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We Believe In: SANCTIFICATION

Part 3: Present Sanctification: God's Role in Present Sanctification

ROBERT N. WILKIN

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I. Introduction

In some ways, in a series on sanctification, this should be the easiest article to write. After all, for many people today the word *sanctification* is practically synonymous with present sanctification. Many books and articles have been written on the subject from a variety of perspectives.¹ However, there are many reasons why this is not an easy task after all.

The fact that a great deal has been written on the subject does not guarantee that not more than a recapitulation need be made. In fact, if one studies what has been written, he discovers that there is great diversity of opinion on the subject.

While it is not the purpose of this article to explore the various views of present sanctification in detail, a brief review may be helpful. In this review I will limit my remarks to the various views on the relationship between present sanctification (i.e., personal holiness) and assurance of salvation.

¹ See, for example, J. Sidlow Baxter, *A New Call to Holiness: A Restudy and Restatement of New Testament Teaching Concerning Christian Sanctification* (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1967) and *Our High Calling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967); G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952); Peter Toon, *Justification and Sanctification* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1983); Jonathan H. Rainbow, "Double Grace: John Calvin's View of the Relationship of Justification and Sanctification" *Ex Auditu* 5 (1989): 99-105; H. A. Ironside, *Holiness: The False and the True* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, n.d.); Philip Mauro, *Sanctification: Notes of an Address* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, n.d.). See also footnote 2.

There are at least five different views of present sanctification. These have been detailed in a recent book appropriately titled *Five Views of Sanctification*.² The perspectives include Wesleyan, Reformed, Pentecostal, Keswick, and Augustinian-Dispensational.

The Wesleyan view, named after John Wesley, holds as two of its main tenets that present sanctification is not guaranteed and that if one fails to live righteously he can and will cease to be a Christian. Dieter writes:

Salvation is by grace. However, although the Reformation tradition frequently emphasizes justification and adoption, it often neglects regeneration and sanctification; a wholly *imputed* righteousness (objective salvation) comes to the fore, but *imparted* righteousness (subjective salvation) is neglected. Wesleyans would maintain that the biblical concept of salvation encompasses both and that both are found in the Pauline concept of being "in Christ," which constitutes the basic definition of a Christian in the New Testament.³

The Reformed view of present sanctification seems to be the opposite of the Wesleyan view on the two points just cited. However, the differences are mainly cosmetic in my estimation. For, while Reformed theologians believe that present sanctification is guaranteed for the true Christian, they suggest that any professing Christian may fail to live righteously, and if he does so it merely proves that he never was a *true* believer in the first place.

Hoekema, for example, writes:

Sanctification is a supernatural work of God in which the believer is active. The more active we are in sanctification, the more sure we may be that the energizing power that enables us to be active is God's power.⁴

The net effect of such teaching is no different than that of the Wesleyan view. One cannot be sure that he or she is eternally secure under *either* system.

Similarly, the Pentecostal view is essentially the same as the Wesleyan view in terms of the issues of sanctification and assurance.

² Melvin E. Dieter, Anthony A. Hoekema, Stanley M. Horton, J. Robertson McQuilkin, and John F. Walvoord, *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987).

³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

Pentecostals believe that present sanctification is not guaranteed and that failure in personal holiness results in loss of eternal life.⁵

The Keswick (pronounced Kez-ik) view, named after a town in England where annual conventions on personal holiness have been held since 1875, is one which I have found to be less united on the issues of sanctification and assurance than the previous views mentioned.⁶ However, if we can take the view of J. Robertson McQuilkin, the man chosen to present this position in *Five Views of Sanctification*, as representative of *most* Keswick teachers, we can discover elements in common with—and contrary to—the previously mentioned views.

