatever the culture dictated.²

Later, the same reviewer notes that "those who *do not share Horton's love* for the five Points of Calvinism may find his constant harping on Arminianism excessive."³ An awareness of the theology behind *Christ the Lord* is essential if we are to correctly evaluate this book.

II. LET THE READER BEWARE

In the last analysis, *Christ the Lord* is a vigorous attack on Free Grace theology from a slightly disguised Dortian (five-point Calvinist) perspective.

The reader should understand that five-point Calvinism generally denies the validity of all free will in human beings and embraces a harsh doctrine of reprobation along with a rigid view of divine election. To put it plainly, those who are lost were unconditionally assigned to hell by divine decree in eternity past. Since they have no free will, there is nothing they can possibly do about their eternal reprobation.

But equally, the elect can do nothing either, not even believe. This leads to the doctrine that our faith does not appropriate God's gift of life, but rather faith *results from* God's sovereign regeneration of the elect person. To the five-point Calvinist, regeneration logically precedes faith, despite all of the Scriptures that condition eternal life and/or justification on faith.

It follows, as well, that Christ did not pay the penalty for the sins of the non-elect, but only for those of the elect. This too flies in the face of Scripture (2 Cor 5:19; 1 Tim 2:3-6; 1 John 2:2).

None of these ideas has any right to be called normative Protestant theology. None has ever been held by a wide cross-section of Christendom. Most importantly, none of them is

²Robert W. Patterson, "Did the Reformation Take a Wrong Turn in America?" *Christianity Today* 35 (14, November 25, 1991): 30-32, italics added.

³Ibid., 32, italics added.

biblical. In the opinion of this reviewer, *all* of them lie outside the proper parameters of Christian orthodoxy.

Yet the contributors to this book do not lay explicit claim to this set of doctrines. To do so would have “turned off” a large majority of Christian readers. Instead, they feel more comfortable hurling at their opponents such epithets as “Arminian” and “antinomian.” But by concealing the full scope of their own theology—and by laying claim to orthodoxy—they actually construct a fantasy world. They create the deceptive illusion that the Free Grace movement is an enemy to historic orthodoxy.⁴

But in fact, the Free Grace movement is *not* an enemy to orthodoxy. On the other hand, most (but not all) Free Grace people are indeed opposed to the “Christian fatalism” of 5-point Calvinism.

The writers of this volume are sometimes so intense that one feels they regard their assault on Free Grace theology as a kind of “holy war.” But if this is their view of it, their weapons are decidedly *unholy*. Let us examine some of these “weapons,” which the writers freely deploy. Limits of space require our focus to be mainly on Horton, the leading offender here.

III. UNHOLY WEAPONS

Very few books that I have read deal so heavily in caricature and misrepresentation. It was hard for me even to *recognize* myself after encountering so many false strokes on this volume’s portrait of me. We will look at some of these “false strokes” as we survey the “unholy weapons” deployed in this volume.

A. False Statements

1. *The Issue of Saving Faith*

Under his discussion of “Is Faith a Gift?” (Introduction, p. 16), Horton refers to my approving citation of Dr. Robert Preus in *Absolutely Free!* (Note 5, pp. 227-28).⁵ Horton describes Preus as “perhaps the leading conservative Lutheran scholar in our

⁴One can obtain an instructive exposure to five-point Calvinism in the volume by John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991).

⁵Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, and Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989).

generation,”⁶ and quotes the section (which I also quoted) where Preus states:

The Arminians too opposed the Lutheran doctrine by making faith (which they granted was trust) a work (*actus*) of man. Like the Romanists they had a synergistic notion of how man came to faith...Their deviations from the evangelical model are in force today, although in somewhat less gross form. We have all encountered them.⁷

What follows in Horton is an astounding and reckless charge. He writes:

Indeed, we have all encountered them, not least in Zane Hodges’s *Absolutely Free!* That Hodges can approvingly cite these remarks while *laboring throughout the book* [italics added] to establish that very Roman Catholic and Arminian view of saving faith as a human act and the product of a synergistic (i.e., cooperative) response of free will to divine grace demonstrates the author’s confusion either as to what the Reformers taught or as to his own position.⁸

This is totally “off the wall,” to use a colloquial expression. We should note that, in saying that I labor “*throughout the book*” to prove what he charges me with, Horton does not cite so much as one single page-reference! Since I do *not* hold or teach what Horton says I do, Horton’s statement is flatly false.

What is equally bad is the question of whether or not Horton has even read with care the very footnote in my book from which he himself was quoting! In that note I speak approvingly of Preus’s insistence on the traditional Lutheran understanding of faith as “pure receptivity.” I also refer to Preus’s citation of Luther’s own great statement: “Faith holds out the hand and the sack and just lets the good be done to it. For God is the giver... , we are the receivers who receive the gift through faith that does nothing.”⁹ This is my view of faith, too.

⁶ *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 16.

⁷ Robert D. Preus, “Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, (July 1981): 172.

⁸ *Christ the Lord*, 16.

⁹ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 227.

I do not contradict this position anywhere in *Absolutely Free!* Horton's claim that I do is without foundation. Faith is *not* an "*actus*" in either the Roman Catholic or Arminian sense. It is "pure receptivity" to the offer of the Gospel. Faith is a *persuasion* of the heart, not an "*act*" of the human will.¹⁰

2. The Second or Third Point of Calvinism?

After the discussion above, we are hardly surprised to read another accusation by Horton:

Denying the doctrine of unconditional election ("this tragic error," Hodges calls it) and the effectiveness of God's grace in granting faith, the author adds...¹¹

This is also an untrue statement. I say nothing in *Absolutely Free!* about the doctrine of unconditional election (the so-called second point of Calvinism). As a matter of fact, I hold to that doctrine, though probably not in a form to which Horton would give his approval.

In my text the words "this tragic error" refer to the *third* point of Calvinism, namely, to the doctrine of *limited atonement*. This doctrine is often denied by those Calvinists who hold to the other four points of Calvinism (including unconditional election). With apologies to the reader, I must quote myself here in order to make my point. I wrote:

Frequently (though not always) lordship salvation is combined with a harsh system of thought that *denies the reality of God's love for every single human being*. According to this kind of theology, God dooms most men to eternal damnation long before they are born and *really gives His Son to die only for the elect*.

For such thinkers, the declaration that "God so loved the world" (John 3:16) must be tortured into meaning something less than His universal love for mankind. It

¹⁰ One might note here Kendall's crisp summation of Calvin's view of saving faith: What stands out in these descriptions is the given, intellectual, passive, and assuring nature of faith. What is absent is a need for gathering faith, voluntarism, faith as man's act, and faith that must await experimental knowledge to verify its presence." R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 19, italics added. I, of course, concur with such a view of saving faith.

¹¹ *Christ the Lord*, 17, italics added.

does not lie within the scope of this book to deal with this tragic error.”¹²

No doubt this section of my book greatly displeased Horton, who evidently holds to “limited atonement.” But why could he not accurately designate the doctrine I was criticizing? Is this carelessness? Or is it an unwillingness to allow his belief in “limited atonement” to be plainly declared. After all, most Christians throughout church history have rejected this doctrine. Furthermore, a powerful case has been made that *Calvin himself did not hold it*.¹³ Is Horton afraid that “open confession” will undermine his case to the general Christian public?

3. Revelation 3:20

Or, we might take the following unwarranted statement by Horton:

Hodges also returns to the faulty, if popular, exegesis of Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” It is clear from the context that Jesus is addressing “the church of the Laodiceans,” not the unbelieving world, as Hodges and others interpret it.¹⁴

How could Horton possibly have come up with this? Certainly not by a careful reading of my book! In fact I say clearly of Rev 3:20 that:

It would be wrong to take this famous statement as a simple gospel invitation, though that has often been done. Here our Lord is addressing a Christian church and, clearly, anyone in the church is invited to respond.¹⁵

Moreover, on p. 150 of my book, I refer to Rev 3:20 in connection with Christian repentance! Horton’s statement about my view is *totally* false.

¹² Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 85-86, italics added.

¹³ For effective discussions of this issue, leading to the conclusion that Calvin held to unlimited atonement, the reader should refer to Kendall’s *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*; to M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985); and to A. N. S. Lane, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Assurance,” *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979): 32-54.

¹⁴ *Christ the Lord*, 17-18.

¹⁵ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 129.

4. Conclusion

The observant reader will have noticed that the three false statements I have cited occur on pp. 16, 17 and 17-18. This is falsification at a very rapid clip! Obviously I would soon use up all the space in this article if I tried to enumerate each and every false assertion this volume makes about my views.

Suffice it to say, Horton and his fellow authors are so unreliable in stating these views, that none of their statements about me should be taken at face value unless carefully verified by the reader from my actual writings!

B. Distortions

As we have said, the writers in *Christ the Lord* frequently just misstate my views; on the other hand, they often distort them. Once again we will focus on Horton.

1. The Charge of Denying God's Sovereignty

On p. 21 (still in his Introduction!), Horton rejects my view about the statement in Eph 2:10 that Christians are “created... for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” In *Absolutely Free!* I stated that one cannot find in this text “any kind of guarantee that the stated purpose will be fulfilled.”¹⁶

Horton replies: “So, once again, the author follows his logic to its sad conclusion: God is not sovereign; he does not achieve his gracious purposes...”¹⁷

Has Horton never heard the formulation to which even many Calvinists hold, namely that, “What God desires, He does not always decree”? God may deeply desire certain goals which, in His wisdom, He has not chosen to attain. Horton’s charge that my theology results in the conclusion that God is not sovereign, is logically absurd.

Horton’s position is also linguistically untenable. The Greek word *hina* (= “that”) in Eph 2:10 tells us nothing about the final results and only describes the intended *purpose* God has for us as people “created in Christ Jesus.” Whether or not this purpose will be fulfilled in each and every case is a conclusion that cannot be supported from this text.

¹⁶ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 73.

¹⁷ *Christ the Lord*, 21.

But in Horton's theology one is required to hold to its fulfillment by *all* the elect. From Horton's perspective, the reason for this is indicated by the words that immediately follow the quotation cited above: [The result of Hodges's view is that] "the effectiveness of the grace he [God] offers depends entirely on what we decide by an act of the will."¹⁸

This, too, is a distortion. I do not state, nor do I believe, that obedience to God's will "depends *entirely*" on what *we* decide. God works on the human will to move us (not coerce us!) to a decision to obey, and His enablement is necessary as we seek to carry out this decision (see Phil 2:13). At the same time, the Christian *may* resist God's work in his heart.

But leaving this point aside, the real key to Horton's comments is his complete refusal to allow any role to man's will either in salvation or in sanctification. Horton appears to think that any allowance for the activity of the human will deprives God of His sovereignty. But this is false.

The relationship between divine control and human freedom has long been a controversial theological issue. The reader may be interested in a recent and highly competent treatment of this difficult subject. He will find it in an article by David Basinger entitled, "Divine Control and Human Freedom: Is Middle Knowledge the Answer?" in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1, March 1993): 55-64. The complexity of the issue can easily be seen from Basinger's discussion. Horton's perspective evidently requires what Basinger calls "theological determinism." In my view, the approach designated "middle knowledge" is superior to other views. In "middle knowledge" full account is taken of God's omniscience so that room is left for the biblical concept of human responsibility as well as of divine sovereignty. A discussion of the whole question cannot be taken up here.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ It must be said that Basinger does not hold himself to the "middle knowledge" position. His critique of this position, however, does not seem to me to do full justice to the tremendous scope of God's foreknowledge, which includes knowing all things that could be conceived of occurring, in all of their conceivable permutations—and knowing all this with full immediacy. Such a God can instantaneously take account of an infinite number of possible scenarios and could ordain precisely that scenario in which His will is completely worked out within a cosmos containing actual free will. For Basinger's evaluation, see the article cited in the text above, 61-64.

Suffice it to say, Horton apparently charges me with theological indeterminism of an Arminian type, which is not at all a fair or correct assessment of my position.

2. *The Charge of Antinomianism*

Naturally, Horton also charges me (and others) with antinomianism. This is pretty standard fare for my critics in the New Puritan camp. I was certainly not surprised to find it in this book too.

What did surprise me was Horton's apparent lack of accuracy in discussing the so-called "antinomian controversy" in seventeenth-century New England. In a section entitled "The Antinomian Controversy" (found on pp. 142-47 of Horton's chapter called "Christ Crucified between Two Thieves"), Horton depicts that controversy in a way that is, historically, almost unrecognizable.

The best resource for students of this controversy is the volume edited by David Hall and entitled, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*.²⁰ Here all the essential original documents have been collected and printed in full. The first edition was published in 1968 (Horton apparently errs in citing it as 1989 on p. 228), while a second edition appeared in 1990. I have read the documents in their entirety. But has Horton? I seriously doubt it, even though he cites the book four times. On inspection, his citations from the first edition are from p. 15 (twice), p. 19, and p. 53. But this is a book of well over 400 pages!²¹

Strikingly, Horton critiques the New England Puritans who *opposed(!)* antinomianism because they "appeared to be following a system more akin to the medieval penitential system, with assurance of God's favor being granted through successive stages of contrition, purgation, illumination, and finally union" (pp. 144-45). And who is Horton's "hero" in this controversy? Astoundingly, it is John Cotton, the leading clergyman on the *antinomian* side! Of Cotton he writes:

For whatever reasons, John Cotton had become more aligned with the thinking of the Reformers (and, I think, the New Testament) after his move to Boston.

²⁰ David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990).

²¹ In the second edition, to be exact, xxi + 453 pages.

Cotton argued, quite traditionally, that we do not attain union through a series of stages; rather we are united to Christ immediately by the Holy Spirit through faith. His opponents, however, like many of their English contemporaries, followed a line closer to the medieval scheme.²²

All of this is to be taken *cum grano salis* because it throws a false slant on the controversy. As Hall has reaffirmed in the preface to his new edition, “I argued in 1968, and would argue again, that assurance of salvation was the central issue in the controversy.”²³ The argument among the Puritans revolved around whether assurance of salvation could be immediately given by the Spirit at conversion, or whether assurance must wait on one’s sanctification—i.e., on a manifestation of *obedience to the law*. Those who *opposed* making obedience to the law a necessary condition of assurance were the “antinomians” (= those against law). As I have noted, Cotton was the leader of the “antinomians.”²⁴

But if Cotton, the “antinomian,” is Horton’s hero in the controversy who is his villain? This dubious distinction falls on Anne Hutchinson, whom Horton acknowledges to have been “one of his [Cotton’s] devoted parishioners.”²⁵ Of Hutchinson Horton writes:

Now it must be said that Anne Hutchinson, in addition to being a strange person, was certainly an antinomian. Very often, charges of antinomianism are not seaworthy, but Anne clearly denied the necessary connection between faith and repentance, justification and sanctification, and relegated the latter to “works-righteousness.” Every command, every requirement in Scripture, was viewed as a form of legalism.²⁶

Where is the documentation for these claims? Horton offers none. Apparently he wishes to distance Hutchinson from Cotton, but in so doing he distorts history. Much more accurate, it seems to me, are the publisher’s comments on the back cover of the paperback edition of Hall’s *The Antinomian Controversy*:

²² *Christ the Lord*, 144-45.

²³ Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*, xiv,

²⁴ Cotton was charged with antinomianism, for example, by Robert Baillie, who was a minister in the church of Scotland as well as a delegate to the Westminster Assembly (which drew up the Westminster Confession).

²⁵ *Christ the Lord*, 144.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

This new edition of the 1968 volume, published for the first time in paper, includes an expanded bibliography and a new preface, treating in more detail the primary figures of Anne Hutchinson and her chief clerical supporter, John Cotton. Among the documents gathered here are transcripts of Anne Hutchinson's trial, several of Cotton's writings defending the Antinomian position, and John Winthrop's account of the controversy. Hall's increased focus on Hutchinson reveals the harshness and the excesses with which the New England ministry tried to discredit her and reaffirms her place of prime importance in the history of American women.

This does not sound at all like Horton's description of things!

What is crucial here is the account, or transcript, of Mrs. Hutchinson's examination by the General Court at Newtown in November of 1637.²⁷ This account was first found in an appendix to an historical work published in Boston in 1767.²⁸ It sheds significant light on Mrs. Hutchinson and is included in Hall's volume on pages 312-48.

It is plain from the transcript that Mrs. Hutchinson was routing her accusers with her responses until she admitted that she had received divine revelations. As Hall has noted,

Her trial by the Court was nearly a disaster, for Mrs. Hutchinson made the various charges brought against her seem ridiculous. Not until she spoke of receiving revelations from God did the Court find an issue on which she could be banished. With her proscription the Controversy drew to a close.²⁹

So, in reality, Mrs. Hutchinson was not banished for her antinomian views, but for what amounted to her "charismatic" tendencies!

The reader may be interested in a brief extract from the exchange between Anne Hutchinson and her accusers at this hearing. In segment, the Deputy Governor charges her with disparaging all ministers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony by

²⁷ Given in Hall's chapter, "The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newton," 311-48.

²⁸ Specifically, according to Hall, p. 311, "the second volume of Thomas Hutchinson's *History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, 1767)." Hall calls Hutchinson "a notable historian and political figure in pre-revolutionary Massachusetts."

²⁹ Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*, 10.

saying “that they have preached a covenant of works, and only Mr. Cotton a covenant of grace.”³⁰

The transcript proceeds as follows:

Mrs. H. I pray Sir prove it that I said they preached nothing but a covenant of works.

Dep. Gov. Nothing but a covenant of works, why a Jesuit may preach truth sometimes.

Mrs. H. Did I ever say they preached a covenant of works, then?

Dep. Gov. If they do not preach a covenant of grace clearly, then they preach a covenant of works.

Mrs. H. No Sir, one may preach a covenant of grace more clearly than another, so I said.

D. Gov. We are not upon that now but upon position.

Mrs. H. Prove this then Sir that you say I said.

D. Gov. When they do preach a covenant of works do they preach truth?

Mrs. H. Yes Sir, but when they preach a covenant of works for salvation, this is not truth.

D. Gov. I do but ask you this, when the ministers do preach a covenant of works do they preach a way of salvation?

Mrs. H. I did not come hither to answer questions of that sort.

D. Gov. Because you will deny the thing.

Mrs. H. Ey, but that is to be proved first.

D. Gov. I will make it plain that you did say that the ministers did preach a covenant of works.

Mrs. H. I deny that.

D. Gov. And that you said they were not able ministers of the new testament, but Mr. Cotton only.

Mrs. H. If I ever said that I proved it by God’s word.

Court. Very well, very well.

Mrs. H. If one shall come to me in private, and desire me seriously to tell them what I thought of such an one. [sic] I must either speak false or true in my answer.³¹

Here it is plain, as it is throughout the entire transcript of the proceedings, that the court was having considerable difficulty in

³⁰ Ibid., 318.

³¹ Ibid., 318-19.

nailling down any significant charge against Mrs. Hutchinson. Moreover, John Cotton stood with Mrs. Hutchinson in her defense virtually to the end of the hearing. A segment near the end of the examination is illuminating:

Mr. Peters. I was much grieved that she should say our ministry was legal. Upon which we had a meeting as you know and this was the same she told us that there was a broad difference between Mr. Cotton and us. Now if Mr. Cotton do hold forth things more clearly than we, it was our grief we did not hold it so clearly as he did, and upon those grounds that you have heard.

Mr. Coddington. What was wrong was that to say that you were not able ministers of the new testament or that you were like the apostles—methinks the comparison is very good.

Gov. Well, you remember that she said but now that she should be delivered from this calamity.

Mr. Cotton. I remember she said that she should be delivered by God's providence, whether now or at another time she knew not.

Mr. Peters. I profess I thought Mr. Cotton would never have took her part.³²

It should be clear enough from these segments of Hutchinson's trial before the General Court that something quite different was taking place than what Horton describes. The issues were fundamentally her charges of legalism against the Puritan ministers and her claims to direct revelation. Mrs. Hutchinson was not banished from the colony for antinomianism in any widely accepted sense of that word, such as "lawlessness" or "libertinism." As much as anything she was banished (as we said earlier) for her "charismatic" tendencies. Pastor Cotton did not desert her.

Ironically, Hutchinson was later tried by Cotton's own church in Boston, with Cotton participating.³³ But this was on an array of new charges, many of which were unrelated to the original controversy. Although she was convicted and excommunicated by Cotton's church, Hutchinson professed to have held none of

³² Ibid., 372.

³³ For the account of this trial, see Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*, 349-95.

the censured convictions prior to her imprisonment, which followed her trial at Newtown. Cotton acknowledged his own previous unawareness that she held these views.³⁴ But at this point the larger antinomian controversy was over.

In conclusion, it must be said that Horton's discussion of this historic controversy is so distorted and flawed, that one wonders how he could manage to be so far off target. It is therefore almost grotesque for Horton to write:

Like Anne Hutchinson, the Dallas position is clearly what its critics insist it is: nothing short of the antinomian heresy. The gospel is distorted in bizarre ways by Hodges, Ryrie, Cocoris and the like.³⁵

With words like these, Michael Horton descends to new depths of irresponsibility.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 372.

³⁵ *Christ the Lord*, 146.