On the one hand, McQuilkin suggests that genuine believers may fail in significant ways, but that no genuine believer can lose his or her salvation.⁷ On the other hand, he also suggests that if one fails significantly, then he should question whether he has ever been saved at all, since major sin may well be an indication that one is unsaved.⁸ The problem here is that McQuilkin adopts the not uncommon view today that good works are an indispensable verification of one's regeneration.⁹

Finally, the Augustinian-Dispensational view is also not as united as the first three views mentioned. Presently there is a move afoot to change Dispensationalism. Something called *Progressive Dispensationalism* is emerging. Persons holding this position nor-

⁵ See, for example, the comments of Stanley M. Horton in *Five Views*, 109-114.

⁶ On the issue of assurance and present sanctification, most Keswick speakers would affirm that genuine believers cannot lose their salvation and that failure in the Christian life is possible. However, there is disagreement about whether a professing believer should question his salvation if he is "deliberately rejecting the known will of God" (a phrase used by McQuilkin in *Five Views*, 170). Some (e.g., McQuilkin, *Five Views*, 170) would say that such a person has "no legitimate biblical ground for assurance of salvation." Others would affirm that the promises in God's Word are all that is needed for full and complete assurance.

⁷ *Five Views*, 160-67ff.

⁸ *Ibid*, 170.

⁹ For a discussion of the supposed indispensability of good works for assurance, see, "Assurance and Works: An Evangelical Trainwreck," by Zane Hodges, *The Grace Evangelical Society News* (March-April 1994): 1, 3, 4.

mally hold a view of sanctification and assurance identical to that of the Reformed view mentioned above.¹⁰

Classic Dispensationalists, such as John F. Walvoord, who wrote on the Augustinian-Dispensational view in *Five Views of Sanctification*, hold a view of sanctification and assurance which Free Grace believers would find mostly unobjectionable. These Dispensationalists believe that while good works can have a confirming value, works are not indispensable for one to have settled assurance.¹¹ In addition, they believe that eternal life can never be lost.¹²

In light of this brief overview of the various views, I find that none of those five views is completely satisfying to me. While the last view is closest to what I believe to be correct, it is flawed in that it is often too closely aligned with the Reformed position. It sometimes leads to unguarded statements which are confusing on the issue of assurance and sanctification.¹³

In the remainder of this article, I will lay out what I believe to be the biblical teaching on this subject. Specifically we will consider the

¹⁰ See, for example, Darrell Bock, "A Review of The Gospel According to Jesus," *BibSac* 146 (1989): 21-40, esp. 30-32. "In this reviewer's opinion there are three practical tests for determining the presence or absence of saving faith" (31). He then goes on to list (1) sensitivity toward sin, (2) recognition of some fruit in one's life, and (3) sensing that one "has a desire for and a sense of intimacy with God as his Father" as those three tests (31-32).

See also, Robert Pyne, "[A Review of] *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*, by John F. MacArthur, Jr.," *BibSac*, 150 (1993): 497-99. "MacArthur seems correct in arguing that assurance is not really complete without both elements [the promises of God and the observance of spiritual fruit in one's life]" (p. 499).

¹¹ See Walvoord, *Five Views*, 210: "Once saved, regenerate persons no longer question their salvation but are prepared to confront the problem of experiential sanctification. From Scripture, regeneration in itself does not bring perfection of character or freedom from a sin nature."

¹² Ibid. He writes: "The act of regeneration is irreversible and results in the eternal security of a believer in Christ."

¹³ For example, Walvoord writes: "The inner transformation [of regeneration] is visible in outward conduct. One's character changes, and even those personality traits that reflect sinful thought patterns are changed. . . . In the Old Testament there was no redemption from presumptuous sins (e.g., Exod. 21:14; Num. 15:30-31), and in the New Testament that type of deliberately chosen sin occurs consistently in lists that identify those who are unredeemed and under judgment (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8)" (*Five Views*, 180).

roles which God and man play in present sanctification. (Due to space restrictions the latter section will be concluded in the next issue of the journal.)

II. God's Role in Present Sanctification

A. Continually Extending Grace

The *sine qua non* of a Free Grace view of present sanctification is *grace*. It is not merely in regeneration that we depend on grace. *All* of our Christian life is dependent on God continually extending grace to us.

According to 1 John 1:8, 10, no believer ever arrives at perfection in this life. As long as we are in unglorified bodies we sin. God has made provision for forgiveness by means of confession of our known sins. First John 1:9 is a crucial verse on present sanctification and grace:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The word *we* here refers to Christians (cf. 1 John 2:2, 12-14, 25; 5:9-13). As we acknowledge and turn from the sins of which we are aware, God forgives and cleanses us from those and even from the sins of which we are not aware (i.e., from *all* unrighteousness).

What about the believer who chooses to compromise with or even wallow in sin? Amazingly, God does not routinely take him home immediately, though of course this does sometimes happen (Lev 10:1-3; Acts 5:1-11). God in His grace often allows believers to defy Him for a time. Who among us cannot think of a day in which we wallowed in self-pity, anger, jealousy, covetousness, or some other sin? The fact that we are still around to read these words shows that God extended His grace and gave us more time to grow and to serve Him.

It is vital that we remember that grace is foundational to present sanctification. We must not give up and decide God can't use us anymore simply because we recognize some sin in our lives.

Certainly Peter would have been tempted to feel that way after directly denying Christ three times in one terrible night. However, after His resurrection the Lord three times gave Peter a chance to affirm his love and each time He in turn affirmed His desire for

Peter to serve Him (John 21:15-17). There were other major gaffes in Peter's life (see, for example, Gal 2:11ff.). Yet in each case Peter confessed and turned from his sin and the Lord continued to use him.

On the other hand, it is equally important that we not think that we can sin with impunity. If we play with fire, we will get burned.¹⁴ The fact that God may, in His grace, not take us home when we fall into sin, does not mean that we escape scot-free. No indeed. Whenever we develop a closed attitude toward God and refuse to confess and forsake our sin, then God disciplines us (Heb 12:3-11). Escaping immediate death is not the same as escaping all negative consequences.

In addition, consequences in this life are not all that is at stake. There are *eternal* consequences for those believers who do not walk with the Lord. While the eternal destiny of all believers, faithful or faithless, is secure (Rom 8:38-39), the *quality* of that eternal existence is dependent on how we live now. Unfaithful believers will be rebuked at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Luke 19:11-26), will be ashamed of themselves at that time (1 John 2:28), and will miss out on the opportunity to rule with Christ in the millennial and eternal kingdoms, as well as missing out on other privileges extended only to *faithful* believers (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:10; Gal 5:19-21; 2 Tim 2:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:26; 3:21).

Interestingly, some Free Grace proponents object to discussing works in relation to present sanctification. Miles Stanford writes: "While the [Grace Evangelical] Society stands for grace, and 'free salvation through faith alone,' that does not extend to the *life* of the Christian."¹⁵

He goes on to say:

Grace Evangelical Society was formed "to promote the clear proclamation of God's free salvation (justification) through faith alone in Christ alone." But it is evident that that does not include [present] *sanctification*, since for them Paul "did not teach Christian living apart from works." This is an eclipse of grace!¹⁶

¹⁴ See "Believers Who Play with Fire Get Burned (John 15:6)," by Robert N. Wilkin, *The Grace Evangelical Society News* (May-June 1994): 2-3.

¹⁵ Unpublished paper, "Dispensational Disintegration (Part 2)," August 1993, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

The charge being made here is unfounded. While it is true that we teach that present sanctification involves works which believers are commanded to do, that does not mean that we deny the role of grace in the Christian life. Present sanctification requires on-going grace, but it is *not* accomplished by faith *alone*. Rather, it is realized through faith that is “working through love” (Gal 5:6).

Even a cursory scanning of the word *work* in a Bible concordance reveals that Paul clearly linked Christian living and works (e.g., 1 Cor 3:13-15; 9:1; 15:58; 2 Cor 9:6-8; Gal 6:4; Phil 2:12; Col 1:10; 2 Tim 2:21). The same is true for the teaching of our Lord and His other apostles (e.g., Matt 21:28; 26:10; Luke 13:14; John 14:15; 15:14; Heb 6:10; 13:21; Jas 1:25; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 22:12).