THE NEW PURITANISM PART 3: MICHAEL S. HORTON: HOLY WAR WITH UNHOLY WEAPONS¹

ZANE C. HODGES

INTRODUCTION

In the previous issue we began our review of the book, *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*, edited by Michael Horton (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992). This is a symposium book with articles by seven writers, including Horton, who contributes two articles and an introduction.² Horton is the president of CURE (Christians United for Reformation) which is based in Anaheim, California.

The theological perspective of the writers appears to be that of Dortian (or, five-point) Calvinism. The volume displays considerable hostility toward the Free Grace position. A sense of “holy war” against the theology of grace is not hard to detect in many places in the book. But the weapons employed might be described as *unholy* weapons.

In the last issue we saw that the book is permeated by false statements (point A) and/or distortions of its opponent’s views (point B). To these unholy weapons we may now add another: the subjugation of biblical soteriology to theological determinism.

C. Soteriology Subjugated to Determinism

If there is one thing five-point Calvinists hold with vigorous tenacity, it is the belief that there can be no human *free will* at all. With surprising illogic, they usually argue that God cannot be sovereign if man is granted any degree of free will. But this view of God actually *diminishes* the greatness of His sovereign power. For if God cannot control a universe in which there is

¹This article appeared in the Spring 1994 issue of *JOTGES*.

²Besides Horton, the other writers are Robert B. Strimple, Rick Ritchie, Kim Riddlebarger, W. Robert Godfrey, Paul Schaefer, and Red Rosenblatt.

genuine free will, and is reduced to the creation of “robots,” then such a God is of truly limited power indeed.

We would argue quite differently. The God of the Bible is in fact great enough to create creatures with genuine powers of choice. Yet so perfect is His omniscience of all choices, possible and actual, that He can devise an almost infinitely complex scenario for mankind in which His sovereign purposes are all worked out perfectly through—and even in spite of—the free choices made by His creatures. This view of things is sometimes called “Middle Knowledge,” which was briefly referred to in our last article.

The theological determinism found in *Christ the Lord* is in no way necessitated by the Bible. But since the writers *impose* it on Scripture, the results are necessarily bad. When the Bible is not allowed to speak beyond the grid of its interpreters, we are not surprised if its voice is seriously distorted.

1. There Is No Place for Human Responsibility

It is a logical (though unadmitted) corollary of theological determinism that there can be no true concept of human responsibility. If man has no free will, he can make no other choices than those for which he has been programmed. Man cannot be held truly responsible for “choices” which were mere illusions of choice and which are really the inevitable outworking of a predetermined program to which he is unconsciously subjected. If the word “responsible” is assigned to such “choices,” the word loses any real significance at all. Determinists who use the word are playing a word-game. We might as well say that the table, on which I have just laid some books, is “responsible” to hold them up!

It is part of the creed of the theological determinist that unsaved man cannot really be called upon to believe the Gospel, since he has no capacity to do so at all. It follows, then, that faith must be a divinely imparted gift which man receives only as a part of his conversion.

This idea is pretty clearly stated by Horton. Speaking of “union” with Christ, he writes:

Regeneration, or the new birth, is the commencement of this union. God brings this connection and baptism even before there is any sign of life—God “made us alive...even when we were dead” (Eph 2:5). The first

gift of this union is faith, the sole instrument through which we live and remain on this vine.³

This statement is theological quicksand to say the least. It is fraught with unbiblical implications.

It is evident that Horton believes that faith is a consequence of regeneration, not regeneration the consequence of faith. It follows that an unsaved man could not possibly believe unless God *first* regenerates him. The non-elect, therefore, are faced with the horrible reality that God has chosen *not* to regenerate them and that, therefore, they *cannot* believe even if they want to.

Yet biblically, the failure to believe is *the basis* of the condemnation of the unsaved, as John 3:17 declares:

He who believes is not condemned. But he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

The result of Horton's theology is that non-elect people are hopelessly bound for hell because God declines to regenerate them. Thus they are *unable* to believe.

Yet they are *condemned* for that unbelief! The picture of God that emerges from this is a hideous distortion of His loving character and nature.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Horton also writing (on the same page!) these words:

He [God] cannot love us directly because of our sinfulness, but he can love us in union with Christ, because Christ is the one the Father loves.⁴

What this amounts to is that God does not "directly" love *anyone* unless *first* He regenerates him or her, since "regeneration is the commencement of union."⁵ In other words, God does not love the elect until they are regenerated, and He *never* loves the non-elect at all.

This is hardly the God of love whom we meet in the Bible. The deity of the determinist creates human beings for whom he has no direct love, and who have no free will, and thus they are created solely for a destiny in everlasting torment. Christ's death in no way affects them, and so they stand totally outside of

³ *Christ the Lord*, 111.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

any redemptive provision. Christ's atoning work is limited to the elect. The non-elect are both unloved and doomed.

The cruelty implicit in such a view is obvious to any observer outside of those who have been brought up in, or have bought into, this kind of theology. Despite specious arguments addressed to every text alleged against such theology, determinists of this type are bereft of true biblical support. It is absurd, for example, to claim (as they sometimes do) that when the Bible says, "God so loved the world," it means only "the world of the elect."

This is not the place to refute the doctrine of limited atonement. The reader of this Journal should consult passages like 1 John 2:2, 2 Cor 5:18-19, and 2 Pet 2:1 for clear biblical declarations. Suffice it to point out that the antagonistic, distorted attack on the Free Grace movement in *Christ the Lord* is understandable against the backdrop of such theology. The theology itself is hard-edged. It transparently lacks a true sense of God's compassion and love toward all mankind.

It seems to this reviewer that the harsh rhetoric which determinists direct toward their opponents is basically a manifestation of the harsh theology they have embraced.

2. *The Doctrine of Assurance Is Muddled*

The tensions produced by determinist theology necessarily affect the doctrine of assurance. Horton is well aware of the problems created by a heavy stress on good works as a proof of saving faith. For example, he chides John MacArthur for writing: "If disobedience and rebellion continue unabated there is reason to doubt the reality of a person's faith."⁶ Correctly, Horton finds such a statement to be in tension with Paul's struggle in Romans 7, which both he and MacArthur take as the experience of a regenerate person.

But, surprisingly, Horton goes on to say:

MacArthur may have been on safer ground to have said, "If there is no struggle against the disobedience and rebellion, there is reason to doubt the reality of a person's faith." In other words, evidence of the new birth is not whether we are, on the whole, achieving victory at any given point, but whether we are at

⁶ Ibid., 49, quoted from John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says Follow Me?* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 113.

war! While Paul struggles in this way, he adds, “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin that is in my members” (Rom 7:22-23). *While the regenerate do not cease sinning, they also do not cease hating their sin and struggling to eradicate it.*⁷

Although many interpreters have regarded Romans 7 as referring to a *pre-conversion* experience, its reference to *post-conversion* experience now has widespread acceptance. Yet the view that Romans 7 is *normative* Christian experience is open to serious question.⁸ Surely, the conclusion of the chapter suggests that it is not: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24-25). These words, in fact, prepare the way for the positive perspective of Romans 8 where an experience opposite to that of Romans 7 is suggested: “...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4).

It is then quite inappropriate for Horton to elevate the experience of Romans 7 to the level of a test, or proof, of saving faith. He really has no grounds for doing this. His own claim that “evidence of new birth is...whether we are at war,” is completely arbitrary. Surely there is nothing in Romans 7 that suggests that the reality of our faith can be tested by such an experience of repeated failure and defeat! The claim that “the regenerate... do not cease hating their sin” is gratuitous, too.⁹

Correctly, Horton observes that

Nevertheless, the Reformers were quite anxious to hold together faith and assurance as responses that demand Christ alone as their object. In other words, one is not justified through faith alone and then assured some time later by examining his or her works.¹⁰

⁷ *Christ the Lord*, 50, italics added.

⁸ For a Reformed defense that Romans 7 is normative, see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 256-59.

⁹ Especially so in the light of Heb 3:12-13, which is addressed to Christian “brothers”!

¹⁰ *Christ the Lord*, 51.

As far as it goes, this seems to be fine. Throughout his book, Horton *does* react against a radical reliance on works for assurance. Our discussion of his remarks on Romans 7 illustrates this fact.

But what immediately follows the statements just quoted, is obscure. Horton states:

Rather, justifying faith carries with it (in its very definition: trust) a *certain* confidence and assurance that the promise *is true for me*, even though my faith and assurance may be *weak*.¹¹

What does this really mean? What is intended by a *certain* confidence? Does Horton mean a certain *level* of confidence? If so, *what* level? What, in fact, is *weak* assurance? Is “weak assurance” functionally equivalent to “a certain level of doubt”? If so, *what* level? And is that really assurance at all?

In addition, what does it mean for one to have “assurance that the promise is *true for me*”? Does this mean: “I am sure that I’m saved based on God’s promise”? Or, does it mean, “I am sure the promise is for me *if* I truly believe”? Most Reformed thinkers would take the latter option.¹²

In his conclusion to the chapter we are quoting from, Horton is even less perspicuous. For example, he states: “Many think they are living holy lives because they do not have the slightest comprehension of biblical holiness.”¹³ Later in the same paragraph he adds:

¹¹ Ibid., italics added.

¹² One might also note here Horton’s later statement: “If saving faith is more than the conviction that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, but that he did this for me, then that conviction is synonymous with assurance. To trust in Christ for salvation is to be assured that he will fulfill his promise. If we are not assured, we are not trusting.

“Of course, this was never to suggest that assurance is complete, any more than faith. Our faith and assurance may be weak, sometimes barely distinguishable, but it is impossible to truly exercise a justifying faith that does not contain the assurance that Christ’s saving work has guaranteed what has been promised in one’s own case” (*Christ the Lord*, 132).

This partakes of the same ambiguity noted above. Horton seems to be saying that one can be sure of the objective facts and of the validity of the promises. But does he also mean that one can know for sure that he is eternally saved at the moment he trusts Christ? If he does, this is far from clear.

¹³ *Christ the Lord*, 55.

Because they have never had premarital sex or been drunk, they are certain they do not require self-examination and a swift flight back to the cross. They may not be “spiritual giants,” they concede, but they’re “good Christian folks”—mediocre, external, and superficial in their devotion. They have never been condemned in their righteousness by the law, so they shall never be justified by Christ’s righteousness.¹⁴

Here, of course, Horton is on solid Puritan terrain, honey-combed though it is with theological land mines. Here the typical Puritan disdain for “superficial” Christianity comes through clearly, along with a loud warning that apart from a deep conviction of sin, wrought by the law, one cannot hope to find justification by faith! So it turns out that one can hardly look to Christ and His cross for salvation unless one first discerns *in himself* a sufficiently deep spirit of conviction and unworthiness.

But how deep? When is my guilt great enough, or my sorrow profound enough, that I can look to the Cross and find peace? Horton, like most Puritans new and old, does not tell us. He is sure, however,

that the reason so many unbelievers can sit comfortably in our churches and even call themselves born-again Christians is that we give them very little to deny. The offensive message of the cross has been replaced with “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” with the cross tucked somewhere underneath it.¹⁵

Again, this is strong Puritan stuff. But it will only do what Puritanism almost always does. It will drive the believer away from resting in the Cross and will require him to examine the reality of his own faith and conversion. Yet Horton writes, a few pages earlier, “We must be careful not to react to the antinomian threat by driving the sheep back to themselves, away from Christ.”¹⁶

But when Horton is read carefully, it seems to me he violates his own principle. The believer cannot simply rest in Christ and in what the Savior has done for his salvation. The believer must also take note of whether he is “at war” with sin. (And *how much*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 54-55.

¹⁶ Ibid., 51.

struggle must there be?) He must take care not to be like superficial professing Christians who think of themselves as “good Christians” but have never really felt the condemnation of the law. Moreover, he must be careful that he has been given enough wickedness “to deny,” lest he be like “so many unbelievers” who “can sit comfortably in our churches and even call themselves born-again Christians.”

Shakespeare said, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” And we might add, “Self-examination by any other name is still self-examination.” In seeking to avoid the Scylla of “assurance by works,” Horton has been sucked into the Charybdis of “assurance by self-condemnation and guilt.” Both alternatives are ruinous to genuine assurance, which can only be gained by looking away from ourselves to our Savior.

In the last analysis, Horton cannot give up what deterministic theology requires. And that is some kind of consistent evidence that man’s sinful and enslaved will has been re-made by God’s work of salvation. Since unsaved men cannot use their wills in a way that pleases God, the absence of any apparent response to God in a professing Christian is taken as an indication that God has not worked in that person.

The biblical reality is more complex. The new life imparted at regeneration carries with it “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). But Peter must also appeal to the will of his readers to give “all diligence” to the process of character development (2 Pet 1:5ff). Even in a Christian, the human will can impede growth and fruitfulness, or stop it altogether (2 Pet 1:9).

The search that the new Puritans undertake for some consistent universal evidence of God’s action on the will of the regenerate person, is like the medieval search for the Holy Grail. It is always beyond reach and ultimately unattainable.

I think that Horton’s position on assurance implodes due to its inherent instability and inconsistency.

3. Sanctification Is Seriously Distorted

Theological determinism also plagues Horton’s view of the process of sanctification in the believer’s life. The result is a serious distortion of this biblical doctrine.

Horton’s background tells us a lot about his present perspective. He writes:

Here we must bring this critique to a pastoral reflection, and for that I will have to explain why the issue is so important to me. I was raised in Bible churches pastored by those who had been taught by Zane Hodges, Charles Ryrie, and other proponents of the “carnal Christian” teaching...As a teenager I had discovered the writings of the Reformers and the later exponents of that teaching. The more deeply I delved into those works, *the more cynical I became* toward the schizophrenia I had experienced all along in trying to get from the bottom of the spiritual ladder to the point *where I could finally be victorious, fully surrendered, yielded, and consecrated.*¹⁷

The reviewer can certainly empathize with Horton here. My own experience at Wheaton College was very similar to his. There I often heard the Christian life presented as though “surrender” and “yieldedness” were the panacea for all of a Christian’s problems with sin. Later at Dallas Seminary, it sometimes seemed as if the “filling of the Spirit” was a similar panacea. Simplistic approaches to Christian experience *can* be devastating, because they don’t really work.

The biblical teaching on the Christian life has much greater depth than such “panacea approaches” often suggest. (The basic biblical primer is Romans 6–8.) I am truly sorry if any student of mine has taken a simplistic approach in teaching Horton or others about Christian living. But I would maintain that he didn’t get this approach from me—or, at least, I never *intended* such a result. Teachers are all too often saddened by what their students claim to have learned from them!

Horton’s reaction to his background, however, leads to an even worse result. Theological determinism, of a Puritan type, takes over. Since man has no free will, except as he is wrought on by God, Horton need no longer struggle with aligning his will with God’s. Everything comes from God.

Most interesting are these words from Horton:

Union with Christ is not the result of human decision, striving, seeking, yielding, or surrendering, but of Christ’s. While we are called to be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18), *that is merely a figure of speech*: “Do not get drunk on wine...Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” In other words, make sure you’re under

¹⁷ Ibid., 30-31, italics added.

the right influence! *Every believer is Spirit-filled* and, therefore, a recipient of every heavenly blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3-4).¹⁸

Here we see what psychologists might call a “reaction formation.” Having frequently been exhorted to “be filled with the Spirit,” Horton escapes from this admonition by claiming it as a benefit belonging to *all* Christians. The command itself is a mere “figure of speech”! All “seeking, yielding, or surrendering” is done by Christ, not by Horton!

But Horton cannot quite escape the “demand” obviously made by Paul’s text. That demand is now reduced to “make sure you’re under the right influence”! But how does Horton do even that? By his decision (or, “will”) to do so? Or does Christ do that too?

The dilemma is acute for the theological determinist. Many commands of the Bible (like Eph 5:18) call upon believers to decide to do, say, or think the right things. If such things can only be done by God Himself working on man’s will—or by Christ living through the man—why does He not do it *all the time* for *all true Christians*? Why must the Christian (as Horton holds) always be “at war,” like Paul is in Romans 7? Cannot God bring victory and peace? Where is God’s power?

Let us hear Horton further on this matter:

The believer has died, is buried, is raised, is seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and so on. These are not plateaus for victorious Christians *who have surrendered all and willed their way to victory* [italics added], but realities for every believer, regardless of how small one’s faith or how weak one’s repentance.

Thus, we must stop trying to convert believers into these realities by imperatives: “Do this.” “Confess that.” “Follow these steps,” and so on. Union with Christ ushers us immediately into all of these realities so that, as Sinclair Ferguson writes, “The determining factor of my existence is no longer my past. It is Christ’s past.”¹⁹

A little later he states:

We are justified through receiving what someone else has earned for us. But we grow in sanctification through *living out* (italics his) what someone else has

¹⁸ Ibid., 113, italics added.

¹⁹ Ibid., 113-14.

earned for us. Both are *gifts* we inherit from someone else, but the former is passively received and *the second is actively pursued* (italics added).²⁰

This kind of discussion has about it a certain superficial plausibility. Indeed, it contains some real truth. But upon close scrutiny, it is impossibly vague and solves nothing.

It is true, of course, that the believer has died, risen, and ascended with Christ (Eph 2:5-6; Rom 6:3-4). But who among Horton's opponents has ever described these things "as plateaus for victorious Christians"? *I* have never heard it done, and Horton leaves his charge undocumented. Furthermore, who has tried to "convert believers into these realities by imperatives"? Again, I don't know of anyone. The truth in question is usually called "positional" and ascribed to all believers.

But if Horton's objection is to "imperatives" per se,²¹ then his quarrel is with each and every NT epistle. The epistles are *full* of imperatives. It may even be said that the NT *commands* us to recognize that we are dead to sin and alive to God and *commands* us to live accordingly. Thus Paul writes:

Likewise you also, reckon [imperative] yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign [imperative] in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present [imperative] your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present [imperative] yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God (Rom 6:11-13).

What can Horton's words possibly mean? A Christian life without imperatives—without an appeal to our will—does not exist.

Further confusion occurs when Horton goes on to describe sanctification as "*living out* what someone has earned for us" and as a gift which "is actively pursued." Of course, there is an element of truth in both observations. But both statements are as simplistic as some of the ideas Horton criticizes.

If all one must do is to "live out" a righteousness he already possesses, why is this so difficult—as even Horton acknowledges with his reference to Romans 7? Further, if it is a *gift*, why must I

²⁰ Ibid., 114.

²¹ Recall he wrote, "Thus we must stop trying to convert believers into these realities *by imperatives*" (italics added), p. 114.

actively pursue it? Why indeed is this gift so imperfectly attained in every Christian life? Horton's rearticulation of the doctrine of sanctification solves nothing. The same old down-to-earth problems remain.

I would contend therefore that Horton's doctrine of sanctification is an example of theological cosmetic surgery. Some of the wrinkles (commands like, "do this," "confess that") have been made to disappear—almost. But what remains is the fundamental problem of how to attain holiness in Christian living.

One cannot wave this problem away by downplaying the role of the Christian's will in living for God. One cannot evade the Bible's direct appeals to believers to be obedient. If God's sovereign power is *all that counts*, even Horton's life—and mine!—would be far better than they are. For that matter, why would not both our lives be perfect?

IV. CONCLUSION

Admittedly, in this review, we have ignored Horton's fellow-writers in *Christ the Lord*. But Horton not only edits the book, he also writes the lengthy introduction (pp. 11-57) and two of its chapters (pp. 107-15 and pp. 129-47), the greatest amount of material of any of the contributors. (Paul Schaeffer does have two chapters, covering pp. 149-93). In addition, Horton is president of CURE, which sponsored the book. The rest of the writers for the most part do not seem to diverge significantly from Horton's position.²² The reader of this review should therefore now have a basic theological "fix" on *Christ the Lord*, though many other subjects could have been discussed with profit. But the reviewer has to stop somewhere!

It is difficult to summarize the mixed feelings produced by this volume. On the one hand, its failure to state accurately the

²² One of a number of possible contradictions to Horton is found in the words of Robert B. Strimple, who seems to regard good works as expected evidences of true faith: "That a person's possession of eternal life is necessarily evidenced by that person's life of faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control—is thought [by Hodges!] to be a totally unbiblical idea. And I suspect, I certainly hope, that you would immediately think of many New Testament passages to which you could turn to refute Hodges here, like 1 John 2-3 and James 2..." (*Christ the Lord*, 63). This sounds much more like MacArthur than Horton, for whom the evidence is more akin to the "war" in Romans 7!

views it opposes leaves an impression of deliberate unfairness. But on the other, Horton's own flight from his previous theological background evokes a real measure of sympathy. Yet this very rebellion against earlier teaching is what seems to poison the discussion.

On balance, the contributions of Horton reveal the damage that a Christian teenager can sustain when his mentors do not effectively address his struggles. At the same time, one wishes that even at this late date Horton could return to his roots, get rid of the unbiblical weeds that choked them, and finally escape from the intellectual prison of theological determinism.

WE BELIEVE IN REWARDS¹

ZANE C. HODGES

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the very last recorded words of our Lord Jesus Christ are these: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My *reward* is with Me, to give to every one according to his *work*” (Rev 22:12; italics added).

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

II. REWARDS AND GRACE

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

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

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

Salvation, of course, is *not* earned. Therefore it can be said to be “by grace...through faith” and “not of works” (Eph 2:8-9). Our works have nothing to do with whether we go to heaven or hell. Salvation is a gift and it is absolutely free. Faith in Christ is the means by which this gift is received.²

¹ This article originally appeared in the Autumn 1991 issue of *JOTGES*.

² Preus is expressing Lutheran theology when he states “that faith’s role in justification is purely instrumental, that faith is an *organum leptikon*, like the empty hand of a beggar receiving a gift, that it alone (*sola fide*) is the appropriate vehicle to receive reconciliation, forgiveness, Christ and

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

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

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

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

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

But Christians who deny that the works considered at the Judgment Seat of Christ are really rewarded on the basis of their spiritual merits fall into a similar error. They are trying to fit "works" and "grace" together in a way that Paul says is impossible. In the process they will either distort the true meaning of grace or distort the meaning of work.

His merits..." See Robert D. Preus, "Perennnial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45 (1981) 172.

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

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

Let us hear Paul again:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A totally passive view of the Christian life, in which we make no effort to do right or to please God, has no foundation in the

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

Bible. We are not mere passive vehicles for the Holy Spirit, but active ones who must apply “all diligence.”

As we do, we *earn* rewards!

III. REWARDS AND SELFISHNESS

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

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

Thus Jesus said:

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

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

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

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

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

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my

body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Cor 9:24-27).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christ as though it were so much wood, hay, or stubble (1 Cor 3:11-15).

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

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

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

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

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

IV. REWARDS AND OTHER MOTIVATIONS

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

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

A. Love and Gratitude

Love and gratitude are indeed worthy motivations. Paul could write that “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith

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

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

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

B. Temporal Consequences of Sin

Another motivation for godly living is concern about the *temporal* consequences of sin. Although no failure can call a believer’s eternal salvation into question, the believer’s sin may have disastrous earthly consequences.

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

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

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

Forgiveness, of course, re-established David’s fellowship with God. But it did not annul all temporal penalties for his grievous sin.⁵ We need to take this to heart. We can indeed confess our sins and be forgiven and restored to harmony with God (1 John 1:9).

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

But this may not prevent such dire temporal consequences as loss of health, broken homes, disturbed children, and many other negative things.

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

C. Temporal Benefits of Righteous Living

But just as there are temporal *consequences* of sin, there are also temporal *benefits* from righteous living. These benefits can provide yet another motivation for a holy life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

rich in motivational material. The doctrine of rewards is biblical. It is one excellent motivation to live well.

But it is not the only one.

V. CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶It is not the purpose of this article to discuss all these passages, or even the various kinds of rewards about which the Bible speaks. That is well beyond the scope of a brief presentation like this one. In fact, this writer has written an entire book on the subject of rewards (*Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards*, 3rd edition [Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2007]). For those interested in doing so, the subject may be pursued more fully there.

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

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

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

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

REGENERATION: A NEW COVENANT BLESSING¹

ZANE C. HODGES

The New Covenant relates to the doctrine of regeneration, that is, the new birth. But before this relationship can be clearly considered, it is necessary to deal with a problem that has arisen with regard to this Covenant.

I. DISPENSATIONALISM AND THE NEW COVENANT

For a long time, the New Covenant has been a problem in dispensational theology. The problem seems to be centered in the statement of Jer 31:31, where the Lord is speaking:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...

From this statement the conclusion has been drawn that the New Covenant is exclusively an arrangement between God and the nation of Israel. Many Dispensationalists have feared that to say otherwise would threaten the collapse of any meaningful difference between Israel and the Church.

Yet at the same time, the NT appears to treat NT believers as objects of the New Covenant arrangements. A number of pivotal passages show this.

For example, the expression *new covenant* appears in all three Gospel accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper: Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; and Luke 22:20. Luke, for example, reports:

Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

This statement of Jesus is repeated by the Apostle Paul in his discussion of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:25. Furthermore, Paul describes himself as a minister of the New Covenant in 2 Cor 3:5,6 when he says,

¹This article appeared in the Autumn 2005 issue of *JOTGES*.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also has made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant.

Finally there is the book of Hebrews. The author of that book—whoever he was, Barnabas, I think—makes the New Covenant a centerpiece in discussing the high priestly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact he actually quotes the passage from Jer 31:31-34 in Heb 8:8-12. He treats the New Covenant as fully applicable to his Christian readers.

Even if the first readers of Hebrews were Jewish believers, which seems highly likely, they were nevertheless members of the Christian Church. Therefore, their Jewishness cannot be the reason the writer applies the New Covenant promises to them. In the Christian Church the Jew/Gentile distinction vanishes. Paul teaches us that in Gal 3:28, when he writes:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

So the writer of Hebrews cannot be talking about blessings that belong *only* to Jewish members of the Christian Church.

The problem of the New Covenant has been felt so strongly by some dispensational teachers that they have even postulated that there are *two new covenants*. One of these is to be made with Israel in the end times, while the other is with the Church. But this is so clearly a counsel of desperation that it must be decisively rejected. The NT offers zero support for the theory of two new covenants.

In my opinion at least, the solution to this problem is extremely simple. The New Covenant is indeed to be made with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, just as Jeremiah says. And the meaning of this is that the entirety of Israel and Judah will someday receive eternal salvation. This is plainly stated in the prophecy itself, which says:

No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying "Know the Lord," for

they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord.

This is quite clear. Someday there will be no unconverted Israelite.

Let us also remember in this connection the words of the Apostle Paul in Rom 11:25-27. They are relevant here even if the word *salvation* is not defined as *salvation from hell*. I quote:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins."

Here, Paul's quotation from the OT comes mainly from Isa 59:20-21a, which includes the words *this is My covenant with them*. But the final words of the quotation, *when I take away their sins*, are not found in this passage in Isaiah. They are apparently a reference to the New Covenant prophecy in Jeremiah 31. Thus they are Paul's interpretation of the reference in Isaiah to *My covenant*. The future of Israel (that Paul describes in Romans 11) is predicated on the fulfillment of the New Covenant promise found in Jeremiah.

(Parenthetically, let me add in passing how I understand Rom 11:26. I think Paul is referring to deliverance from God's eschatological wrath by means of "the Deliverer" [Jesus Christ] who turns away "ungodliness from Jacob." When He comes again His people will all be believers in Him. By His coming and personal presence with them He will teach them practical holiness. In other words, His kingship and ministry to them "will turn away ungodliness from Jacob." He will lead them in the paths of righteousness. But this is all based ultimately on the New Covenant.)

Leaving that complication aside, however, the bottom line is extremely simple. The New Covenant will someday be in force with the entire nation of Israel. But this is not the same as saying it will be in force *only* with them. Every person who has ever been eternally saved, regardless of racial origin, has been saved under the promises of the New Covenant. That is, they have been saved on the basis of *the blood of the New Covenant*

that Christ shed for them. They have become the beneficiaries of God's New Covenant, just as will *all* Israel in a coming day.

We celebrate our participation in the New Covenant every time we partake of the Lord's Supper.

There is no real problem here. To say that every individual finds eternal salvation under the New Covenant is one thing. To say that the destiny of every individual who is saved is exactly the same as every other individual who is saved, is quite another. The New Covenant does not say this.

The New Covenant should be viewed as God's universal covenant of salvation. God enters into that Covenant with each individual at the moment He believes in Jesus.

Under its terms, Israelites can be saved and remain Israelites, or as in the present age, they can become members of the Christian Church. The same is true of Gentiles as well, of course. The distinctions between Israel and the Church are simply not addressed in the New Covenant. Much less are these distinctions denied by this Covenant. Everyone is eternally saved in the same way. What happens beyond that depends on God's purpose for them, which is by no means a plain vanilla conformity.

In a future day, as Jeremiah predicts, God will enter into this New Covenant with the entire nation, both Israel and Judah.

II. NEW BIRTH UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

When we read Jeremiah's prophecy about the New Covenant, our first impression might be that it does not mention new birth. But this would be incorrect. There are two features of the New Covenant as spoken through Jeremiah that show clearly that regeneration is being discussed. I will take the last one first.

A. Knowing God

In his New Covenant prophecy, Jeremiah speaks as follows:

No more shall every man teach His neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord.

What does it mean to know the Lord? Jesus gives us the answer to this in John 17:1-3. In His prayer to the Father Jesus says:

Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may also glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

As this statement shows, eternal life is nothing less than the knowledge of God. But eternal life itself is the result of new birth.

It follows, therefore, that when Jeremiah's prophecy predicts that all Israelites will someday know the Lord, he is predicting that someday every Israelite will be born again. The whole nation will have been regenerated because the whole nation will have believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life.

Yes, new birth is definitely included in the New Covenant.

B. God's Law in the Heart

The second feature of the New Covenant that anticipates new birth is found in these words from Jeremiah:

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Clearly here we have a work of God that He does through new birth. The law of God—His will—becomes part of the regenerate person's innermost being. Paul gives testimony to the truth of this in his own personal experience. As described in Rom 7:19-25, Paul tells us of his struggle with the presence of sin in his physical body. In the process of telling us, he writes:

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members [vv 22-23].

A half verse later he writes:

So then with my mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin [v 24b].

It is completely clear in these verses that the Apostle Paul is under the terms of the New Covenant. Just as God had promised

in Jeremiah's prophecy, God had written His law on Paul's mind and heart. With his mind he served that law and in his heart he delighted in it. Only a recalcitrant physical body prevented him from doing it consistently.

In fact, this happy inner servitude to God's law is precisely what the Apostle John speaks of in 1 John 3:9 saying:

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His
[that is, God's] seed remains in him; and he cannot sin,
because he has been born of God.

This much-discussed text simply means that the regenerate person, as such, cannot sin. Since God's law is written in his heart, his regenerate self never produces sin. Sin, as Paul teaches us in Romans 7, is the work of the sinful flesh as it operates in and through our yet-to-be transformed physical bodies.

It is the inner man that is transformed at new birth, not the outward man. That outward change can happen gradually as we walk with God, and the process will be completed when we meet the Lord in the air and receive our glorified bodies.

III. CONCLUSION: NEW BIRTH IN THE OT

Even before the New Covenant was established through the death of Christ, its benefits were applied to believers in anticipation of the sacrificial work of Christ. God's righteousness in doing so was vindicated by the cross of Christ as we learn from Rom 3:25. Thus New Covenant language appears early in the book of 1 Samuel. In 1 Sam 1:12, we are told this: "Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they *did not know the Lord*." And in 1 Sam 3:7 we read:

Now Samuel *did not yet know the Lord*, nor was the
word of the Lord yet revealed to him.

In the light of the New Covenant, these statements simply mean that Eli's sons were unregenerate and that Samuel was unregenerate until the night that God appeared to him. On that night, however, Samuel was not only born again, he was given the gift of prophecy. Thereafter the word of the Lord was revealed to him.

Perhaps the clearest case of regeneration in the whole OT is the case of King Saul. After his first interview with Samuel, as he departs, Samuel tells him (in 1 Sam 10:5-6):

And it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying. Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and *be turned into another man*.

A few verses later we read (1 Sam 10:9):

So it was, when he had turned his back to Samuel, that God gave him *another heart*; and all those signs came to pass that day.

So Saul was born again and this was a benefit of the New Covenant that Jesus would establish by His death on the cross. In the days of Samuel and Saul people in Israel needed to know the Lord. Indeed they had enough knowledge, apparently, to encourage this experience in their unregenerate brothers and neighbors. According to Jeremiah, Jewish people used to say to their fellow Jews, "Know the Lord." Thus the terminology of the New Covenant was part of Israel's earliest history. But when the New Covenant prophecy of Jeremiah is fulfilled, it will be wonderfully true that,

No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord.

That day will probably be here much sooner than we expect.

JUSTIFICATION: A NEW COVENANT BLESSING¹

ZANE C. HODGES

I. INTRODUCTION

In a previous article, it was shown that the prophecy in Jeremiah 31 about the New Covenant involved a promise of *regeneration*.² This article will consider the question of whether it also entailed a guarantee of *justification*. After all, as seen in the previous article, Paul considered himself a minister of the New Covenant. Again, I quote his words in 2 Cor 3:5-6:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Of course, the doctrine of justification by faith was a crucial part of the Pauline gospel. The question being raised is this: Did Paul think of justification by faith as a benefit included in the promises made in the New Covenant?

The solution to this question is not quite as obvious as the issue discussed in the previous article. It is plain that the New Covenant anticipated regeneration, but did it also anticipate justification?

II. FORGIVENESS UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

There is no question that forgiveness is one of the New Covenant benefits. For this we have the authority of the book of Hebrews. Let me quote the words of Heb 10:15-18:

And the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make

¹This article appeared in the Autumn 2006 issue of *JOTGES*.

²See the preceding article in this journal.

with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” then He adds, “Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more.” Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

The last words of this quotation are not from Jeremiah but are the words of the writer of Hebrews. Notice his comment, “Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.” The word *remission* here, of course, is the Greek noun *aphesis* which is the standard NT noun for forgiveness.

Clearly the author of Hebrews understands the New Covenant words, “their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more,” as guaranteeing the forgiveness of sins.

III. FORGIVENESS AND JUSTIFICATION COMPARED

For anyone who sees no distinction between justification and the forgiveness of sins, then the problem being discussed is already solved. If they are interchangeable terms, then when one is promised so is the other.

However, there is a critical difficulty with this approach. The identification of forgiveness with justification is invalid. I do not believe that the NT offers any evidence that they should be equated, as though they were interchangeable terms. In fact, in Acts 13, they seem to be distinguished.

In that chapter, in Paul’s speech in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia, Paul speaks these words in vv 38-39:

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; *and* by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Notice the word *and*. Paul clearly appears to distinguish the two benefits. To paraphrase his words, He seems to be saying: “I am preaching forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, *and* every believer in Him is also justified.” There is no suggestion of equivalence here.

To forestall a question, I am aware that the *and* is not found in the critical editions of the Greek NT. Of course, it *is* found in the

Majority Text. But the absence of the *and* in no way invalidates my argument. Instead it results in two separate sentences. This is illustrated by the NIV translation of these verses as follows:

Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

Even under this translation, we have no real grounds for equating these two benefits of faith in Christ. As a matter of fact, the conclusion that they are distinct is strengthened by the fact that Paul and Peter are paralleled in the narrative of the book of Acts. As far as I know, this Lucan technique was first noticed as far back as the work of R. B. Rackham in the early 1900s. In the Lucan parallels observed by Rackham, Peter's premier speech in Acts 2:14-39 has its counterpart in Paul's premier speech in Acts 13:16-41. Close study of the two speeches reveals both similarities and differences.

Both speeches have in common an offer of the forgiveness of sins (2:38 and 13:38). But only the Pauline speech contains a reference to justification by faith. (If anyone thinks this is accidental, I have a bridge in Brooklyn I'd like to sell you.) Obviously, Luke was well aware of Paul's deep interest in this doctrine, whereas Peter never mentions it in Acts or in his two epistles. Thus, in the book of Acts, the only reference to justification is right here (13:39), and it is on the lips of Paul. That is both historically and psychologically accurate.

Of course, this is not to say that Peter did not know the doctrine. That would be absurd. Rather, Luke's assignment of this doctrine to Paul's mouth, but not Peter's, reinforces the inference that has already been made. Luke knew that this doctrine was profoundly important for Paul, and Luke knew it was not identical with the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins.

What then is the difference between these doctrines? This can be stated very simply. Forgiveness is an interpersonal issue. In ordinary life it deals with relationships between people. In religious matters, it deals with man's personal relationship with God. By contrast, justification in Pauline thought is a judicial issue. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary* there are

four fundamental definitions for the word “judicial,” plus a theological definition.

1. Of, pertaining to, or proper to courts of law or the administration of justice.
2. Decreed by or proceeding from a court of justice.
3. Belonging or appropriate to the office of a judge.
4. Characterized by, or expressing judgment.
5. *Theol.* Proceeding from a divine judgment.³

It seems to me that the Pauline concept of justification is judicial in all of these senses. For Paul it is basically a term related to the courtroom, and the act of justifying someone is the function of a Judge (that is, of God) and expresses a divine pronouncement, or judgment, about the believer in Jesus Christ. That judgment is that the Judge recognizes no charge at all against the believer.

This conception appears very clearly in Rom 8:33-34a: “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?” In justification, therefore, God pronounces the believer perfectly righteous and, as a consequence, he is beyond any and every charge before God’s Judgment Seat.

To summarize, forgiveness removes the personal barrier of sin between God and the believer. Justification frees the believer from all accountability in the final judgment.

As we all know, there is a myth abroad that holds that every human being will stand before God in the final judgment. It is a myth that still appears in commentaries. But it is a fiction since it contradicts the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here are His words in a more accurate form than what we find in our English Bibles:

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

John 3:17-18: For God did not send His Son into the world *to judge* the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him *is not judged*; but he who does not believe *has already been judged*, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

³ *Dell; 4th edition* (June 26, 2001).

From these statements it is clear that final judgment pertains only to the unregenerate. From Revelation we learn that the regenerate have already been raised and glorified a thousand years before the final judgment at the Great White Throne.

Someone may say, however: “But the saved are judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ.” In a sense, yes. However, it is interesting that Paul never uses the Greek word *krisis* for that event. The term translated “judgment seat” is the Greek word *bema*. Its general sense was that of “a dais or platform that required steps to ascend” and from which a magistrate might address an assembly or hear cases.⁴ It could be translated “judicial bench” in the places where Paul uses it of the final accounting given by Christians to their Lord (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10).

The ethos of this word for Paul is far less formal than a full-fledged courtroom scene would be. Contrast with this the terrifying scene envisaged in Rev 20:11, where John writes: “Then I saw a Great White Throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.”

I am not trying to play down the solemnity of our day of accounting to the Lord. But it would be a mistake to confuse this accounting with the far more serious event of final judgment. It was to that event that Jesus referred in the passages I have quoted from the Gospel of John. In fact, in John’s Gospel, when the term *saved* is used of our final destiny, it means to be “saved” from the final judgment altogether. Justification, therefore, is a term Paul uses with reference to our being “saved” from appearing *at all* in the last judgment.

IV. PAUL, HEBREWS AND THE NEW COVENANT

It has been pointed out more than once, that the writer of Hebrews never uses the word *justified*. Instead, for him its close approximation is the word *sanctified*. All believers are completely sanctified according to this writer. In Heb 10:10, for example, he says: “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Also, in Heb 10:14 he

⁴A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 175.

says, "By one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified."

The writer is thinking here against the background of the Old Covenant. He is thinking of the merely external purification that people in the OT could get through the process of animal sacrifices and ceremonial washings. Under the New Covenant, however, the believer possesses the definitive reality to which these ceremonies pointed. He is totally clean, and he has been sanctified, or made holy, before the sight of God.

Just as a priest was sanctified for his priestly ministry, so now the believer is sanctified and is able to enter boldly into the Holiest of all, that is, into the very presence of God (Heb 10:19). In that sense, therefore, God no longer remembers "their sins and their lawless deeds." That is to say, they are perfectly clean and holy in God's sight. But if that is true, then clearly, the sanctified are also *forgiven*. Forgiveness is a necessary deduction from the New Covenant promise about not remembering sin.

But note something very important here. The New Covenant prophecy does not say explicitly: "their sins and lawless deeds I *will forgive*." Instead it says, "their sins and lawless deeds I *will remember no more*."

Suppose we ask this question: How would a *Judge* not remember sins and lawless deeds? What would be the effective *judicial* equivalent of regarding people as totally free from sin? Paul's answer, I submit, would have been this: "a judicial pronouncement of justification"!

Of course Paul found biblical support for such a pronouncement in passages like Gen 15:6, Ps 32:2, and Hab 2:4. But the fact remains that he could have easily seen this as the judicial side of the New Covenant promise that "their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

In my judgment that is exactly what he did. Thus I believe he would have regarded justification as a New Covenant blessing. Naturally, so do I.

V. CONCLUSION

More than one thing happens to people at the moment when they believe Christ for eternal life. At that moment we are: (1) regenerated, that is, born again; (2) washed from sin, that is, forgiven; (3) sanctified, that is, made holy and fit for the presence of God; and (4) justified, that is, declared righteous. This list is not complete for us today, since we receive the Holy Spirit as well. But the gift of the Spirit is not promised in the New Covenant, so my brief list will suffice for us just now.

Please note in this connection a Pauline statement in 1 Cor 6:11. After listing a catalogue of sinful people in vv 9-10, he writes: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

Note those words: *washed—sanctified—justified*. All of them denote New Covenant blessings that are implicit in the marvelous words of Jer 31:34: "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

By grace, therefore, God sees us as perfectly clean from sin, as holy people belonging to Him, and as completely free of any and every charge of sin. God's grace under the New Covenant is rich and marvelous!

LEGALISM: THE REAL THING¹

ZANE C. HODGES

Legalism is not a very nice word. No one wants to be accused of it, anymore than one would want to be accused of despising motherhood or apple pie. In ecclesiastical circles, to call someone a *legalist* is to hurl an insult of the first magnitude. If someone says, “You’re a legalist,” the instinctive reply would be, “Them’s fighting words!”