Present sanctification would not take place unless God continually extended His grace to the believer. This He does. But the believer must be “giving all diligence” to the process of moral development (see 2 Pet 1:5-7).

B. Laying the Foundation: Regenerating, Indwelling, Baptizing, and Sealing

Years ago when I taught a course on the doctrine of salvation I used the memory device R-I-B-S to help my students remember the four things which the Holy Spirit does to a person the very moment he or she believes in Christ. At the moment of faith the Holy Spirit regenerates, indwells, baptizes, and seals.

The Holy Spirit *regenerates* all who believe in Christ (John 3:3-18; 1 Pet 1:22-23). This is why believers are capable of living holy lives. We have constant inner enablement by the Holy Spirit.

God the Holy Spirit also *indwells* every believer (Rom 8:9). He never leaves us. Moment by moment He resides within us. He leads us to obey God (Gal 5:18), whether we recognize it or not.

In addition, the Holy Spirit *baptizes* all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). That is, He *places* us in the universal Church. This is a tremendous truth which should strongly motivate us to pursue personal holiness. While we may have been alone and felt like an outsider before salvation, once we trust Christ we are not alone and we are not outsiders. We are permanent members of the greatest society there is: the Body of Christ.

Finally, He *seals* every believer for eternity (Eph 1:13; 4:30). God’s seal can never be broken. Once we are saved, we are saved forever.

This ministry of the Holy Spirit gives believers who reflect upon it a deep sense of gratitude springing from their security. Gratitude is a powerful motivation for us to pursue holiness.

The fact that every Christian is regenerate, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, baptized into the Body of Christ, and sealed forever means that present sanctification is both possible and natural for every believer.

C. Praying for Us

Many believers are unaware of the fact that the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus both pray for us regularly. Yet They do! "The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:26). "It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom 8:34).

What a comfort and encouragement this is. I remember talking with a veteran of nearly forty years of pastoral ministry who told me that he was absolutely convinced that the reason he was still in the ministry and walking in the light is because the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit had been praying for him.

D. Empowering Us

God empowers every believer to obey Him. No believer can legitimately claim that he is unable to live a godly life. Peter said, "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3). The words *all things* refer to the fact that we have *all we need* to live godly lives because of God's power within us.

This does not, of course, guarantee that we *will* live godly lives. Rather, it guarantees that we *can*. Whether we do or not depends on the extent to which we give "all diligence" and "*add [italics supplied]*" to [our] faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (2 Pet 1:5-7).

E. Directing Us

Every film has a director. The director is the person who lets all the actors, cameramen, and stage hands know exactly what is expected of them on each shot.

Similarly, God has not left us without direction. He has given us clear direction as to what we should and should not do to please Him.

This does not mean, however, that God tells us precisely what clothes and car and house to buy, whom to marry, what job to take, etc. For example, on the vital issue of marriage, God's instructions through the apostle Paul for a widow is that she is to marry "whom[ever] she wishes, only in the Lord."

God directs us by means of written instructions. As Paul said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [lit. "is God-breathed"] and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." A Christian who does not know the Bible is like an actor who doesn't know his script.

God aids our understanding of His Word by giving men and women in the Body of Christ the gift of teaching (cf. 1 Cor 12:28-29). Sermons, Sunday School lessons, home Bible study messages, books, journal and newsletter articles, commentaries, and the like are all ways that God can help us understand and apply His Word better.

Much has been written on this subject.¹⁷ The bottom line is that God has shown us what He wants us to do and what He wants us to avoid doing. A major part of present sanctification is studying God's Word so that we can make His direction an integral part of our daily thinking and experience.

F. Chastening Us

It is a sad fact, but there are some who believe in the absolute freeness of the Gospel who do not believe that God chastens His children. I heard one radio preacher who proclaims the freeness of the Gospel actually say that God never gets angry with or causes bad things to happen to His children.