But legalism is more than just a nasty religious word. It is also a widely misused word. In the ordinary jargon of evangelicalism, legalism has come to mean an undue emphasis on rules—particularly rules of a negative kind. But on this basis the Apostle Paul, whose epistles contain a plethora of negative commands, would himself be called a legalist! This is an absurd designation for the great Apostle of Grace.

I. WHAT LEGALISM IS NOT

When I did my undergraduate work at Wheaton College, like all other Wheaton students, I signed the famous Wheaton pledge. The pledge, of course, bound me to abstain from things like drinking, smoking, dancing, card playing, and going to movies. To many people today, that kind of restrictive policy smacks of a very bad case of legalism. Yet I am happy to report that I never had a problem with the Wheaton pledge at all. Not only did I abstain from all these things while a student there, but I was actually glad the pledge existed.

In my humble opinion, the Wheaton pledge was a good idea for a Christian school and was in no small degree responsible for creating a good atmosphere on campus. Many students, like myself, were away from home for the first time in their lives. There is no telling what we might have experimented with had it not been for the pledge. Of course, as we all knew, some students broke

¹This article was adapted from a paper which was presented on March 8, 1988 at a GES conference held in Dallas, Texas. It was published in *JOTGES* in the Autumn of 1996. Therefore, although some of the articles in this issue were *published* before this one, none were *written* before this article. This article was written several years before any of the other articles in this issue.

the pledge on the q.t., but most of us were not brave enough to do that. So I concentrated on getting a good education, for which Wheaton had earned a well-deserved reputation. My hat is off to my old alma mater and to the pledge it so wisely enforced.

Naturally there were some people, even in those days, who thought the Wheaton pledge was a par excellence example of rigid fundamentalism with its so-called legalistic mentality. This accusation, however, was false. First of all, if you didn't like the idea of a pledge you could go to another school. Anyone who enrolled at Wheaton knew perfectly well what the rules of the game were. It was a fault much worse than the pledge, to enroll and sign it, and then go out and break it in the name of Christian liberty. Those who did so only revealed their lack of Christian integrity and character.

But in the second place, the Wheaton pledge was *not* an expression of legalism properly perceived from a *biblical* point of view. If anything, the Wheaton pledge impinged on the NT teaching about doubtful things. Paul had a good bit to say on that subject and if I read his words correctly he was highly sympathetic to the idea of giving up doubtful things if they caused offense to his Christian brothers. I am impressed by his words in 1 Cor 8:13 where he writes: "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." I am not at all sure I could pull that off!

My experience in Evangelicalism suggests that not very many Christians today share Paul's sentiments. For the most part, Evangelicals are not very eager to surrender practices they regard as their right to engage in, in the interest of a brother who may be spiritually hurt by their activity. It is not uncommon to hear scruples against so-called doubtful things labeled as "legalism." This kind of characterization then offers an excuse for ignoring other people's scruples, in the alleged interest of maintaining Christian freedom against unbiblical legalism.

To all of this I say, "Stuff and nonsense!" People's conscientious scruples against activities not explicitly condemned in Scripture is *not*—I repeat, *not*—legalism. Of course, when a word is used widely in a certain way, it comes to have that meaning. But I am not talking about the semantic history of the word *legalism*. I am talking about the NT concept of legalism.

From a NT vantage point, a preoccupation with a lot of negative rules which are not explicit in the Bible is not legalism at all. It may, in fact, reflect the weak conscience Paul talks about. But Paul never condemns a “weak conscience” as some sort of perverse adherence to the law, but rather as a sign of spiritual immaturity. And Paul was nothing if he wasn’t solicitous for the well-being of the spiritually immature. He believed firmly in the principle that, “We...who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom 15:1). And for Paul that meant giving up his own rights if need be.

We need more of that in the Christian world today. Instead of hurling thunderbolts about “legalism” at our more scrupulous brothers, let’s try making a few personal sacrifices here and there. After all, as Paul points out in the passage just quoted above, we ought to do this “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me’” (Rom 15:3).

So that’s what legalism is *not*.

II. WHAT LEGALISM IS

But if so, what *is* legalism? Is there such a thing? And the answer must be straightforward: *There sure is!* In fact, I would suggest that there is more real legalism in the Church today than there was back when I took the pledge at Wheaton College.

In his widely known and widely used *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof² listed the so-called three uses of the law. The first use of the law has to do with the *restraining* function of God’s law in the world. The second use of the law has to do with the *convicting* and *educating* use of the law. I am not concerned here with either of these two uses since I think a good biblical case can be made for them. It’s the so-called third use of the law that I am particularly interested in for the purposes of this discussion.

Let me quote Berkhof directly on this point. He designates this use by the Latin words, *usus didacticus* or *normativus*, and then he writes as follows:

²Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957).

This is the so-called *tertius usus legis*, the third use of the law. The law is a rule of life for believers, reminding them of their duties and leading them in the way of life and salvation. This third use of the law is denied by the Antinomians.³

A. The Antinomian Rabbit Trail

Uh, oh! Here's another of those nasty theological words—*antinomianism*!

According to Berkhof, the denial of the third use of the law is a mark of the antinomians. But if the word *legalism* is wrapped in obscurity these days, the term *antinomianism* is enveloped in Stygian darkness!

For instance, my copy of *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* has only one definition for this word, which it designates as its meaning in theology. Listen to this: “antinomian n. Theology. A member of a Christian sect holding that faith alone is necessary for salvation.”⁴ Well, how about that! If that's all we're talking about under the term *antinomian*, I cheerfully confess to being one. And so, I imagine, would every member of GES, since that's the doctrine articulated in our doctrinal confession. But I take great comfort in the fact that under the *American Heritage* definition, the Apostle Paul himself should be classified as an unreconstructed antinomian!

I wish it were all as simple as that. But of course it isn't. I said before we were talking about a muddy, muddy word here, and we certainly are. You see the term *antinomian* has a complicated theological history.

Martin Luther is thought to have been the first to utilize the term, in his controversy with Johann Agricola. Agricola is said to have denied the relevance of the moral law in bringing a sinner to repentance. On the other hand, some who have accepted this second, or pedagogic, use of the law, have still been called antinomians. For example, Hugh Blair writes that they (the antinomians) “insist that the moral law has no place in the life of the believer, who is not under law but under grace, and so

³Ibid., 615.

⁴*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 57.

not bound by the law as a rule of life for Christian living.”⁵ As you can see, this articulation of things is close to Berkhof’s third use of the law. The main difference is that Blair specifies “the moral law” and Berkhof mentions simply “the law.” Obviously we have opened a can of worms.

A reading of all the documents in the second edition of David D. Hall’s, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*⁶ reveals that the nature of the Antinomian controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony has been repeatedly misrepresented both in the theological classroom and in theological literature. The controversy was not at all about the need for holy living—all sides agreed to this. Thus Anne Hutchinson, the famous villainess of the controversy, “was not a ‘libertine’ who advocated sexual license.”⁷ In fact, the controversy was not about sanctification per se, but about assurance of salvation. So Hall writes: “I argued in 1968, and would argue again, that assurance of salvation was the central issue in the controversy.”⁸

I would like to suggest that today the term *antinomian* is largely what you make it. That’s unfortunate, but I’m afraid it’s true. But of course the root derivation of the word simply means “opposed to law.” Not necessarily to the law of Moses per se, but simply to law as such. It would be nice if all parties in the current debate over the gospel could agree to confine the term to those who are opposed to all forms of law in the Christian life. That is to say, an antinomian would then be one who held that there are no laws governing Christian behavior so that the Christian is entirely free from commandments and binding obligations. That kind of definition would clarify things a lot.

For one thing, under that definition, Paul was certainly *not* an antinomian. After all, it was Paul who said (1 Cor 9:21) that in seeking to win to Christ those who were “without law,” he became “as without law”—but he hastens to add, “not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ.” In another place he

⁵ Hugh Blair, s. v. “Antinomianism” in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, revised edition, edited by: J. D. Douglas, Earle E. Cairns, and James E. Ruark (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 48.

⁶ David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990).

⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv.

can say, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). Regardless of the precise meaning of this text, it certainly shows that Paul could think in terms of Christian law. In addition, the NT everywhere asserts that our Lord left commandments that are binding on His followers today.

So you see what I mean. If we could confine the designation *antinomian* to those who will not acknowledge any such thing as a Christian law, we would clarify the situation greatly. But don’t hold your breath waiting for this to happen. *Antinomian* is too good a Christian “cuss-word” to retreat easily to the fringes of theological debate in the way I am suggesting. It just happens to be a very convenient cudgel with which to bludgeon theological opponents whose attributes and theology offend us. I regret to say that Christian polemicists do not readily retire their most useful brickbats, anymore than the nuclear powers easily discard their nuclear arsenals. It’s nice to have something with which to blow your opponents off the face of the map, and antinomianism serves very well for that purpose in some theological circles.

So how about my own nuclear arsenal? What theological word is *my* big bomb? All right. I’m going to admit it. My own nuclear riposte is wrapped up in one word: *legalism*.

B. On the Trail of Real Legalism

Like all theological debaters, I have an excuse for not giving this weapon away. I happen to think that the term *legalism* can be used in a legitimate and biblical sense. It is a charge that will truly stick in specific cases.

So, for that matter, is *antinomianism*, if I may return to that word for a brief moment. You see, Paul apparently knew some real, live antinomians in his day. Or at least, there were those who thought *he* was antinomian, because Paul writes (in Rom 3:8), “And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come’?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say.” To which he adds, “Their condemnation is just.” Such a view is beneath contempt for Paul and he will not even debate it. But unless I miss my guess, Paul has in mind some who were using his legitimate teaching as a perverted excuse for licentious living. If *antinomian* were used in that sense it would have a biblical counterpart.

But I would equally insist that Paul confronted various forms of thought that can legitimately be described as legalism. In fact, if I read my NT correctly, Paul had a lot more trouble with legalists than he did with antinomians.

For a long time I have felt that Acts 15 is a highly instructive text in terms of the nature and content of the legalistic thought which Paul vigorously opposed. For example, in Acts 15:1 we are told this: "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" Naturally, it is unlikely that this means that these Judean teachers asked for circumcision and nothing more. The subsequent debate at Jerusalem suggests that the larger issue was the keeping of the Mosaic law, in the keeping of which circumcision was simply the first step.

But clearly these Judean teachers mixed their commands into the conditions for final salvation from hell. We should not leap to the conclusion, however, that they denied the necessity of faith in Christ. In all likelihood they affirmed it, since they got a good hearing at Antioch—so much so that the congregation there dispatched Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to settle this issue once and for all. But, of course, everyone at Antioch knew that the Jerusalem church proclaimed faith in Christ, so that it is unlikely that the Judeans denied this. Nevertheless, the Judeans *did* deny the necessity of faith in Christ *alone* for salvation, since they held that salvation was impossible apart from observance of the law.

I don't need to tell you, do I, that this view of things is widely held today? In the case of many who adopt the so-called third use of the law, this use has inevitable soteriological consequences. To use Berkhof's words again, "The law is a rule of life for believers...leading them in a way of life and salvation." It is only a short distance from this concept to the conclusion that if one does not follow this rule of life there is no salvation. But such a view is a transparent return to the position of the Judaizers of Acts 15:1.

I say it is "transparent," but obviously it is not always transparent to those who espouse it. Indeed, there has arisen in contemporary discussion a fairly vigorous debate about what exactly Paul meant when he condemned *works of the law* as a basis for justification. The answer given by some is that Paul was mainly referring to things like circumcision and food laws.

Ironically, others maintain that by *works of the law* Paul was referring to legalism(!)—by which they mean the attempt to establish one's own righteousness through completion of the law. By defining *works of the law* to mean only the legalistic attempt to achieve righteousness before God, the door is opened to the *right kind* of obedience to the law! Indeed, on this view, such an obedience actually springs from *faith*! Thus some today hold that obedience to the law, on the principle of faith, is a necessity for final salvation.

Perhaps one of the more extreme expressions of this view is the one found in Daniel P. Fuller's book, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?*⁹ As one might guess from the title, Fuller believes gospel and law comprise a continuum. Let me quote a revealing passage from Fuller:

I realized that if the law is, indeed, a law of faith, enjoining only the obedience of faith and the works that proceed therefrom..., then there could no longer be any antithesis in biblical theology between the law and the gospel. I then had to accept the very drastic conclusion that the gospel established by Luther, Calvin, and the covenant theologians could no longer stand up under the scrutiny of biblical theology.¹⁰

Well, I can at least agree with Fuller about one thing. I can agree that his conclusion is “drastic”! With it, Fuller bids farewell to the Protestant Reformation and is smugly embarked on a pilgrimage back to Rome. As we all know, the synergism between faith and works is a truly Roman Catholic conception.

But Fuller is not wrong because he veers away from Reformation thought. He is wrong because he misreads the Bible and misreads the Apostle Paul in particular. Let me recommend to you that you read the excellent study by Douglas J. Moo in the *Westminster Theological Journal* entitled, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul.”¹¹ Interacting with the literature on this subject, Moo makes an effective case that by *works of the law* Paul simply meant “actions performed in obedience to the

⁹ Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹¹ Douglas J. Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 73-100.

law, works which are commanded by the law.”¹² To put it plainly, the notion that by *works of the law* Paul meant wrongly motivated works—or something similar—is a theological fiction. It simply will not wash with the biblical texts.

But my point is this. The very fact that contemporary theologians have found ways to say, “Unless you observe the law of Moses, at least the moral law of Moses, you can’t be saved,” is positive proof that the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 did not rid the Church once and for all of legalistic soteriology.

No indeed! Legalistic soteriology is alive and well and living in today’s church!

But let me return again to Acts 15. The issue raised by the Judean legalists at Antioch was soteriological. But by the time the council convened, I think the soteriological issue had dropped into the background. The reason I say this is because of Acts 15:5, where we read: “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up,¹³ saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.’” It should be carefully observed that these converted Pharisees do not really repeat the contention of the Judeans who had come to Antioch (cf. Acts 15:1). There is nothing in their words that suggests that salvation was impossible apart from the Mosaic law. In a church which had long been under the direct teaching of the original apostles, it is not very likely that there was a faction that believed the law to be necessary for eternal salvation. I feel confident that the apostles had made themselves quite clear on *that* point!

But the apostles had evidently not disturbed converted Jews¹⁴ who wished to pursue their ancestral lifestyle under the Mosaic system. They were free to do so if they desired, and—as we learn from Acts 21:15-25—there were many of them who so desired. In fact, according to Acts 21:21, what really offended these converted Jews was that they heard that Paul was teaching his Jewish converts to give up their observance of the law. But Paul was not teaching that at all. On the contrary, he taught that the law

¹² Ibid., 92.

¹³ Editor’s note: In his class on Acts, Zane emphasized that the Jews mentioned in Acts 15:5 are said by Luke to have *believed* (in Christ). Luke tellingly, however, did not say that about the Judeans of Acts 15:1. Zane concluded that the Jews of 15:1 were unregenerate, whereas those of 15:5 were clearly regenerate.

¹⁴ See previous note.

should not be imposed on *Gentile* converts. But for the believing Jews in Jerusalem, who were free to go on in the Mosaic ways to which they were accustomed, this issue must have been clouded around the edges with obscurity.

In fact, it is not a very hard step to take to conclude that what I do freely out of devotion to God really *ought* to be done by others if they want the best possible spiritual experience. How many people are there, for example, who rise early in the morning to have their quiet time, and who think that every Christian ought to do the same? And if they had a chance to legislate it for the whole church, they would be severely tempted to do so!

So when the believing Pharisees of Acts 15:5 said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses," that does *not* mean that they thought of this as a soteriological necessity. More likely they thought that this was the only lifestyle fully acceptable to God. Hence, they would naturally feel that even Gentile Christians definitely needed the law as their rule of life.

Now let me suggest this: These converted Pharisees would have concurred with Berkhof's third use of the law, *minus any soteriological overtones*. In short, using Berkhof's words again, they probably held that "the law is a rule of life for believers... leading them in the way of life and salvation." Mind you, not leading them in the way *to* salvation, but leading them in the way *of* salvation.¹⁵ This too is a biblical form of *legalism* and, along with its soteriological cousin, it is rejected by the Jerusalem Council.

C. The New Covenant Relationship

One of the significant points raised by Douglas Moo, in the article referred to earlier, is that the Pauline usage of the term law does not really yield itself to a neat distinction between the moral and ceremonial *law*. In fact, Moo writes as follows:

As has been often pointed out, the threefold distinction of moral, ceremonial, and civil law as separate categories with varying degrees of applicability is simply unknown in the Judaism of the first century,

¹⁵ Editor's note: Presumably what Zane meant here is that these believing Jews argued that in order to please God, saved Gentiles had to keep the Law of Moses. For them the issue was one of sanctification, whereas for the Jews of Acts 15:1 it was an issue concerning justification.

and there is little evidence that Jesus or Paul introduced such a distinction.¹⁶

Later on, in discussing the Pauline assertion that the believer is not under the law but under grace, Moo writes as follows:

If...*nomos* in Rom. 6:14, 15 is a reference to the *Mosaic economy* (contrasted with the Christian economy, referred to by one of its chief characteristics, grace), then believers could very well be freed from obligation to *nomos* while being required to observe the “commandments” (now mediated through Christ and the apostles).¹⁷

I like that. Unless I miss my guess, this is the position of most of the members of GES. We hold that the law—by which we mean the Mosaic economy as a whole—is no longer in force for Christians. Not only does it have no soteriological role to play for us, but it most certainly is *not* our rule of life. To put it another way, we are not under the Old Covenant, we are under the New Covenant.

Moreover, we are introduced into this New Covenant relationship with God by an act of grace. The new heart of which Hebrews 8 speaks is imparted to us by a supernatural work of regeneration, and our standing in this covenant is thus permanent and unconditional. Nevertheless, God’s gracious act, by which we come under the New Covenant, carries with it many obligations and responsibilities. The failure to perform these does not nullify the covenantal relationship itself, but—as the author of Hebrews makes clear—this failure can expose us to severe divine sanctions.

To put this matter in another way, born-again Christians today are responsible to keep the commandments left to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and by His apostles. This new array of commands is quite distinct from the Mosaic economy and should never be confused with it. Though we are not under the law of Moses in any sense, we can still say with Paul that we are “under law toward Christ” (1 Cor 9:21). But under the New Covenant this law is inscribed on our hearts (Heb 8:10) and every act of obedience is the natural outworking of what we are inwardly. That is why James can call it “the law of liberty” (Jas 1:25; 2:12),

¹⁶ Douglas J. Moo, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law,’ and Legalism in Paul,” 85.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

because it is the free expression of what we are by nature as God's children. The redeemed self (= our "new man") "was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). Were it not for the "counter-programing" of sin that dwells in our flesh, obedience would be spontaneous for all of God's children (Rom 7:21-25).

Please don't misunderstand. Obviously I'm *not* saying that obedience to the New Covenant law is *inevitable*. But I *am* saying that it is *natural*. Of course, there is a significant difference between something that is inevitable and something that is natural. Neither am I saying that obedience to the New Covenant law of liberty is always *easy*. It is not. Romans 7 shows that!

On the other hand, through the personal ministry and help of the Holy Spirit the Christian life can be so lived that we can realize the truth of our Lord's words, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt 11:30). Our victory can be such that we can keep God's commandments out of love for Him, so that John states: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). If the Christian life is perceived by an individual as an enormous burden, that person has yet to understand the real nature of life under the New Covenant. His personal freedom from the Old Covenant law is not yet a reality in his experience. For as Peter so succinctly put it at the Jerusalem Council, the Mosaic law was a "yoke...which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10).

Of course, the statements I have just made deserve an article entirely devoted to the issues they raise. But that is not my purpose here. That must wait for another time, if the Lord wills it.

III. CONCLUSION

My purpose in this article has been mainly this: to point out that the so-called third use of the law is what we really ought to refer to when we talk about *legalism* in the Church today. The Mosaic law perceived as a rule of life for believers—whether or not that has soteriological overtones—is *true legalism*! That, in my view, is the real thing.

But I hope you have also concluded from this discussion that for a believer to reject the third use of the law is not to become,

ipso facto, an antinomian. That charge is an ungracious and inconsiderate canard. I am tempted to say that it is a violation of the royal law of Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Jas 2:8)—a law, by the way, repeated under the New Covenant and applicable to all believers. I say I was tempted to say that—but I guess I already have. But I have to agree with Moo again, who writes”

And, as one implication, the fallacy of castigating someone as “antinomian” because he argues that believers are not under the Mosaic law should at least be obvious. Such a charge would “stick” only if it were demonstrated that the Mosaic law contains the *complete* and *sole* revelation of God’s will for man.¹⁸

That’s a good statement, I think. The Mosaic economy was indeed a revelation from God and, because it was, we can still learn immensely profitable truths from it. But the touchstone for our lifestyle today, is not the *old* revelation—marvelous as it was—but the *new*, more marvelous one, which has been made in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. And we who live in these last days should be able to appreciate the profoundness of the opening words of Hebrews:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...

And it is to that revelation that we are profoundly responsible—all the more so since it has fully superseded the Mosaic revelation. We are thus Christians who live on this side of the Cross and we are under a new law—the law of the New Covenant, that is, the law of liberty. If I were to deny the authority of *this* law over my life, I would then be truly an antinomian. But if I thought the *Mosaic law* had authority over me—even though Paul tells me plainly I am not under it—in that case I would be a legalist. And my legalism would be *the real thing*!