Interestingly, many in the Lordship Salvation camp also seem to have a low view of God's discipline. Only rarely have I seen any-

¹⁷ See, for example, René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969); Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980); Haddon Robinson, *Decision-Making by the Book* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991); and Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

thing written or heard anything preached by Lordship Salvationists on God's chastening believers. (And even then, they are always careful to point out that the person experiencing difficulties may not be a "true" believer at all. He may be a false professor who only *thinks* he is saved.)

This is not an emphasis of that theology, though one would think it surely would be. I believe this is the case because Lordship Salvationists feel that genuine believers, while not sinless, are holy and obedient. If they weren't, they would not be true believers. Such people rarely, if ever, need chastening.

Personally, I am greatly comforted to know that God cares enough for me to confront and discipline me. I would not want to be set free from His constraining hand. I want to be all that I can be for Him and I know that chastening is a necessary element in my growth. The writer of the Book of Hebrews, quoting Prov 3:11-12, writes:

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the Lord loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.

As the passage just cited illustrates, both the Old and New Testaments teach that God *does indeed* discipline believers when we go astray. He does this in various ways.

1. By Convicting Us of Sin

One of the ways in which God chastens us when we sin is by causing us to *feel guilty* as He makes clear to us what we have done (cf. Eph 5:8-14).

David felt guilty for committing adultery and murder and said that until he acknowledged his sin, "Day and night Your hand was heavy upon me" (Ps 32:3-4). Peter wept bitterly after he denied the Lord three times (Matt 26:75). The Word of God is able to pierce us to our innermost secrets (Heb 4:12-13) and to reprove and correct us (2 Tim 3:16-17).¹⁸

¹⁸Of course, it is unfortunately possible to feel guilty even when we have done nothing wrong. That is why it is vital whenever we feel guilty to evaluate our feeling in light of Scripture. If, for instance, I feel guilty for turning down a speaking engagement—even though I had good reason to do so—then I can reject the guilt as "false guilt" and go on with my life, knowing that like an ocean wave that feeling will pass.

God may use a human mediator to convict us of our sin. This is exactly what happened to King David. For one year he failed to confess his sins of adultery and murder. Then God sent Nathan the prophet to confront him. David broke down in confession and repentance upon being confronted by Nathan (2 Samuel 12).

If we fail to respond to one person, God may move the leaders of our church to confront us. If even then we do not confess and forsake our sin, the congregation as a whole may decide to put us under church discipline, cutting us off from the fellowship of the assembly until we confess and repent.¹⁹

2. By Sending Us Temporal Difficulties

A second way God chastens us is by bringing difficulties into our lives.

Paul told the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 11 that some of them were sick (v 30) due to God's chastening (v 32) because they had abused the Lord's Supper by becoming drunk and gluttonous at it (cf. vv 17-22).

Whenever the nation of Israel fell into idolatry and rebellion against the Lord, she experienced God's hand of chastening. He chastened her with disease, defeat by her enemies, crop failure, plagues, destruction of livestock, famine, and deportation (cf. Lev 26:14-39). Similarly, God may chasten believers today in a wide variety of ways.

Of course, not all difficulties are a result of personal sin. Often we experience difficulties simply because God is allowing us to be tested (e.g., Job), because God is judging a whole group of people of which we are a part (e.g., Daniel), or because of God's overall plan requires it, though we probably don't know why (e.g., the man born blind, John 9:1ff.).

It is not necessarily easy to decide whether we are experiencing difficulties due to some sin in our life or some other reason. However, two extremes should be avoided: believing that *no* difficulty we experience could possibly be the result of sin in our lives and, oppositely, believing that *every* difficulty we face is God's chastening of us due to some sin or sins we've committed. Both licentious and paranoid attitudes are unhealthy and are to be avoided.

¹⁹ Unfortunately, church discipline is rarely practiced today.

How, then, do we decide? Sometimes it's easy. If you rob a bank and then are arrested and sent to jail, it's reasonable to conclude that God is chastening you for robbing the bank! If you fall into sexual sin and contract a sexually transmitted disease, the cause and effect is obvious.