¹⁸ Ibid., 90.

THE MORALISTIC WRATH-DODGER ROMANS 2:1-5¹

ZANE C. HODGES

I. THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

Let me say just a word about the so-called new perspective on Paul. In scholarly circles this approach is connected with the names of men like E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, and Terence L. Donaldson.

What they are saying amounts to a claim that Paul does not really clash with Judaism as sharply as many Lutherans and other Protestants have thought. According to this view, Paul is mainly challenging Jewish exclusivism. Paul, we are told, is insisting that Gentiles can enter the redeemed community by faith in Christ, but that good works are the way that entrants into that community stay inside it.

As you can see, under this conception, final salvation still depends on works. The new perspective seems to be implicitly Arminian, although a Calvinist expositor could accommodate himself to it rather easily. In the Reformed perspective, genuine entrance into the redeemed community only occurs when the entering faith results in the necessary good works.

I am happy to say I don't have to consume your time or mine refuting this "new perspective." That has already been very adequately done by a recent book. I am referring to Stephen Westerholm's book entitled, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul*.²

Westerholm's book exhibits thorough scholarship and is an incisive critique of this point of view. My sense of the literature on Paul today is that the "new perspective" has largely run its course and is beginning to erode. I hope this erosion will prove fatal to this point of view.

¹This article appeared in the Spring 2005 issue of *JOTGES*.

²Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives New and Old on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004).

But even if I'm not correct in this hopeful outlook, the so-called "new perspective" is seriously misguided. It does not really understand Paul.

II. THE MORALIST OF ROMANS 2:1-5

That leads me to Romans 2. This chapter in particular has played a prominent role in the discussions related to the "new perspective." As a result, I have tried to give Romans 2 very close attention in my commentary that I am presently working on.

Romans 2:1 is addressed to a moralist. Paul's words are:

Therefore you are without excuse, O man (anyone who judges). In fact, in the matter for which you judge someone else, you condemn yourself, since you who pass judgment do the same things.

— Author's Translation

I am surprised that a number of commentators think that Paul has a Jew in mind here. I can see no basis for that in the text. Paul's statement is obviously generalized by the words I have translated as *anyone who judges*. Needless to say, in the Greco-Roman world there were plenty of critics of human behavior. Every age and society can be expected to have this type of person.

In the previous chapter (Rom 1:18-32) Paul has been at pains to pass sweeping condemnation on the behavior of men in general. But his indictment of men is more than just an indictment. He is actually in the process of showing that God's anger (i.e., wrath) with mankind is displayed in mankind's depraved condition. Romans 1:28-32 is a catalogue of human vices into which God has allowed men to sink.

This brings Paul to the moralist of Romans 2. What about people who decry the iniquities of other people and pass judgment on those people? Are these moralistic individuals actually exceptions to Paul's general condemnation of human beings? This question is relevant whether the moralist is Jewish or Gentile.

Paul's answer, of course, is that even the moralist is no exception to what Paul is saying. This is indicated up front by the words, *you who judge practice the same things*. The moralist, in other words, is a hypocrite. But here we should note carefully how Paul phrases this point.

In the Greek text, as my translation indicates, the judgment made by the moralist is a judgment of some particular thing or other. In the phrase *in the matter for which you judge someone else*, the words *in the matter* render the Greek phrase *en hō*. Of course, *hō* is singular. However, in the phrase *you...do the same things*, the underlying Greek is the plural expression *tāauta* (*the same things*).

Paul's point is that, no matter what the moralist condemns in others, he does the same wicked things that others do. This does not necessarily mean that he does the very thing he finds fault with (though this often happens). Instead, it means that he does his own fair share of the sins men generally do.

Let me illustrate. A moralist might say, "I know husbands who lie to their wives. That's wrong. I would never do that." However, the moralist lies to his friends, his co-workers, and the authorities. To take another example, the moralist says, "Adultery is everywhere and it's wrong." But the same person indulges in envy, greed, and hatred.

Even the moralist, Paul is saying, falls under the sweeping indictment of chapter 1. He is not a glowing exception to mankind's depravity. He too, therefore, cannot expect to escape God's wrath.

III. THE PERSONAL DANGER OF THE MORALIST

Precisely because the moralist does *the same things* that other sinners do, he is himself confronting personal danger.

This is made clear in Rom 2:2-3:

Now we know that God's judgment against people who do such things corresponds to the truth. So do you suppose, O man—you who judge *people who do such things and you do them too—that you yourself will escape God's judgment?*

— Author's Translation

Here Paul is affirming that God's wrathful judgment against sinful behavior is valid. It is *according to the truth*, that is, it corresponds to the reality of man's sin and is fully justified. Since this is the case, how then does the moralist expect to escape this wrath? The moralist condemns people who do the type of things

Paul has catalogued in chapter 1. But the moralist is guilty of such things as well.

Paul's question, of course, is pointed and sharp. *So do you suppose, O man...that you yourself will escape God's judgment?* Sooner or later the moralist will be overtaken by God's wrath, just like other men are. How does he propose to avoid that?

There is in fact a way in which he *might* avoid it. This is suggested in verse 4 where Paul writes:

Or do you despise the wealth of His kindness and tolerance and longsuffering, *not realizing that God's kind behavior is drawing you to repentance?*

– Author's Translation

The moralist should seriously consider why he has not yet been overtaken by the wrath that has fallen on people all around him. The reason is that God is dealing with him in *kindness, tolerance, and longsuffering*. This kind behavior on God's part is in fact God's way of *drawing him to repentance*.

Repentance, therefore, is the means by which God's wrath could be evaded. But the moralist is so busy condemning others he does not stop to consider why it is that God is bearing patiently with the moralist's own sins. God wants this moralist to repent.

Paul's statement here is quite revealing. Although in chapter one mankind is seen as universally under God's wrath, here we see that God also individualizes His wrath. To put it simply, God's wrath does not overtake men the moment they commit sin. That wrath may be delayed by God's wish not to have to inflict it.

Let me illustrate this. Here is a man who drinks heavily. But he does not destroy his liver overnight. Yet if he continues to drink, that may well happen to him. That would be God's wrath. He should repent of his heavy drinking before it is too late.

Or take another case. Here is a man who engages in gay sex. His first sinful liaison may not be with someone who carries the AIDS virus. In fact, he may go through a long series of such encounters without contracting AIDS. But then one day he contracts AIDS. That is God's wrath. He should repent of his sexual activity before it is too late.³

³ Editor's note: Not once in the justification section of Romans (3:21–4:25) does Paul refer to repentance. In fact, as Zane mentions in the conclusion, this is the one and only use of repentance (*metanoia*) in Romans. As Zane explains, repentance is the condition to escape temporal wrath, not the condition of justification before God.

Obviously God would prefer that the heavy drinker not reach the point of severe liver damage. He would prefer the homosexual not to contract AIDS. But if there is no repentance from such behavior, God's wrath in some form or other is inevitable.

Therefore, the moralist of Romans 2 should carefully consider his own danger instead of focusing on the failures of others.

IV. THE DAY OF WRATH

Paul now concludes his exchange with the hypothetical moralist by the words of Rom 2:5.

Before I quote 2:5, however, I want to point out that a period should follow this verse, not just a comma. Despite the KJV tradition of a comma after verse 5, it is preferable to place a period there along with the NIV and *The Jerusalem Bible*. The following relative pronoun, in v 6, functions as a virtual personal pronoun introducing a new line of thought.

Romans 2:5 reads as follows:

And by means of your hardness and your unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath against yourself in a day of wrath, and of *revelation*, and of the *righteous judgment of God*.⁴

– Author's Translation

What we are looking at here in 2:5 is what exegetes refer to as an *inclusio*. An *inclusio* is a stylistic device that picks up a word, phrase, or idea from the beginning of a unit and repeats it at the end of the unit as a structural marker that the unit is complete. The writer of Hebrews, for example, is quite fond of the *inclusio*.

More than one commentator has noticed that the wording of Rom 2:5 clearly recalls the material in 1:18. To begin with, there is the double use of the word *wrath* in 2:5. That is the first explicit use of this word since 1:18.

Secondly, there is the word *revelation*. In Rom 1:18 Paul affirms that the wrath of God has been *revealed* from heaven. In 1:18 the verb is used and in 2:5 the cognate noun is used.

Thirdly, the word translated *righteous judgment* is the Greek word *dikaiokrisias*. This is its only use in the NT. It quite clearly

⁴The third *and* (*kai*) in this verse is not found in the modern critical editions of the Greek NT. I am following the Majority Text here, but the presence or absence of this *and* does not materially affect what I am saying.

picks up a thought that is implicit in Rom 1:18. In 1:18 Paul says that God's wrath is revealed *against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth by unrighteousness*. This double use of *unrighteousness* makes quite clear the fact that God's wrath is due to God's *righteous judgment* against unrighteous men.

If ever there was an obvious *inclusio*, Rom 2:5 is it. This means, therefore, that in Paul's mind Rom 1:18 to 2:5 is a single unit of thought. The basic idea of the unit is very simple. The idea is this: All men are exposed to the righteous wrath of God including the moralist who thinks he is better than others. There are no exceptions.

This also leads to another obvious conclusion. When Paul tells the moralist that he is *storing up wrath in a day of wrath*, he is *not* talking about the eschatological future (i.e., the Tribulation, cf. 1 Thess 5:9). He is talking about right here and now!

I have to confess that I previously had read Rom 2:5 as if it had said that the moralist is storing up wrath *for* the "day of wrath." Perhaps, with a little straining the Greek could bear that idea. But Paul doesn't say *for*, he says *in*. The moralist is *in* the day of wrath.

Paul's point is something like this. I am paraphrasing:

You, who are as guilty as other people, are actually heaping up a real abundance of wrath in this very time which is already a day of wrath.

In other words, Paul is emphasizing the thoughtless folly of the moralizer. Everywhere around him he can see—or should see—the manifested wrath of God. But instead of trying to avoid that wrath, he is heaping it up for himself as well.

"This very day you live in," says Paul, "is a day of wrath!"

V. CONCLUSION

The point I am making today from Rom 2:1-5 is important for several reasons.

First, it helps us to understand that there is a break in the thought between Rom 2:5 and 2:6. Not a radical break in the thought, of course. But a significant one. In 2:6-16 Paul proceeds to the issue of the final judgment of the unrighteous. Of course,

there is no such judgment for those who are righteous by faith, since no charge can be brought against them (see Rom 8:33).

Second, my proposed understanding of Rom 2:1-5 places Paul's one and only reference to repentance in Romans in the context of God's temporal wrath. One commentator states, "Repentance plays a surprisingly small part in Paul's teaching, considering its importance in contemporary Judaism."⁵ If we abandon the "new perspective" on Paul, however, surprise is an uncalled for reaction.

If Hebrews is left out of consideration, in the Pauline epistles the word group *metanoia/metanoēō* (repentance/repent) occurs a grand total of *five times* (Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:9, 10; 2 Cor 12:21; 2 Tim 2:25)! I think you will agree that this is not a very big number for thirteen epistles. The simple fact of the matter is that, in Pauline thought, repentance is not relevant to Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. Romans has only this reference and Galatians has not a single reference.⁶

These facts speak for themselves. Repentance in the Bible is always connected with man's need to adjust his behavior to avoid trouble and to escape the temporal judgment of God.⁷

Thirdly, even in their unregenerate condition, God desires man to repent in time to avoid His wrath on their particular sins.

As Jeremiah said in Lam 3:33, God "does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Even though God is angered by men's sin and righteously inflicts wrath upon them, He does not enjoy doing so. He would prefer that they repent.⁸

Think of the sin that makes you angrier than any other sin. Maybe it is theft, murder, adultery, homosexuality, or something else. But remember one thing. God loves those sinners as individuals. His wrath is not immediate in individual cases. And in every case God would be glad to withhold His wrath if there is genuine repentance.

⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 133-34.

⁶ Editor's Note: This is a fantastic observation worthy of careful consideration.

⁷ Editor's Note: This, too, is well worth giving full attention.

⁸ Editor's Note: See 2 Pet 3:9. Zane has an excellent discussion of this verse in his commentary on Second Peter. It follows the exact lines of his discussion here.

A whole city found this out one time. Its name was Nineveh. If we are going to be people of grace, our attitude toward sinners should be a real improvement on Jonah's!

James and John once asked Jesus about a Samaritan village: "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" Jesus replied, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:54-56).

Hopefully, GES people know what spirit we are of.

HOW TO LEAD PEOPLE TO CHRIST: PART 1

THE CONTENT OF OUR MESSAGE¹

ZANE C. HODGES

The title of my two-part article may lead you to expect a discussion on how to do personal evangelism. Hopefully you will get some ideas about personal work from these articles, but this is not my major objective. Instead I want to discuss how grace theology should affect the way we present the gospel, whether to individuals or to groups.

Nevertheless, before I address my subject, let me say this. I do genuinely enjoy talking to people about their eternal salvation. I have done so with many, many individuals over the years.

A close friend works with me in my office. When I first met him, he did not understand the way of salvation. But over a period of years, after many conversations on the subject, he became a believer. He understands that salvation is absolutely free even though most of the people he knows do not. The salvation of this friend is one of the most highly valued results of my years of service to Christ. It is an immense joy to know that our friendship will continue eternally in the kingdom of God.

What I am saying is this. I am a teacher by spiritual gift. But I enjoy doing the work of an evangelist as much, or more, than I enjoy teaching. So as I talk today about putting good theology into our soul-winning, I am talking about a most important issue. And I also try hard to practice what I am preaching to you today!

The question I am raising is a simple one: Have we allowed solid grace theology to properly affect the way we proclaim and share the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

I propose to address this question under two headings: (1) The content of our message and (2) Our invitation to respond to it. I will consider the first of these topics in this article, and the second, in Part 2.

¹This article appeared in the Autumn 2000 issue of *JOTGES*.

I. THE DESERTED ISLAND SCENARIO²

Let me begin with a strange scenario. Try to imagine an unsaved person marooned on a tiny, uninhabited island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He has never heard about Christianity in his life. One day a wave washes a fragment of paper up onto the beach. It is wet but still partly readable.

On that paper are the words of John 6:43-47. But the only readable portions are: “Jesus therefore answered and said to them” (v 43) and “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (v 47).

Now suppose that our unsaved man somehow becomes convinced that this person called Jesus can guarantee his eternal future, since He promises everlasting life. In other words, he believes Jesus’ words in John 6:47. Is he saved?

I suspect that there are some grace people who would say that this man is not saved because he doesn’t know enough.³ For example, he doesn’t know that Jesus died for his sins on the cross and rose again the third day. Needless to say, there is a lot more he doesn’t know either, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the eternal Sonship of Jesus or the doctrine of the virgin birth.

But why is he *not* saved if he believes the promise of Jesus’ words?⁴ It is precisely the ability of Jesus to guarantee eternal life that makes Him the Christ in the Johannine sense of that term. Our Lord’s exchange with Martha in John 11:25-27 demonstrates this clearly.

You remember it, don’t you? “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” (John 11:25-26). Her reply is a declaration that she believes Him to be the Christ. Martha said, “Yes,

² Editor’s note: This illustration continues to generate much criticism. Yet the criticisms almost always fail to deal fairly with what Zane actually wrote. Read this section carefully to understand his point.

³ Editor’s note: This turned out to be an understatement. However, he realized it would prove jarring for many in Free Grace circles.

⁴ Editor’s note: Many have countered this point by suggesting that John’s Gospel presents a message that is no longer sufficient. While the apostles were indeed born again by believing such a simple message, a dispensational change has occurred so that now people must believe much more than this to be born again.

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

Notice here that to believe that Jesus is the Christ means to believe that He guarantees resurrection and eternal life to every believer. But now let us look at John 4. In that famous passage we have the Samaritans saying to the woman who had encountered Jesus, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

Observe that the common denominator to both passages is the term “Christ.” On Martha’s lips He is “the Christ, the Son of God,” and on the lips of the Samaritans He is “the Christ, the Savior of the world.” This is not an accidental or insignificant difference.

In Jewish prophecy and theology the promised Christ was also the Son of God—that is, He was to be a divine person. Recall the words of Isaiah: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given...and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6-7). But in Samaritan theology, the Messiah was thought of as a prophet and the woman at the well is led to faith through our Lord’s prophetic ability to know her life. Her words, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet” (John 4:19) are a first step in the direction of recognizing Him as the Christ. There is no evidence that she or the other Samaritans understood the deity of our Lord.

But they *did believe* that he was the Christ. And John tells us in his first epistle that “whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (5:1)! A full theology of His person is not necessary to salvation. If we believe that Jesus is the One who guarantees our eternal destiny, we have believed all we absolutely have to believe in order to be saved.

Years ago, as a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, I washed dishes in the dining hall to pay for my meals. Often after I had finished this chore I hung around and talked theology with another student who swept up the kitchen every night. One night this student made a statement to me that I have never forgotten. He said something like this, “I know that I trusted Christ for salvation before I realized that Jesus was the Son of God.” I was surprised because I had never heard anyone say this before.

But I did not quarrel with that statement then, nor would I quarrel with it now. It is the name of Jesus that brings salvation whenever anyone believes in that name as his or her sure hope of eternal well-being. We are not saved by believing a series of theological propositions, however true and important they may be. We are saved by believing in Jesus.⁵

That's why the man on the deserted island can get saved with only the barest minimum of information. When he believes John 6:47 he is believing in Jesus as the Christ.

II. WHAT ABOUT THE CROSS?

But what about the cross of Christ? Is it not essential for a man to know about that in order to be saved?

This leads to a question about the eleven apostles who believed in Jesus before He died. Did they understand the cross or the significance of His death? Did they understand the necessity of His resurrection? Of course they did not, as John 20:9 makes perfectly clear.

You recall that text. In recounting how the unnamed disciple came to believe that Jesus had risen, it is said of Peter and of himself that "as yet they did not know the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead." The eleven disciples had believed in Jesus long before they understood that He must die for their sins and rise again. As Peter says so emphatically in John 6:68-69, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The disciples of Jesus were saved without knowledge of the death and resurrection of their Master. However, some people today would say, "But it's different now that the cross is behind us. Now we have to believe in that as well." Do we? Where does this idea come from? Certainly not from the Gospel of John.⁶

⁵ Editor's note: Of course, many have said we are saved *both* by believing a series of theological propositions about Jesus' Person and works and by believing in Him for everlasting life.

⁶ Editor's note: Zane anticipates here that the Gospel of John would be the heart of the issue. Lordship Salvation people had long rejected the message of the Fourth Gospel in favor of the call to discipleship in the first three Gospels. Some Free Grace people have followed a similar approach, except

Let us think a moment. The events described in John's Gospel occurred before the cross. But the entire book was written afterward. In my view, it was written before 70 AD, but if we prefer a later date in the 80s, my point will be even more forceful. At the time of writing, the cross was years ago, and if belief in the work of the cross was by then necessary for salvation, John definitely gives us the wrong impression by stressing the way the cross dumbfounded even His most intimate disciples.⁷

Let me put it to you this way. The Gospel of John is the only book in our New Testament canon that explicitly declares its purpose to be evangelistic. Of course, I am thinking of the famous theme statement found in John 20:30-31, where we read: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

This statement does not affirm the necessity of believing in our Lord's substitutionary atonement. If by the time of the writing of John's Gospel, it was actually necessary to believe this, then it would have been not only simple, but essential, to say so.⁸

Inasmuch as the key figures in John's narrative *did* believe in Jesus before they understood His atoning death and resurrection, it would have been even more essential for John to state that the content of faith had changed. But of course he does not do this. The simple fact is that the whole Fourth Gospel is designed to show that its readers can get saved in the same way as the people who got saved in John's narrative. To say anything other than this is to accept a fallacy. It is to mistakenly suppose that the Fourth Gospel presents the terms of salvation incompletely and inadequately. I sincerely hope no grace person would want to be stuck with a position like that.⁹

that they have replaced Jesus' words in the Fourth Gospel with the words of the Apostle Paul in his epistles (esp. 1 Cor 15:1-11).

⁷ Editor's note: This argument has been completely ignored in responses to Zane. If a dispensational change occurred, then surely John, in an evangelistic book, would tell the readers.

⁸ Editor's note: Ultimately if the message changed and yet John presented a now ineffectual message, then the Bible has an error in it. And this would certainly be a major error; one keeping people in the dark about what they must believe to have eternal life.

⁹ Editor's note: Not only have many done so, they have used pejorative and vitriolic language in an effort to counter what Zane writes here.

Let me repeat. Neither explicitly nor implicitly does the Gospel of John teach that a person must understand the cross to be saved. It just does not teach this. If we say that it does, we are reading something into the text and not reading something out of it!

What is my point? That we should not preach the cross of Christ to men? Not at all. I will make it emphatically clear a little later on that I think we should.¹⁰ Instead, I am arguing that we need to focus on the core issue in bringing men and women to faith and eternal life. What is that core issue?

Very simply it is this: We want people to believe that Jesus guarantees their eternal destiny.¹¹ Of course, we would like them to believe a lot more than this, but this at least must be believed. Our failure to clearly define our goal in evangelism can have a negative or impeding effect on our efforts to lead people to simple faith in Christ.