In cases where we are unaware of any unconfessed sin in our life, the biblical approach is to continue to confess our sins as we become aware of them (1 John 1:9). As we "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7) we can reasonably assume that difficulties we experience are not due to some sin in our life.

If, on the other hand, we know that we are walking away from the Lord, then we can reasonably assume, though we might not be absolutely certain, that illnesses and family and financial difficulties and the like are part of God's chastening ministry in our lives. If we then confess and forsake our sin, possibly the difficulties will end swiftly. In any case, we won't be giving the Lord *fresh* reasons to chasten us.

3. By Taking Us Home

A third way the Lord chastens believers is by taking them to heaven prematurely. When believers are walking in rebellion, God may take them home to move them instantly to personal holiness. At the moment of death present and future sanctification meet and coalesce.

I have been asked on a number of occasions by people in the Lordship Salvation camp why we don't see more believers taken home prematurely if our view of present sanctification is correct. My response is that we do. Many times. How many thousands—or even millions—of believers died before their time because of sin in their lives?

This does not mean that *all* believers who die young or who die before they reach a ripe old age (three score and ten?) were taken by God due to sin in their lives. God may take believers home for a host of reasons. He has a master plan which He has not chosen to reveal to us in detail. Again, two extremes should be avoided: thinking that *no* believers are ever taken home due to sin in their lives and thinking that *all* who die before age seventy were taken home because of the sin unto death.

The chastening of God is a powerful way in which He moves us toward personal holiness.

G. Rewarding Us

The opposite of chastening is rewarding. As all good parents and employers know, rewarding good behavior is also a powerful motivator.

God rewards obedience both here-and-now and eternally. In a temporal sense we might paraphrase a popular advertising slogan: “Things go better with *obedience*.”

The nation of Israel was greatly rewarded by God when she obeyed Him. He gave her good crops, plenty of food to eat, good health, and peace in the land.

While the NT does not guarantee that material prosperity and good health will accompany holiness (e.g., 2 Cor 11:22-33), emotional and spiritual good health surely do. The fruit of the Spirit is only for the person walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Only the obedient Christian experiences peace, joy, contentment, and the like.

Similarly, every believer will someday appear before the Lord Jesus at His Judgment Seat. There Christ will recompense us “according to what we have done in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Those who have lived holy lives will receive praise, treasure, and special privileges and honors which will last forever. Those who have squandered their spiritual lives in this life will receive rebuke and will miss out on the abundance of life they could have had. (Cf. Matt 6:19-21; Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10; 1 John 2:28; Rev 2-3.)

H. Restricting Our Choices

It is easy to forget, if we do not stay in the Scriptures regularly, that God does not allow us to walk through life facing a haphazard and purely coincidental series of experiences. He restricts our choices. For example, He allows us to be tempted, but never beyond what we can handle (1 Cor 10:13).

Can’t all of us think back on situations where we’re now glad that a particular option was *not* open to us? If the option had been available to us, we might well have made a choice that would have led us away from God. However, God eliminated that choice and made it easier for us to follow Him.

Had Adam and Eve stayed in the Garden of Eden, they might well have eaten the fruit of the tree of life. If they had, they would have

physically lived forever (Gen 3:22), yet in a state of separation from God. Von Rad comments that God was being merciful in "the withholding of a good which for man would have been unbearable in his present condition."²⁰

While they were possibly very unhappy to be excluded from the Garden at the time, Adam and Eve surely ultimately had reason to be very glad the Lord restricted their choice.

God used a donkey to restrict Balaam's choice and to spare his life (Num 22:22-33). While Balaam was very angry at the animal for a time, he was very grateful when he realized that she had saved his life.

God restrained David from his foolish decision to go into battle on the side of the Philistines against King Saul and the forces of Israel (1 Sam 29:1-11)!

God restricts our choices again and again. We may be deeply saddened when a given prayer is not answered the way we want. However, as one person has wisely said, "It's a good thing we don't always get what we pray for." God makes it easier for us to grow in godliness by restricting our choices.

* * * * *

In the next issue we will conclude this article by considering man's role in present sanctification.

²⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 97.

THE NEW PURITANISM

Part 3:

MICHAEL S. HORTON: HOLY WAR WITH UNHOLY WEAPONS

(continued from last issue)

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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.¹ 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.

¹ Besides Horton, the other writers are Robert B. Strimple, Rick Ritchie, Kim Riddlebarger, W. Robert Godfrey, Paul Schaefer, and Rod Rosenblatt.

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 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.²

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!

² See *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, “The New Puritanism—Part 2: Michael S. Horton: Holy War with Unholy Weapons,” Autumn 1993, 32-33, and note the article by Basinger referred to on p. 32.

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

³ *Christ the Lord*, 111.

⁴ *Ibid.*

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." 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 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 . . ."⁵ Correctly, Horton finds such a statement to be

⁵ Ibid., 49, quoted from John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says Follow Me?* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 113.

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 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.* [Italics added].⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸

⁶ *Christ the Lord*, 50.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Especially so in the light of Heb 3:12-13, which is addressed to Christian "brothers"!

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.⁹

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* (italics added).¹⁰

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.¹¹

⁹ *Christ the Lord*, 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ 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.

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."¹² Later in the same paragraph he adds:

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.¹³

Here, of course, Horton is on solid Puritan terrain, honeycombed 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.¹⁴

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."¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 55.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 54-55.

¹⁵ Ibid., 51.

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* 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* (italics added).¹⁶

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.

¹⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

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 the right influence! *Every believer is Spirit-filled* and, therefore, a recipient of every heavenly blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3-4). (Italics added.)¹⁷

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."¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 113.

¹⁸ Ibid., 113-14.

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* what someone else has 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).¹⁹

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, 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.

¹⁹ Ibid., 114.

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 “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.²⁰ The reader of this review should therefore now have a basic theological “fix”

²⁰ 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, 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!

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 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.

IS FAITH A GIFT? A STUDY OF EPHESIANS 2:8

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I. Introduction

The nature of faith is a prominent part of the soteriological discussions of recent years. Some believe that salvation is a gift from God and even the faith a person exercises in order to be saved comes from God. Others likewise hold that salvation is a free gift but see faith as being personal. In other words, believing is the role of the individual in securing the gift of salvation.

Ephesians 2:8 is a significant passage in this debate. It says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." This article will interpret the verse and render a conclusion regarding the source of faith.

II. The Text

The transliterated Greek text of Eph 2:8 is as follows: *tē gar chariti este sesōsmenoi dia tēs pisteōs; kai touto ouk ex hymōn, Theou to dōron.*¹ The only textual variant concerns the presence or omission of the article *tēs* in the prepositional phrase *dia tēs pisteōs*. The inclusion of *tēs* is supported by A, D (first corrected copy), Athos, and the great majority of the manuscripts (i.e., the Majority Text). On the other hand Aleph, B, D (original copy), F, G, P, 6, 33, 104, 1175, 1739, 2464, 2495, and a few Coptic versions omit the article.

Since the presence of *tēs* is supported by the majority of manuscripts as well as one important uncial in the Alexandrian family (and is therefore of great antiquity), it can be concluded from the external evidence that the article is original.

¹ Based on *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 2d. ed., edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985).

With regard to internal data, the preposition *dia* plus the genitive of *pistis* occurs two other times in Ephesians. In both 3:12 and 17 the article *tēs* is used by Paul. This would tend to support the appearance of the article in 2:8.

Although the external and internal data support the inclusion of the article *tēs* in 2:8, its presence or absence is not of critical importance to the interpretation of the passage. The basic meaning of the prepositional phrase is simply "through faith."

The translation of the verse according to the various versions is as follows:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God (King James Version; italics in original).

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God (New King James Version; italics in original).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (New International Version).

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God (New American Standard Version; italics in original).