III. ADDING TO THE GOSPEL

Most of us deplore the efforts made by Lordship people to add provisos to the message of faith in Christ. According to them, true faith has not occurred if it is not accompanied by surrender or by a commitment to live for God. We rightly reject such ideas.

But in our own circles, there is a tendency to add theological information to our message of faith. Some people even regard belief in the virgin birth as essential to salvation, and in the absence of such belief they would not admit that a person is saved. They do this despite the fact that the Gospel of John makes no effort to present this doctrine. In fact, in John 1:45, Philip announces to Nathaniel that he has found the Messiah and he refers to Him as “Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” John never bothers to set the record straight, since in any case Jesus was legally Joseph’s son. But no doubt Philip thought of Jesus as the naturally born son of Joseph and Mary.

¹⁰ Editor’s note: Most fail to mention this point when discussing what Zane wrote about the deserted island illustration.

¹¹ Editor’s note: Some in Free Grace circles have rejected Zane’s suggestion that unbelievers need to believe that Jesus guarantees their eternal destiny. Some have argued that as long as a person believes he is saved, forgiven, justified, or spiritually alive *at the moment of faith*, then he is born again, even if he does not believe that what he has is forever guaranteed.

I have also just finished pointing out that the disciples who did believe in Jesus did not understand the significance or necessity of His death and resurrection, according to John 20:9. And this was true despite the fact that John the Baptist announced Him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). If we require an understanding of these truths before faith in Christ can be valid, we are obviously requiring more than the Gospel of John does.¹²

Let me say this: All forms of the gospel that require greater content to faith in Christ than the Gospel of John requires, are flawed.¹³ Evangelism based on such premises will also be flawed, because we will be tempted to test professions of faith in terms of the doctrines we think must be believed. Instead we should be focusing on whether an individual believes that Jesus has given him eternal life.

Evangelism, therefore, is intended to bring men and women to the place where they believe that Jesus guarantees their eternal destiny. If a person does this and we insist on more than that, we will be guilty of seeking to invalidate the simple exercise of faith that really does bring salvation.

Even in the grace movement, we are sorely tempted to make the gospel more complicated than God makes it. We can hardly bring ourselves to believe that a man who is largely ignorant of evangelical theology, yet genuinely trusts Christ for his eternal well-being, is truly saved. We have every reason to be embarrassed by this tendency on our part.¹⁴

According to the apostle Paul, God is “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). Moreover it will be “at the name of Jesus” that “every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess” (Phil 2:10-11). The name of Jesus therefore is a

¹² Editor’s note: Some say that indeed a person must believe more than the Gospel of John requires. Others say that the Gospel of John contains all the truths one needs to believe, and as long as one believes *everything* John presents, he will be saved. But both contend that what the apostles believed to be born again is less than what is now required.

¹³ Editor’s note: Two recent books critical of what Zane writes in this article have quoted but one word from this paragraph: “flawed.” That they fail to quote the whole paragraph, or even simply the whole sentence, is exceedingly misleading.

¹⁴ Editor’s note: One recent book suggests Zane was here trying to shame people into proclaiming a defective message. Yet Zane was encouraging the reader to search the Scriptures carefully. If our views are then found to contradict the Scriptures, we rightly should be embarrassed.

mighty and exalted name, compared to which all other names in our age or in any other age are inferior and weak. No one has ever trusted in that name for his or her eternal well-being who has not been saved by doing so. And this is true no matter how little they might have known about the One whom that name represents.

I think we need a renewed emphasis on the power of Jesus' name. As Peter declares in Acts 4:12, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other *name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." If there is one salient fact about the proclamation of the gospel in this present age, it is that God saves all those, but only those, who believe in this name for eternal salvation.

Another way of saying this is that the name of Jesus is the one and only way to God. "No one comes to the Father, except through" Him (John 14:6). Naturally this eliminates the idea that a pagan person who has never heard the name of Jesus can be saved by believing in something like the light of creation. Therefore, that is why we must always have missionaries and witnesses to the saving power of Jesus' name. Without the name of Jesus there is no salvation for anyone anywhere in our world.

But the flip side of the coin is this: Everyone who believes in that name for eternal salvation is saved, regardless of the blank spots or the flaws in their theology in other respects. Another way of saying the same thing is this: No one has ever trusted that name and been disappointed.

In other words, God does not say to people, "You trusted my Son's name, but you didn't believe in His virgin birth, or His substitutionary atonement, or His bodily resurrection, so your faith is not valid." We say that, but God's Word does not.¹⁵

Suppose I am in some deep financial trouble and a stranger named Sam, let us say, tells me he will get me out of my trouble if I will just trust him to do it. Perhaps Sam strikes me as a reliable and honest type person and I am convinced that he can and will do what he says. So I leave the matter in his hands and sure enough, he comes through and saves me from my financial

¹⁵ Editor's note: Indeed, some Free Grace people are saying that. Different people have different lists of what must be believed. Some say that a person must believe that Jesus is *in some sense* God. Others say one must believe He is *the Son of God*. Still others say we must believe *He is fully God*. Some say that we must believe in *His perfect humanity*.

problem with a generous infusion of cash. Did I believe in him? Sure.

But suppose after trusting him, I find out that he is a corporate CEO and a multi-millionaire. Would he later come back to me and say, well you didn't know enough about me when you trusted me, so I'm afraid I can't help you? Our deal is cancelled.¹⁶

I hope you think this illustration would be an absurd way for this CEO to act. If he invites my faith and I give it to him, why should he deny the reality of that faith on the basis of my ignorance about his vast resources? On the other hand, is it not true that knowing these things up front would make it a whole lot easier to trust him to help me in the first place? I will say more about this in a moment.

Suffice it to say, however, that Jesus never fails anyone who trusts Him for everlasting salvation. No one on earth will ever possess more than a rudimentary understanding of our Savior's Person and work.¹⁷ But if I know I can believe on Him for salvation, and I do, He is too great to fail me. It is this conviction that ought to arm us for the work of sharing the gospel with people.

In the final analysis, therefore, salvation is the result of believing in Jesus to provide it. Salvation is not the result of assenting to a detailed creed. Salvation does not even require an understanding of how it was provided for or made possible. All it requires is that the sinner understand the sufficiency of the name of Jesus to guarantee the eternal well-being of every believer. Thank God, salvation is so wonderfully simple!

¹⁶ Actually this is what some Free Grace people are saying. Failure to believe in *the right Jesus* damns a person to hell, even if he believes in Jesus of Nazareth for everlasting life. Of course, how much one must believe about Jesus' Person and works in order to believe in *the right Jesus* is highly subjective since neither the Lord nor His apostles gave us such a list.

¹⁷ Editor's note: This seems to be denied by some in Free Grace circles. While they will admit our knowledge is imperfect, they assert that without a fully informed understanding of Jesus' deity, death, and bodily resurrection one cannot be born again even if he believes in Jesus for everlasting life.

IV. PREACHING THE CROSS

In the light of what we have just said, should we preach the cross of Christ? The answer to that is emphatically yes.¹⁸ And the most obvious reason for doing so is that this is what Paul and the other Apostles did.

According to Paul's own statement, when he came to Corinth to preach, he was "determined not to know anything among [them] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Later in the epistle, Paul describes his gospel as one that declared "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (15:3-4).

I need hardly tell you, do I, that the Greek word for "gospel" (*euangelion*) as well as the word for "preach the gospel" (*euangelizō*) are both words found frequently in Paul. Peter also uses these words a total of 4 times in his first epistle. Luke uses the verb many times in Luke and Acts, the noun twice in Acts. Matthew and Mark have both words.

Are you ready for this? John never uses either word in his Gospel.¹⁹ Why? Because, as I have already suggested, John makes the Person of Jesus, not a set of doctrines, the object of the faith that brings eternal life. Fundamentally he is trying to get people to believe in Jesus for their eternal salvation.

But this is precisely where preaching the cross becomes so important. Why should men trust Christ for eternal life? The gospel gives us the wonderful answer.²⁰ They should do so because Jesus has bought their salvation at the cost of His own precious blood. And God has placed His seal on the work of the cross by raising Jesus from the dead. As Paul states: He "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom 4:25).

¹⁸ Editor's note: Somehow this remark by Zane is rarely cited. Indeed, the pejorative title, *the crossless gospel*, suggests Zane did not proclaim the cross and urged others not to preach it as well.

¹⁹ Editor's note: Here is another exegetical observation that still has not been answered by Zane's critics. If one must place his faith *in the gospel* to be born again, why didn't Jesus say so, especially in the Fourth Gospel?

²⁰ Editor's note: The gospel, Zane says, is that which should lead people to believe in Jesus for everlasting life. The word *gospel* here is meant by Zane to refer to Jesus' death and resurrection. In what sense, then, is that *a crossless gospel*?

The preaching of the cross greatly facilitates the process of bringing men to faith in God's Son.

V. DEALING WITH SOULS

This brings us to the bedrock issue of leading people to Christ. After all, that's the title of this article and I mean by it just what the title says. We need to lead men to *Christ!* Winning souls is a matter of leading people to a Person to whom they may safely entrust their eternal destiny. We are not leading them to a *message*, but to Jesus Christ as the object of their faith.

But more often than not, we have difficulty leading them to Christ, unless we lead them *through* the full gospel message. The gospel message is normally the avenue through which men and women come to understand why they can trust completely in the Savior.²¹ To be sure, trust in Christ *can occur* without a knowledge of the cross, but more often than not it doesn't. The message of the cross clarifies God's way of salvation.

On a very practical level, when I am dealing with an unsaved person, I find that if I simply tell him he only needs to believe in Christ, this usually doesn't make sense to him. Why should it be so easy? Why are not works required? To the unregenerate American mind, it doesn't sound reasonable.

So I find it not only useful, but indeed essential,²² to explain that the Lord Jesus Christ bought our way to heaven by paying for all our sins. In recent years I have liked to emphasize that He paid for all the sins we would ever commit from the day of our birth to the day of our death. This serves to stress the completeness of the payment He made. It is usually only in the light of so perfect a payment that people can come to see the reasonableness of a salvation that is absolutely free.

I say to people, "Jesus paid it all" and there is nothing left for you to do or to pay. All you have to do is believe in Him for the free gift of everlasting life.

²¹ Editor's note: This comment is never cited by Zane's critics. Why? To understand his view, a person must grasp this point.

²² Editor's note: Zane found the preaching of the cross *essential*. Yet this has not typically been reported when people cite this article. But it should, in all fairness.

One of my favorite illustrations goes like this: If a friend bought you a Rolls Royce and paid for it in full and offered it to you as a free gift, wouldn't he be hurt, or even insulted, if you insisted on paying for it yourself? In the same way, if we try to do or pay something to go to heaven, even though Jesus paid it all, aren't we insulting His great sacrifice and treating it as if it were not enough?

Most unsaved people can understand that point, even if they don't believe its true. The Savior's work on the cross thus becomes a powerful argument that He should be trusted for eternal life.

And apart from the cross, for most modern Americans, the offer of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, just doesn't compute. Even after hearing it, it still may not compute. But by offering the truth of the gospel to people, we give the Holy Spirit something to work with in their hearts. And in the final analysis, it is only the Spirit of God who can sweep away the blindness of the human heart so that the glorious light of the gospel of Christ may shine into unsaved hearts.

Nevertheless, let it never be forgotten: If anyone has faith in Jesus as the One who secures his or her eternal destiny, that person is born of God. Jesus has never yet failed anyone who trusted in His name for eternal salvation. And He never will.

HOW TO LEAD PEOPLE TO CHRIST: PART 2

OUR INVITATION TO RESPOND¹

ZANE C. HODGES

In my previous article I discussed getting the core of our message to men clearly in mind. Our objective is to lead them to believe in Christ to provide their eternal salvation. The gospel message about His death, burial, and resurrection is the normal context for our presentation of this core objective.² But at the end of the day, anyone who trusts Christ for eternal life is born again.

In this article I will discuss the process of seeking a response of faith from those with whom we share our good news.

I. BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS

In recent years I have become aware of a way of presenting the gospel invitation that troubles me. I believe I have heard it from my earliest years, and I admit it didn't really bother me for a long time. Now it does.

I have heard people say this: "In order to be saved you must believe that Jesus died on the cross." In the context of our present discussion, I mean that this is their summary of the requirement of faith. It is not just one item, among others, to be believed. Whenever I hear that nowadays, I get extremely uncomfortable.³

For one thing, is there anyone anywhere in a Christian church (unless it is radically liberal) who *doesn't* believe that Jesus died on the cross? For that matter, even some really liberal

¹This article appeared in the Spring 2001 issue of *JOTGES*.

²Editor's note: He repeatedly links the gospel message with believing in Christ for eternal life. And he says the gospel message is "about His death, burial, and resurrection." That is certainly not *a crossless gospel*. To charge him with that is both dishonest and disrespectful.

³Editor's note: Here's another place where shoddy scholarship has led some to "quote" the two words "extremely uncomfortable" and not the whole paragraph. It saddens me that people with a high regard for truth feel free to misrepresent the view of my longtime friend and mentor.

theologians would consider that a true statement, although they might balk at the doctrine of the resurrection. You see why I am uncomfortable, I hope.⁴

Now I know that the statement I am evaluating leaves a lot of things unspoken that are still implied by the speaker. Most of the time people who say you are saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross mean that He died for our sins. Indeed the phrase “for your sins” is often added. But even with that addition, there is still unspoken material that the person usually has in mind.

They usually mean to say, for example, that this belief in Christ’s death is all that is necessary for salvation. Thus they are normally proclaiming salvation by faith alone. Also unspoken, but usually implied, is the idea that Christ’s work on the cross is sufficient to provide for our salvation. Thus they mean to say that we are trusting in the sufficiency of His work of atonement.

Let me be honest. I don’t like this way of presenting a gospel invitation.

But before I go further, I also want to say that I believe that this kind of presentation has been used by God to the actual salvation of souls. But that doesn’t make it the best way of reaching people or making the truth plain to them.

The very first disadvantage of this kind of invitation to faith is that it cannot be found in the Bible. Just think for a minute of John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 16:31, and so on, and not a one of these verses invites us to get saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross. Why is it that we like to verbalize our message in ways that the Bible does not do? What is wrong with biblical language?⁵

The associated question is this: what is wrong with *our language*? The simple fact of the matter is that the statement I am criticizing is technically incorrect. People are not saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross; they are saved by believing in Jesus for eternal life, or eternal salvation.

If we say it the biblical way, we will be able to support our claim by direct biblical statements. But suppose a person I am

⁴ Editor’s note: In fairness, this paragraph should be cited and dealt with if anyone wishes to explain what Zane is “uncomfortable” about.

⁵ Editor’s note: While there may be texts that mention Jesus’ finished work on the cross, His deity, His perfect humanity, His bodily resurrection, and justification by faith alone in Him alone, none say one must believe all those truths to be born again.

witnessing to says, “Where does the Bible say we are saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross?” What am I going to do then? In that case I would be compelled to take him to a number of Scriptures and try to combine them to prove my point. But even then, I would not really have a statement from the Word of God that exactly verified the point I was making.

I would like to see grace people abandon this form of invitation to faith. Let us always point men to Christ Himself as the object of faith, rather than to some concept that must be theologically clarified before it can really be understood.

II. DOING THE TWO-STEP

Here is another technique that bothers me. Many good grace people employ what I would call a two-step approach to faith. First they invite people to believe the basic facts of the gospel, and then they ask them to appropriate this truth for themselves. In describing this second step, they often prefer the word *trust* to the word *believe*.

I happen to think that people who take this approach to evangelism are sometimes running scared. They do not want to be accused of making faith mere intellectual assent. Thus they try hard to make clear that just believing the facts doesn’t save us. According to them appropriating those facts for ourselves—that is, trusting Christ for our own salvation—is the crucial issue.

This approach to things opens the door for the famous illustrations about the chair, or the elevator, or something similar. Here is an elevator, they would say. Do you believe it can carry you up to the top story of the building? If the answer is yes, the next question is: what do you need to do now to get to the top story? The answer is supposed to be “trust” the elevator by getting onto it.

In the distant past I used to use such illustrations myself. I confess this fact with real embarrassment.⁶ Illustrations of this type do show considerable creativity. But I am afraid that the

⁶ Editor’s note: See p. 135 where Zane said about those who “are sorely tempted to make the gospel more complicated than God makes it”: “We have every right to be embarrassed by this tendency on our part.” Here Zane confesses he is personally embarrassed because he formerly did just that!

creativity here is badly misused. What is created is another idea that is absent from the Bible.

Where in the NT do we find any such presentation as this? Sorry, my friends, it just isn't there. And if you read part 1 of this article, you will know one of the reasons why it is not there.

You see, as we noted previously, the facts surrounding the gospel message—such as the death and resurrection of Christ—are important facts for what they tell us about the reasons for trusting Christ. But believing these facts doesn't save anyone. People are only saved when they believe that Jesus gives them eternal life the moment they believe in Him for that.

Let's return for a moment to that deserted island in the Pacific Ocean that I invented in my previous article. My hypothetical unsaved man has just read the words of Jesus in John 6:47, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has eternal life." All this person needs to do is to believe that statement and eternal life is his. There is no two-step process here at all.

The issues involved in eternal salvation are significantly muddled by the two-step approach I am discussing. The two-step approach seems to imply that two acts of faith are essential to one's salvation. The first of these is belief in the facts, the second is an act of personal trust. So this approach ignores *the instrumental value of the facts of the gospel in bringing men to faith in Christ*, and it tends to elevate them to the level of a preliminary condition which must also be followed by a second step, namely, trust.⁷

Notice how the approaches I have objected to so far tend to blur the necessary focus on the Person of Christ as the object of faith. In the case of "believe that Jesus died on the cross" the focus is on an action He performed (admittedly an indispensable one). In the two-step scenario we approach Christ first by believing certain facts about Him. The simple truth is that Jesus can be believed for eternal salvation apart from any detailed knowledge of what He did to provide it.

In other words, the sufficiency of Christ is the true focus of the faith that brings salvation. I am contending here that until we have that concept clearly in mind, we will be vulnerable to making appeals to faith that tend to cloud the issues rather than

⁷ Editor's note: The connection between the facts of the gospel and faith in Christ is clearly stated here by Zane.

clarify them. If anybody in the world should be able to present a crystal clear gospel message and a clear appeal to faith, it ought to be grace people like ourselves.

But in a lot of cases we are not doing nearly as good a job as we should.

III. ASK JESUS INTO YOUR HEART

I am not going to say much about the famous invitational phrase, "Invite Jesus into your heart." I suspect that most *JOTGES* readers would not be tempted to use this phrase in leading people to Christ.

It has often been pointed out that this phrase is not biblical and this fact is reason enough to leave it alone. Of course, we could also note that a person who used it could have a Lordship message in mind. He could mean that we are to invite the Lord in to take charge of our lives.

However, we should remember also that people have gotten saved this way too. If they are being told to believe in Christ for eternal life and are told that when Jesus comes in, He gives it to us, they are being told the truth. When I believe in Christ, He does come in and He Himself *is* eternal life (1 John 5:20). Thus as 1 John 5:12 says: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

But even after saying that, the unbiblical character of the phrase, "Invite Jesus into your heart," is too heavy a burden to bear. Our own terminology is never better than the Bible's. Never! And if we think so, we are kidding ourselves. And probably also confusing people.

IV. COMMIT YOURSELF TO CHRIST

Even less needs to be said about the phrase, "Commit yourself to Christ," and its many variant forms. Such a phrase could mean entrust your eternal destiny to Him. But it *could mean* a lot of other things too, including surrender of the life in the Lordship Salvation sense.

What's the point of employing phrases that are not only unbiblical but liable to misrepresentation and misunderstanding?

V. WHAT ABOUT “TRUST CHRIST”?

I know that many grace people like to invite the unsaved to “trust Christ” for eternal life. I really don’t have a strong objection to this phrase and occasionally use it myself when I want to offer a synonym for belief. But I never use it as my exclusive, or even pre-eminent, term for the faith that brings salvation.

However, I do resist the idea that is sometimes advanced that *trust* is a better term than the word *belief*. Of course, *trust* is often a synonym for faith in English usage. But often the English word *trust* has a diminished force that becomes equivalent to, “I just have to hope he will do it.” In that kind of statement, the speaker is expressing a significant degree of uncertainty. This is not what we mean by faith.

I may even use the word *trust* of someone I don’t really trust. I may say, “Jim asked me for twenty dollars to pay off a bill and I was afraid he might use the money on something else. But I said to myself, ‘Maybe he does want to pay a bill.’ So I gave him the twenty and decided that I would just have to trust him to do what he said. I hope he will.”

Presumably all of us recognize that this use of trust is perfectly acceptable and fairly common. Of course, the word *believe* can be used that way, too. I may say, “I believe he will come,” when I am not really certain that he will. Usually when we use the word this way, we signal our doubt by a tonal inflection: I *believe* he will come. But it does seem to me, at least, that the word *trust* more easily expresses some lack of certainty, as when I say, “I trust he will come.” I think an element of doubt is indicated just by using the word *trust* in this kind of statement.

However, uncertainty is far from being the normal implication of the word *trust*. In *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2nd college edition) in the discussion of trust in relation to synonyms like “*faith, confidence, reliance, dependence*,” the statement is made that all “these nouns reflect a feeling that a person or thing will not fail in performance. *Trust* implies depth and assurance of such feeling, which may not always be supported by proof” (p. 1300). So the note of complete confidence normally belongs to the word *trust*, just as it does also to faith or the verb *believe*.

The fact remains, however, that no English translation that I am aware of has opted to use *trust* as a replacement word for *believe* in any significant number of contexts. It just so happens

that *believe* works better where the text is specifying the *content* of belief. For example, in 1 John 5:1, we get, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” It would sound strange in English to say, “Whoever trusts that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” The English word *believe* has the distinct advantage of working well in almost all the salvation verses. Thus the word *trust* is only helpful if we are looking for a synonym to assist the unsaved person to understand what it means to believe.

But since our English Bibles use the word *believe* consistently and constantly, I think we are better off using the word people find in their Bibles. *To trust* may be a synonym for *to believe* but there are no real grounds for preferring it when we do evangelism. If for some reason or other we are afraid of the word *believe*, we ought to re-examine our fear and get past it.

And, as I have already said, the use of *trust* to express the second part of a two-step process of believing, has no foundation in Scripture. I would certainly urge that we firmly reject any alleged distinction between *believing* and *trusting*, which is thought to favor the word *trust* over the word *believe*. That would amount to a misuse of one or both of these words.

VI. INVITING PEOPLE TO BELIEVE

So now let’s talk about leading a person to faith in Christ. In my discussion to this point, I have largely been clearing away brushwood. I have been trying to point out some of the mistakes that are made in inviting people to believe. Now let’s consider this from the positive standpoint.

Let’s suppose I have been talking to “Ralph,” an unsaved young man. I have given him the gospel about the death and resurrection of Christ. I have emphasized the point that the Lord Jesus, by His death on the cross, has completely satisfied God in regard to Ralph’s sins. Christ has paid for all the sins Ralph would ever commit from the day of his birth to the day of his death. Thus Jesus has purchased Ralph’s way to heaven.

The one thing Ralph needs now is eternal life. People who don’t have this go to hell according to Rev 20:15. Without new birth we are unable to enter the kingdom of God despite Jesus’ death for our sins (John 3:3). And the alternative to eternal life is to perish (John 3:16).

However, I tell Ralph, eternal life is available on one condition alone, and that condition is faith in Jesus. I now turn to verses like John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; and especially John 6:35-40. I spend time on each of these verses, but I particularly want to focus on John 6:35-40. Let me now give my presentation to Ralph in the first person. I speak as follows:

“Ralph, notice how Jesus stresses the fact that believing in Him has permanent results. In verse 35 He insists that the person who comes to Him for the bread of life will never get hungry for that bread again. And the person who believes in Him for the water of life will never get thirsty for it again.

“Let me put it to you this way, Ralph. If a person could lose the bread or water of life after coming to Christ for it, he would be hungry or thirsty again. But notice! Jesus says that can’t happen.

“He says the same thing in a different way in verse 37. There He says that if a person comes to Him, He will never throw him out.

“Look also at verses 38-39. Here Jesus says that He came down from heaven to do His Father’s will and that His Father’s will is that Jesus should lose none of those that the Father has given Him and that He should raise them all up on the last day.

“And then notice how He repeats this idea in verse 40. Everyone who believes in Him gets eternal life and will be raised up at the last day.

“Notice, Ralph, that our resurrection at the last day depends on Jesus doing God’s will. If I believe in Jesus for eternal life, I get it and He does the rest. He does God’s will, so He will never throw me out. He will raise me up at the last day. I will never again hunger for the bread of life. And I will never thirst for the water of life. Do you think you understand this, Ralph?”

Hopefully, Ralph says that he does. If he says he doesn’t, I will ask him, “What seems to still puzzle you, Ralph?”

At this point, experience suggests that I will often get a question like this: “Do you mean that if I believe in Jesus for eternal life, that I can go out and do anything I want and still go to heaven?”

I am always pleased to hear this question, because it signals to me that the person is getting the idea that this is a gift and that it is not withdrawn if we behave badly.

My usual way of responding to the question is that being born again is like being born into a family. After that, we are always members of that family, even if we are scoundrels. But if we have good parents, they are not going to let us run wild. They will discipline and correct us and do their best to get us on the right path. Then I point out that, after we get eternal life, God is our heavenly Father and He is the best Parent we could imagine. He will not let us run wild. He will spank us, if need be, and may even take our physical lives away. But Jesus will never cast us out of God's family.

So far as my own experience goes, I have never had anybody not find this an adequate answer. It seems to clear things up for people, while still maintaining the truth of a passage like John 6:35-40.

So if I have successfully answered Ralph's questions, and he tells me he understands what I have been saying to him, I can get to the bottom line. Here is one approach that I feel comfortable about:

"Okay, Ralph. You say it's all clear to you. And maybe as we talked, you not only understood Jesus' promise, but you also believed it. If you have believed, then you now have eternal life. Do you remember how we went over John 5:24? Well if you have heard Jesus' word and believed it, that verse says you have eternal life and that you will never come into judgment before God to decide your eternal destiny. You have already passed from death to life."

At this point, of course, I can ask him if he *does* believe. If he says yes, I can also ask, "Then do you know for sure that you have eternal life and will be with the Lord Jesus forever?"

If he also responds affirmatively to this, and gives me no reason to doubt his veracity, I can and should regard him as saved. If, in fact, he does believe the things we have discussed from God's Word, then on the authority of God's Word he most certainly *is* saved.

Notice please! I have not asked him to pray, or to make a decision for Christ, or to do any of the many other things people often ask the unsaved to do.

All I have done is to ask if he has understood the truth we have discussed, and I have asked if he believes it. I absolutely insist that this is all the personal worker needs to do. I am encouraging the unsaved person to believe, but I can't make him do that.

If he does believe, a prayer is unnecessary. If he doesn't, a prayer will be confusing since I may direct him to say things he can't yet understand or believe, because God has not yet opened his heart.⁸

I should know about this problem. You see, when I was a little boy, I went forward in a meeting and said a prayer before I really understood what I was doing. Actually I was saved years later. But that prayer confused me, because I spent years wondering if I got saved when I prayed it. The pastor even thought I had because he came to visit my mother and told her so. But I wasn't sure at all.

I now realize that no one is saved by praying a prayer. They are saved when they understand God's offer of eternal life through Jesus and believe it. That's when people are saved. And that's the *only* time when people are saved. All of the excess baggage that we bring into our encounter with unsaved sinners is just that, excess baggage!

In this brief make-believe encounter with Ralph, I tried to give him something to believe about Jesus Christ. I wanted him to realize that you could believe Jesus' promises about eternal life and that when you did, you were saved forever.

That's all I basically wanted. Everything I might have included in my presentation leading up to the issue of faith was designed to prepare the way for that faith. I work on the conviction that if a person understands God's provision for salvation through the cross of Christ, it will be easier for him or her to believe in Jesus for eternal life.⁹

But the bottom line is this: I want people to know that the moment they believe in Christ for this free gift, they are saved and saved forever.

Let me add one final word. I find this a most liberating approach to evangelism. I have done my part if I have presented the message clearly. But faith in the heart is the work of God's

⁸ Cf. Acts 16:14.

⁹ Editor's note: He has certainly repeated this point many times in the two articles, yet critics of his view rarely mention this. Why?

Spirit and not a function of my technique or of my evangelistic dynamism.

The simple Word of God responded to in simple faith: that's what leading people to Christ is all about.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Hungry Inherit: Winning the Wealth of the World to Come. Third Edition. By Zane C. Hodges. Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1997. 135 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

The hungry inherit. What does that mean? Hodges starts with examples of the gift that God offers to all in the illustration of “living water” and our thirst for the gift of eternal life. He proceeds to discuss the importance of living faithfully so that one will be heirs of an inheritance in the kingdom of God to come. In other words, eternal life as a free gift as stated in Eph 2:8, 9 does not depend at all on our works, but depends solely on His faithfulness to His promise to the believer. However, sanctification or discipleship depends on our faithfulness as stated in Eph 2:10. One lacking a clear understanding of rewards for believers is in danger of denying the assurance concerning the message of life. As a poor substitute for Christ’s guarantee, he will add works either as *evidence* for or *validation* of eternal life.

The Hungry Inherit was published first in 1972 by Moody Press. It was published again in a second edition by Multnomah Press in 1980. The current 3rd edition was published by Redención Viva in 1997. It is worth reading and re-reading each year to remind us that the gift of everlasting life is free and that believers ought to walk by faith and have a hunger which leads to an inheritance/reward. Hodges gives refreshing insights on the Biblical teachings concerning eternal life, discipleship, and rewards. Nearly half of the ten chapters deal with the message of life as presented in John’s Gospel as Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman demonstrating that the living water that He was offering was water that one only needed to drink once to have the promised everlasting life. Continuous lifelong drinking is not required. The moment she drank the water He offered, she would never thirst again.

Ryrie correctly states in the foreword, “When one finishes this book, there can be no mistaking the fact that the free gift of the water of life and the call to discipleship are clearly distinguished

in the New Testament.” Although this is masterfully accomplished in an easy to read format, it is Hodges engaging narrative style that draws the reader in: “We don’t want to just tell you about the drama. We want you to be a part of it. We want you to meet its actors, and to hear their voices. Above all, we want you to think their thoughts and feel their feelings” (p. 9)

Dr. Earl Radmacher is well known for this statement on discipleship today and rewards to follow at the Bema Seat of Jesus Christ: “You are becoming today what you will be in the life to come through what you are doing with what you have today.” He may have been influenced by Hodges wrote something similar when he said this about the woman at the well in Samaria: “Her thirst had led her to eternal life, and her hunger would lead her to eternal heirship. That is the appropriate experience for everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus. For after all, the thirsty live, but the hungry inherit!” (p. 135). What a challenge for every believer. This is a must read for any and all believers.

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Did Paul Preach Eternal Life? Should We? By Zane C. Hodges. Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, Inc, 2007. 32 pp. Paper, \$3.95.

In the movie *Quigley Down Under*, Quigley (played by Tom Selleck) was a long-distance rifle marksman who moved to Australia. At one point, he was challenged to a pistol competition. He replied that he did not have much use for handguns. His antagonist surmised from this that Quigley could not hit a target with a pistol. In the pistol duel at film’s end, the antagonist and his ruffians found the assumption to be a costly mistake.

Those familiar with Zane would know that he focused on John’s Gospel for defining the message that one must believe. They would also know that he emphasized using John for introducing unbelievers to that message.

Interestingly, some have made an incorrect inference from Zane's decided preference for John's Gospel for defining and presenting the message of life. Some viewed the focus on John's Gospel as an admission that Zane could not find this emphasis elsewhere in the New Testament.

What Zane does in this booklet is to show that one can hit this same target from Paul. In other words, Zane argued that the core of Paul's message to unbelievers was that one believe Jesus as his Guarantor of everlasting life. In other words, the arsenal is not limited to John's Gospel, but John is the one and only book designed by God for the unbeliever. The booklet shows that Paul and John, or Paul and Jesus, are in harmony. John quotes Jesus extensively telling unbelievers to believe Him as the guarantor of everlasting life to them. Paul agrees with Jesus and John, but emphasized other themes in his epistles to believers.

The Introduction (p. 9) quotes Gal 1:11-12: "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (NKJV). The source of Paul's message for unbelievers was the same One who taught the Apostle John for 3½ years. Is it really plausible to assume that Jesus Christ revealed twelve divergent messages (a distinct one for each of the eleven plus a twelfth for Paul)? Such a scenario would legitimize (with regard to the message for unbelievers), saying: "I am of Peter," "I am of John," "I am of Andrew," "I am of Paul," etc.

Two criteria characterize the passages expounded in this booklet. The passages all were either written (in his epistles) or spoken by Paul (as quoted by Luke in Acts), and they all either quote what he actually said to unbelievers, or how Paul characterized his message to unbelievers.

Passages receiving attention include: Acts 13; Acts 16; Romans 1; Romans 5; 1 Tim 1:15-16; and Titus 3:4-7. Paul devoted much space to describing what Christ needed to do in order to grant someone everlasting life. He gave much less space to characterizing what the unbeliever must believe in order to receive everlasting life. By contrast, John's book addressing unbelievers frequently quotes Jesus giving the content that must be believed.

One can hit the target with either John or with passages where Paul states what his message was to unbelievers. The

booklet demonstrates this. The book does not examine the issue of how one would use passages in Paul that touch upon pertinent issues, but that Paul addressed to believers. Ephesians 2:8-9 is a case in point. It says, "You were saved by grace through faith..." However, it does not specify the exact content of that faith. If this passage comes up in a discussion with an unbeliever, the content of faith would need to be stated. Zane has given an eloquent answer from both John and Paul: The unbeliever is to believe Jesus Christ as his Guarantor of everlasting life.

This booklet offers some excellent insight for staying on target in Paul. Both John and Paul learned the message of life from Jesus Christ. Both were faithful to that message. It is the same message in both men's writings, although the target audience and the target audience in John's Gospel is unique. John cited Jesus seeking for people to believe Him in regard to His irrevocable promise of life everlasting to believers.

John Niemelä

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Six Secrets of the Christian Life: The Miracle of Walking with God By Zane C. Hodges. Dallas, TX: Rendencion Viva, 2004. 80 pp. Paper, \$4.95.

Summarizing years of insight distilled from decades of exegetical refinement and experience of truth in the lab of life, Zane Hodges left us with a wonderfully practical book on how to live the Christian life. The book respectfully discards the strewn wreckage of so many well intentioned band-aids and bromides for spiritual living. ("...working hard at it... firmly making up [one's] mind to do it... persevering in spite of all difficulties," p. 9).

Hodges acknowledges elements of truth in these over-simplifications, but none of them single-handedly captures Christian living as both a Person and a process. None of them integrates

the six distinguishable components he presents to us in *Six Secrets* as the dynamic process that girds the reality and movement of Christ in us, our earnest expectation of glory.

For a person who has believed in Jesus Christ concerning God's gift of eternal life, living a personally satisfying life that also pleases God is far from automatic. The wise professor Hodges created and crafted for us a beautiful tapestry and useful primer of spiritual living that itself displays a measure of the wisdom, pleasure, and glory of the Person of God as intimately known by this book's author.

Hodges' choice of the word *secrets*, though initially perceived by this reviewer as bromidic, is actually in the spirit of Paul's use of the word *mystery*, a collective truth previously hidden or veiled but emerging and then revealed through the progress of revelation in Scripture to the one pursuing it like treasure.

The six components presented in *Six Secrets* are joined to reveal a unified, orderly, and dynamic process. The six components itemized below, readable as one sentence, correspond to the six chapters of the book under review.

1. The resurrection life of Jesus Christ who is in us who have believed,
2. transforms our minds (=hearts) by means of His Spirit,
3. so that God's life in us is displayed (=glorified) through us in our daily decisions and directions,
4. resulting from an honest heart (=mind) deliberately facing the light of the truth of God's Messiah revealed in His written Word,
5. that we speak to God about in reference to our experience,
6. whose glory we are invited to regularly pursue as a process with an intentional focus (*mindset*) on all we can discover in and about God's Son alive in us.

This is eternal living of the eternal life given to us by Christ who lives in us. He is eternal life. This hope of Glory can continue through us to the world around us. But now this reviewer begins to build beyond the foundation expounded upon in Zane Hodges clearly and efficiently (75 pages plus 4 page index) written *Six Secrets of the Christian Life*. We are indebted to him for it. But he would want us to proceed on and not merely reminisce.

When writing in this form of summation literature, compared to his refined textual exegesis and exposition as displayed in his *The Epistles of John*, Hodges carefully crafted and freighted this

book with frequent but contextually relevant references. The book is free of endnote debate.

This book is for the common reader but is delightful to others as well, as was Lewis Sperry Chafer's *He That is Spiritual* (1918). Let the reader recognize Hodges' target audience or he will degrade his appreciation for this consummate exegete's skill, when called for, to summarize clearly and concisely for the many.

Noticeable in scanning through the text of the book are frequent references to key passages from the Bible weighing in on the message. A review of the helpful Scripture index at the end points the reader to 1 John at least twenty-eight times, Romans at least twenty-seven times, (primarily Romans 6-8), James 1 at least ten times and 2 Corinthians 3-4 at least nine times.

This pupil of Zane Hodges imagines a day when professor and pastor Hodges will receive Christ's stamp of approval for humbly rendered worship throughout life in word and deed. Hodges would never claim to be a receptor of Christ's final approval. He knew he would be with Him. He knew that his Master called him, with all of us, to behold Messiah Jesus now in the mirror of God's Word. Hodges cultivated in life the process that humbly honors the person of Christ and His revealed pathway of spiritual growth. But in all things He let God be God.

The thought of potentially receiving the reward of Christ's approval was a major, though not exclusive, motivator of Hodges. He likewise delighted in the completed work of Christ, the satisfactory payment for all sin, a theme evident in his book, *The Atonement* (2007).

Noticeable in his first book, *The Hungry Inherit* (1972), and for as long as this admittedly admiring reviewer recalls knowing him—from seminary years in the early 1970's to Hodges' death in 2008—he was a champion's champion of the freeness of the gift of eternal life in Christ and corresponding assurance of knowing Him with certainty.

In *The Hungry Inherit* he called our attention to *living water*, spoken of by Jesus to the Samaritan woman, the message of the gift of eternal life (John 4:10-14). Taking his cues from Jesus, Hodges likewise complemented this teaching, as evident in *Six Secrets*, with reference to the discipleship message of *meat to eat that ye know not of* (John 4:31-34). And so flowed the motivation of this mentor of mentors.

This man grounded his students in the gift, which, once given, can never be lost. At the right time, Hodges would then invite God's children to enjoy the process of abundant living as he did—but only in honor of the One who rewards those who diligently seek Him. Likewise he compiled from Scripture and honed by his own joy of Christ living in him, the readable and delightfully ponderable *Six Secrets of the Christian Life*.

It wasn't that he pursued the reward directly. Zane Clark Hodges looked forward to the revealing of the King Himself in His kingdom, the King Who has called us to celebrate with Him as His honored companions in the millennial bliss. That bliss awaits His children who diligently seek intimacy with the Person Who alone rewards or withholds the reward of intimate privilege at His side in the joyous administration of His reign yet to begin on planet earth.

Bob Kenagy

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Jesus, God's Prophet: His Teaching about the Coming Surprise. By Zane C. Hodges. Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, Inc., 2006. 64 pp. Paper, \$4.95.

Though short in length, this book makes a profound point. Zane's point is that the prophetic teaching we find in the NT epistles does not come via the Spirit revealing new truths to the apostles. Rather, it comes from the apostles proclaiming what the Lord Jesus Christ taught. Jesus is God's prophet. Many give lip service to this. Hodges proclaims it.

But this book implies an even more profound claim: All of the teachings found in the NT epistles find their source in the teachings of the Lord Jesus, including soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, Christology, and theology proper.

The Olivet Discourse is analyzed in this work. Zane focuses on the discourse as it is recorded in Matthew 24-25. He makes the

point that this discourse “is the longest uninterrupted prophetic discussion found anywhere in the New Testament outside the book of Revelation” (p. 15).

While most NT scholars do not believe the Rapture is found in the Olivet Discourse, Zane argues persuasively that it is. The Lord’s reference to His coming “as a thief in the night” is shown in this book to be the basis for the use of that expression by Peter (2 Pet 3:10) and Paul (1 Thess 5:4-8). And while there are signs that indicate that the Tribulation is underway (e.g., the abomination of desolation at the midpoint) and that it is ending (seeing the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, Matt 24:30), “the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man’ starts *without* a sign” (p. 25, italics his). While many prophetic teachers point to a myriad of things that they believe prove the Lord will return in our generation, if not in the next year or two, Zane was clear to point out that the Lord made the opposite claim. His coming would start when “when uninterrupted human life is continuing as usual, just as it was before the flood” (p. 24). This is an especially remarkable break from tradition since Zane thought it quite likely, in light of the events surrounding Israel, that the Lord would return in his lifetime. Yet Zane distinguished between what was likely and what was certain due to signs.

Another unique teaching in this book is that the Second Coming takes place over the course of seven years. Many Bible teachers see the Rapture and His setting foot on the Mount of Olives to defeat the armies arrayed against Israel essentially as two Second Comings. Zane sees those as two parts of the same coming: “The term for coming [parousia] does not simply refer to an *arrival*. It clearly covers a *span of time*” (p. 25, italics his).

As those of us familiar with his writings have become accustomed, Zane’s discussion of the Parable of the Just and Unjust Servant (Matt 24:45-51) and of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13) leaves no important observation left unstated. His discussion is masterful. It is exceeding practical in terms of our daily living until Jesus returns. The notion that Free Grace theology promotes spiritual indolence is laughable for anyone who reads this book (and the other books by Zane Hodges as well).

After challenging the reader to reader to believe in Jesus for everlasting life (p. 63), Hodges writes, “And if you *have* believed, then stay awake and be fully alert. Don’t allow sinful conduct

or spiritual neglect rob you of your readiness to meet Him face to face. You have a splendid promotion ahead of you if you are faithful” (p. 63, *italics his*).

I highly recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, TX

The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing. By Zane C. Hodges. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994. 128 pp. Paper, \$6.00.

A few years after Jesus’ crucifixion, James wrote his short epistle. In the centuries that have followed, scholar after scholar has commented on that book. In any well-stocked seminary library, there will be dozens and dozens of commentaries on James, taking up several shelves of space. As time passes, the size of the average volume about James increases. Why?

Each new scholarly commentator must prove that he has read all of the scholarly literature. The normal way this is done is by discussing what all of one’s highly-regarded predecessors have said about James. The result is that most of the space in scholarly commentaries is devoted to commenting on what others have said about James. Only a relatively small portion actually wrestles with the text of the epistle.

In his main text, Zane focused upon exposition of the epistle, not upon critiquing other commentators. His endnotes are succinct, demonstrating familiarity with a huge body of secondary literature. Don’t let the size fool you. Good things come in small packages.

What (besides the lack of empty filler) is unique about this volume? For starters, Zane demonstrates that the book has an outline. He shows convincingly that the epistle is not a mere string of pearls (contrary to the opinion of many). James 1:19, he demonstrates, delineates the three sections of the body of James:

Let every man be swift to hear (1:21-2:26), slow to speak (3:1-18), slow to wrath (4:1-5:6). He shows, for example, that in turn the first section has three subsections: *Being swift to hear* involves more than mere hearing (1:21-27); *being swift to hear* involves more than mere morality (2:1-13); *being swift to hear* involves more than mere passive faith (2:14-26).

Why is it important to recognize that James had an outline? It helps us identify interpretations that are contrary to James' point. Zane shows that all three of these subsections urge believers to apply the truth they have believed. Most would agree with him on the first, but errantly disagree on the third. However, the unity of the outline verifies that Zane understands James. Unfortunately, many misconstrue James.

A review of Zane's exposition of one key verse in each of the three subsections will demonstrate his point.

A key verse in the first subpoint is James 1:22: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*. James challenges these believers to apply Scripture, not just hear it.

A key verse in the second unit is James 2:1: *My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality*. As brethren, these are believers. James does not doubt that they have faith concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, but they are showing inappropriate partiality. Thus, he challenges them to apply Scripture.

A key verse in the third unit is James 2:14: *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save (deliver) him?* The previous two examples (coming from the first and second subsections of *Be Swift to Hear*) were challenges to believers that they need to apply Scripture.

Believing a Christian-walk truth of Scripture does not deliver one from sin's deadliness. If one believes that stealing is wrong, but holds up a bank anyway, faith did not deliver him from that sin and its consequences. James 2:14 means that believers will only be delivered from the deadliness of personal sin as they apply the truth that they have believed. Such an interpretation perceives each of the three subsections of the *Be Swift to Hear* section as an exhortation to apply the truth that these Christians have believed.

Unfortunately, as Zane shows, too many have wreaked havoc with the argument of James. Most commentaries try to advocate

fruit inspection, as if an absence of works constituted proof that someone had a spurious faith. James would be shocked that people misconstrue his words in this way. Zane's commentary is a breath of fresh air.

If you have only one commentary on James, this should be the one. If you have fifty other commentaries on James, but lack this one; your James section is still incomplete.

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Power to Make War. By Zane C. Hodges. Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1995. 135 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

Those who have read the writings of Zane Hodges have come to expect certain things. One of those things is that Hodges will carefully look at the Scriptures, often pointing out things that the reader may not have noticed before. Another expected aspect of Hodges' writings is that he will present the gospel from a free grace perspective. In *Power to Make War* Hodges does not disappoint on either count.

Power to Make War deals with the coming world ruler that the Bible calls the man of sin. Not surprisingly, Hodges comes from a premillennial and pretribulational perspective. However, his study of the texts that deal with this coming world leader have led him to certain conclusions that most premillennialists do not hold. Hodges takes the view that the King of the North in Daniel 11 is the man of sin Paul refers to in 2 Thessalonians 2. As a result, the man of sin will be from the Middle East, and not Europe.

Another commonly held position that Hodges disagrees with concerns the "prince who is to come" in Daniel 9:26. Many identify this prince with the man of sin. Hodges, however, suggests it refers to Titus who destroyed the Temple in AD 70. He concludes from this that the treaty in the Tribulation will not be between

the man of sin and Israel, but between nations that were part of the Roman Empire (modern Europe) and Israel. These European nations are the “people” of the prince to come.

Hodges also suggests that Rev 17:11-18 gives us certain information about the man of sin. When he receives his mortal wound (Rev 13:3) he is revived by the spirit of a dead ancient Roman emperor. This is similar to demon possession. This turns the man of sin into the Beast with supernatural powers.

In chapter six of the book, Hodges points out that evangelicals use the wrong word to identify the man of sin. Most call him by the title *Antichrist*. In 1 John 2:18 and 4:1, John identifies the “many antichrists” with the “many false prophets.” As a result, Hodges says the Antichrist is not the coming world leader, but the false prophet that serves as the man of sin’s right hand man. He points out that the Bible never calls the coming world leader the Antichrist, but does call him the man of sin and the Beast.

Not only does Hodges cause us to look at the Scriptures more closely in these and other areas, He also presents a very clear gospel. He points out that the eternal security of the believer will also be a reality during the Tribulation period. Revelation 14:9-11 does not mean that believers who take the mark of the Beast will lose their salvation. Believers will not be able to take the mark during the Tribulation because they are eternally secure and God will give them grace to refuse it in every situation. Even during the Tribulation faith in Christ saves.

I also liked how he suggested ways in which the man of sin will be able to deceive the world, such as claiming that God is only the God of the skies, but Satan and the man of sin can defeat Him on the earth at Armageddon. The enemies of Israel made a similar claim in 2 Kings 20:27-28. With this and other examples, Hodges gives the reader vivid pictures of how things might occur during the Tribulation.

Hodges closes the book with a clear free grace presentation of the saving message. He addresses the reader of the book and says that eternal life is offered to all who will believe in Christ for that free gift. He adds that this gift can never be lost.

There is something for everybody in this book. For those who have studied eschatology, it will cause them to look at certain aspects more carefully. The book is written in an easy to read style, so it is also very appropriate for those who are new students

of the subject. With the immense popularity of the *Left Behind* series, I often give *Power to Make War* to unbelievers who are interested in what the Bible says about eschatology because it clearly presents the gospel. There is something for everybody in *Power to Make War*. I highly recommend it.

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Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards. Third Edition. By Zane C. Hodges. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2007. 140 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

Many, this writer included, consider this to be one of the best books written on eternal rewards. This is surely one of Zane's best books in terms of content, style, and readability.

The opening chapters on faith, works, and false professors are truly ground breaking. The Free Grace movement advanced greatly as a result of this discussion.

Most Evangelicals lack a way of understanding the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Chapter 3 covers the sermon clearly and succinctly.

Many stumble over the idea of saving and losing one's psyche, life or soul, by denying oneself, taking up his cross, and following Jesus. Hodges takes the confusion away from this concept in Chapter 4.

Other chapters discuss crux passages like the rich young ruler, being judged "each according to his works," the salvation of Zaccheus (Luke 19:9-10), the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27), reigning with Christ if we endure (2 Tim 2:11-13), the Biblical concept of meritorious inheritance, the outer darkness in Matthew, and the call to be an overcomer.

This book is a tour de force. Anyone could benefit from reading it: unbelievers, new believers, mature believers, and seasoned saints. This book explains how eternal life can be an absolutely free gift that is conditioned solely on faith in Jesus and yet how God can and will judge everyone according to their works and

will them recompense them accordingly. Entering the kingdom is for all who simply believing in Jesus. Ruling in that kingdom will be reserved for those who endure to the end of their Christian lives.

I first learned these concepts when I took my first course from Zane in the spring of 1980. I felt the Bible come alive for me that semester. If you absorb what he has written in this book, your understanding of the Word of God will likewise take a giant leap forward. But more than that, your love for and desire to please the Lord Jesus Christ will advance greatly.

I recommend this book so highly that I'd say failure to read it and to do so carefully and prayerfully would be a foolish decision. Incorporating the truths of this book into your life will pay eternal dividends.

Bob Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, TX

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

By Zane C. Hodges. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999. 312 pp. Cloth, \$17.95.

Those familiar with the writings of Zane Hodges have come to expect excellent scholarship combined with unusual insight and practical relevance. Readers of this commentary on the letters of John will find these expectations fully met and more. In this his most recent work, Hodges demonstrates seasoned skill in exegesis and a pastoral heart to apply it. Despite the handling of the technical literature and Greek syntactical/grammatical refinements, the work is reader-friendly for the average Christian. Scripture and subject indexes complement the book. Selective footnotes separate the technical material from the commentary per se, as is the pattern in the GES commentary series. The author has also penned the commentary on James (paper, 128

pp.) in the same series, but the added length of *The Epistles of John* has allowed for a more comprehensive treatment.

The interpretation of the Johannine epistles reflects the author's previous work on the same books in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. While only one or two interpretive changes have been made, the present commentary is much enlarged, allowing the author to interact more with alternative interpretations and especially with issues regarding grace, assurance, and erroneous evangelical perspectives of sanctification.

No one will be surprised that the Hodges/Farstad Greek text (*The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, Thomas Nelson) is followed for exegesis. Since the author has worked extensively on the theories of textual criticism, interaction with these issues appears at pertinent places. Adhering to the majority text theory, Hodges argues for genealogical reconstruction where possible, a point misunderstood by many that oppose a majority text theory. Where genealogical reconstruction is not possible, any reading supported by numerous manuscripts is to be favored over a minority reading. In light of these principles, the originality of 1 John 5:7b-8a (unless otherwise noted, references concern First John) in the Textus Receptus is rejected, even though the New King James Version (the text of choice for the GES series) is used throughout for exposition. If the careful student of this commentary will read the footnotes thoroughly, significant wisdom on textual criticism theory can be gained.

Unlike some scholars, Hodges works with the supposition that First John has a clearly defined literary scheme. An orderly arrangement of an epistle, which was intended from its origin to be read in public, is in line with what is currently known of Greek rhetorical style. Hodges applies this knowledge in analyzing the structure of First John. The epistle opens with a short preface (1:1-4) in which the apostle declares his theme of fellowship with God (1:3). A two-fold introduction follows, describing the fundamental principles of experiencing this fellowship (1:5-2:2) and the primary result—intimacy with (or abiding in) Christ (2:3-11). The 2:12-27 unit reveals the author's specific concerns in writing: the readers need to appreciate their spiritual advancements (2:12-14) while being fully aware of the dangers of the world and the teachings of the antichrists (2:15-27) or

Revisionists (Hodges's label for these false teachers). The main body of the epistle runs from 2:28-4:19 and is marked out by an *inclusio* (the use of the same word[s] at the beginning and end of a unit). The Greek word for "boldness" (*parrēsia*, 2:28 and 4:17) becomes the key mark of the *inclusio*. At the beginning of the body (2:28), John gives a thematic statement for the book: the "abiding" relationship alone is capable of preparing the believer to stand in full confidence ("boldness") and without shame before the Judgment Seat of Christ. In the conclusion of the epistle (4:20-5:17) and its epilogue (5:18-20), the writer offers practical advice regarding an obedient life.

What did the Revisionists teach? Effort is made by some commentators to uncover heretical assertions behind John's instructions in 1:5-2:11. But as Hodges astutely observes, the Revisionists are not directly introduced until 2:18. Indeed, John has not even revealed the occasion for his writing until 2:12ff. Christians who are out of harmony with God can make all of the false statements that occur in 1:5-2:11. (One should not conclude from this that no hints of the antichrists' teachings are to be found in 1:5-2:11). The false teaching, while not a developed form of Gnosticism, could have incorporated Proto-Gnostic beliefs. The clearest heresy of the Revisionists was their denial that Jesus was the Christ who had come in the flesh. Cerinthus, who according to early Christian literature was an heretical leader from Asia Minor and arch-enemy of the apostle John, held that the divine Christ descended on the human Jesus at His baptism, and left just prior to his crucifixion. In Hodges's view, such an historical background nicely fits the mysterious reference in 5:6 to Jesus coming both by water (baptism) and blood (death).

The audience is not only Christian, but is commended for their high spiritual maturity as is substantiated by 2:12-14. Hodges defends the interpretation that all three designations there ("little children," "fathers," "young men") describe the *entire* audience rather than a two-fold or three-fold division of his readership. This conviction is supported by the fact that the two different words translated "little children" in 2:12 (*teknia*) and in 2:13 (*paidia*) are both used unequivocally in the rest of the epistle for all John's readers. Hodges concludes that the readers may well have been the spiritual leaders (i.e., the elders) at the church(es) to which the letter was originally sent.

Expositors and commentators often handle the Johannine letters as if they unfold a series of tests designed to help one ascertain his/her eternal relationship with Christ, i.e., gain assurance of or discover the lack of salvation. In Hodges's opinion, this defective perspective can be traced back to the 1914 publication of Robert Law's study of the epistles. But in stark contrast to the "tests of life" view, the letters are to be understood as tests that determine our intimacy with Christ, i.e. tests of fellowship and abiding in Christ. These epistles, especially First and Second John, must be interpreted in light of the principles Jesus laid down in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17) written earlier by the same apostle in his Gospel (dated by Hodges, ca. A.D. 48-52).

Under the premise proposed by Law and others, numerous verses have been misread. Hodges counteracts these views time and again, showing that a straightforward reading of the text contradicts any form of assurance by works or sanctification. The well-known section of 2:3-6 has repeatedly been twisted to portray such an idea. First, Hodges justifiably criticizes the theological construct that one can believe in Christ without really knowing that he or she has true faith until fruit is produced. Second, he argues that the concept of knowing God or Christ is quite flexible, being used both of saving knowledge and of experiential knowledge. Finally, drawing from John's own Upper Room Discourse, Hodges shows that Jesus spoke of all the disciples apart from Judas as being born again (John 13:10-11) yet failing to "know" Him (John 14:7-9). This establishes John's intention to present in First John a test to establish our intimacy with Christ by our obedience to His commandments rather than a test to evaluate our salvation.

Traditional treatments of 2:9 ("He who...hates his brother is in darkness") argue that John wished to expose the false Christians in his audience. But this viewpoint evidences a similar error. Hodges comments, "The word *his* is completely unnecessary, and even misleading, if a non-Christian is hating a Christian." Later he reasons, "Once we have looked closely at verses [2:]12-14, it will seem absurd that John could be thought to regard his readers as possible 'false professors' of the Christian faith." At each and every verse where "tests of life" presumably exist, Hodges offers a far superior alternative.

First John 2:19 has been consistently summoned as a proof text for the teaching that defection from the faith (“they went out from us”) renders faith illegitimate (“but they were not of us”). The commentary vitiates this argument. The repeated warnings of the epistle confirm that the Revisionists had definitely *not* departed from the church to which John was writing. Furthermore, the pronouns in First John invariably contrast the antichrists (“they”) over against the apostles (“we/us”) and the Christian readers (“you”). Verse 19 teaches that the Revisionists had left the apostles and the “mother church” at Jerusalem (“they [the antichrists] went out from us [the apostles]”), proving their false doctrines were not derived from the foundational and orthodox apostolic circle (“but they were not of us [apostles]”).

Another case in point is 3:6 and 9 where the present tense is frequently misconstrued as teaching that no true Christian can habitually sin. Hodges insists that this perspective is indefensible. Grammatically, the present tense can have a progressive nuance, but *by itself* cannot be manipulated to suggest habitual activity. Contextually, verses 6 and 9 are clearly absolute in light of such statements as in verse 5, “in Him [Christ] there is no sin.” In keeping with the epistle’s strong polarity between darkness and light, sin and righteousness, verses 6 and 9 detail the absolute inner sinlessness of the person born from God. While all Christians do continue to sin (even according to statements found elsewhere in the epistle; cf. 1:8). The innermost self of every regenerate person cannot and does not sin. The principle is simple: “like begets like.” Sin in any and all forms must find its source in something other than the new, divinely regenerate self.

Hodges sometimes breaks with other popular evangelical interpretations. Like most others who have been influenced by the commentary tradition, I must admit that I generally resist his interpretations at first. But his intractable logic and clear, precise handling of the text eventually convince me that his understanding is correct. His view of the antichrist serves as an illustration. Since the antichrists (2:18) are obviously embodied in the many false prophets (4:1-3), the antichrist himself is best understood as the False Prophet of Revelation (13:9-14), rather than the beast of Revelation 13:1-8, i.e., the “man of sin” (2 Thess 2:3-4).

One area of interpretation I am still processing. In 2:23, John says, “whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either” (i.e., “*does not have the Father or the Son,*” italics added). Hodges takes the reference to apply equally well to a saved or an unsaved person. In his understanding, the concept of “not having the Son [or Father]” here and in 2 John 9 means the absence of divine involvement or cooperation, but not necessarily the absence of eternal life. On the other hand, he takes the similar phrase in 5:12, “he who *does not have the Son* of God does not have the life” (italics added), to compose a formula that equals the absence of eternal life. Hodges may be perfectly right when he argues that the verb “have” is flexible. While some questions still remain for me, I am convinced that Hodges’s explanation is the best option among other alternatives.

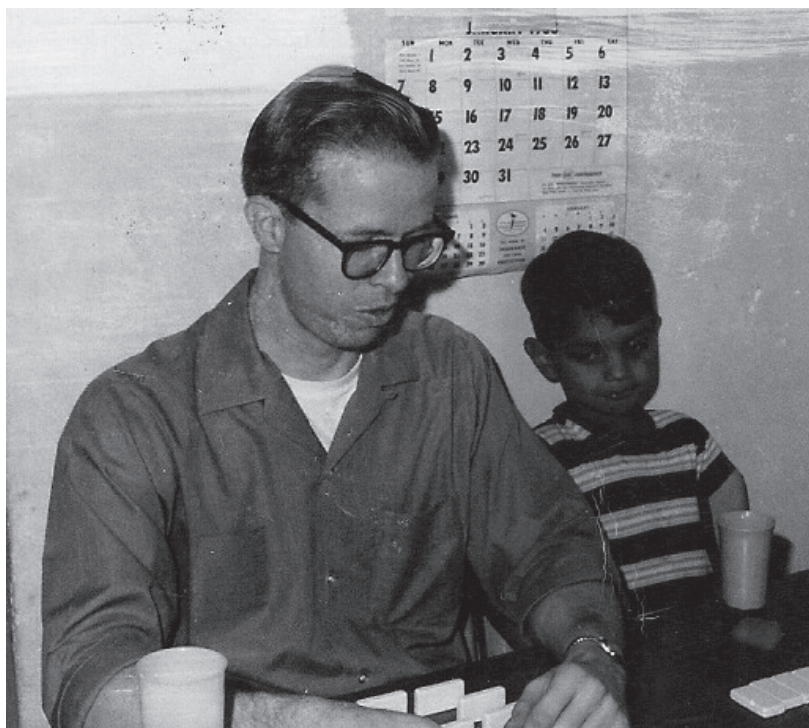
The blend of the erudite with the down-to-earth makes this work enjoyable for all levels of readers. For the scholar, there are discussions (in footnotes) on technical matters (e.g., the role of anapophora and cataphora in First John). On the other hand, one can find penetrating wisdom into human nature: “It is a natural response, when people feel their guilt, to attempt to soften the extent of their failure by defining the responsibility away” (p. 212). Sensitivity to the struggling Christian is apparent as well: “Whatever we try to do in love, a sensitive conscience often condemns us for having done too little, or for not making up for past failures, or for any number of things. Our instincts, in our sinful flesh, are so selfish that we may even in the midst of acting in Christian love suspect ourselves of impure or unworthy motives” (p. 164).

It would be a flagrant disservice to merely recommend this commentary. No finer exposition on the Epistles of John can be found in print. If one aspires to a masterful understanding of these challenging NT letters, a choice regale awaits the reader of this volume.

John F. Hart
Professor of Bible
Moody Bible Institute





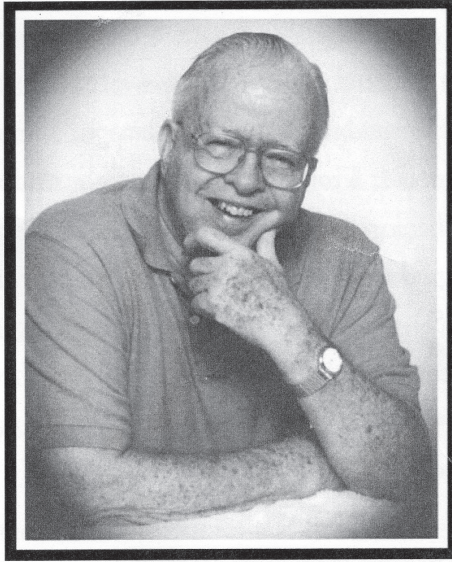




Celebrating the Life
of
Lane Clark Hodges

Sunrise
June 15, 1932

Sunset
November 23, 2008



— *Services* —

Tuesday, December 2, 2008, 11:00 am
Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship Church
Dallas, Texas

Dr. Martin E. Hawkins
Officiating