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (New Revised Standard Version).

Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God (Jerusalem Bible).

For it is by free grace (God's unmerited favor) that you are saved (delivered from judgment *and* made partakers of Christ's salvation) through [your] faith. And this [salvation] is not of yourselves [of your own doing, it came not through your own striving], but it is the gift of God (Amplified Bible; italics in original).

For it is by God's grace that you have been saved, through faith. It is not your own doing, but God's gift (Today's English Version).

For it is by his grace you are saved, through trusting him; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift (New English Bible).

For it is by grace that you are saved, through faith. This does not depend on anything you have achieved, it is the free gift of God (Phillips Modern English Version).

I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God (New Century Version).

Because of his kindness, you have been saved through trusting Christ. And even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God (Living Bible).

III. The Interpretation

A. The Context

Ephesians 1-3 may be termed the "doctrine" section of the Epistle. Here Paul writes of some of the great truths of the Christian faith, particularly regarding salvation. In chap 1, he tells the Ephesian believers of the great spiritual blessings that are theirs in Christ. Beginning in chap 2, Paul reminds them of their spiritual state prior to being saved. The Ephesian believers had been dead in their sins (2:1, 5) and had lived only to gratify their flesh (2:2-3). But the gracious and merciful God demonstrated His great love for them by providing salvation through His Son (2:4-7). In 2:8-10, Paul summarizes the salvation experience and focuses on the work of God through Christ for us.

B. Grace

Ephesians 2:8 begins with *tē gar chariti* ("for by grace"). The conjunction *gar* ("for") is explanatory.² Paul is explaining the reason why God, for all eternity, will show believers "the exceeding riches of His grace" (Eph 2:7). Because He saved believers by grace, God will forever show them His grace.

² John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 2d. ed. (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1861), 153; Charles J. Ellicott, *A Commentary, Critical and Grammatical, on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2d. ed. (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1862), 49; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), 111. Cause is another valid option for *gar*. See A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930), 4: 525.

Tē chariti ("by grace") is the instrumental dative. It is the *means* by which the Ephesians "have been saved."³ This is synonymous with grace being the *grounds* of salvation, which is how some prefer to express it.⁴

The article *tē* is probably anaphoric, i.e., it refers back to the usage of *charis* in 2:5, 7.⁵ Paul now, in 2:8, will expand on the concept of grace which was previously spoken of in a more general way.

But it may be that the article makes *charis*, an abstract noun, more concrete. Therefore in 2:8, the reference is not to grace in general or as an abstract concept, but rather to the historical fact of grace expressed in the death of Christ to secure salvation for humanity. In 2:5, the absence of the article focuses on the inherent *quality* of grace and that salvation is by grace and nothing else.⁶

Tē chariti also occupies the most emphatic position in the sentence.⁷ Paul wants to emphasize the grace of God and the role it plays in salvation.

³ Ellicott, *Ephesians*, 49; Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 525; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3d. ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 533. Eadie calls *chariti* a dative of source. See Eadie, *Ephesians*, 153.

⁴ Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989), 219; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 111.

⁵ T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, n.d.), 51; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4th ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1865), 3:94; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 289; Eadie, *Ephesians*, 154; Ellicott, *Ephesians*, 49; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 111; Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4: 525; S. D. F. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1900-1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 3:289.

⁶ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1927), 142; James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, *Syntax*, by Nigel Turner (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1963), 176; Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples*, English ed. adapted from the 4th Latin ed. by Joseph Smith (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), 57.

⁷ Eadie, *Ephesians*, 153; Ellicott, *Ephesians*, 49.

For Paul, grace is from God⁸ and is the basis for justification:⁹

To the praise of the glory of His *grace*, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His *grace*" (Eph 1:6-7; emphasis added).

Being justified freely by His *grace* through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24; emphasis added).

Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and *grace* which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began (2 Tim 1:9; emphasis added).

That having been justified by His *grace* we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:7; emphasis added).

Grace, then, is the foundation for all that follows. God took the initiative and poured out His favor on undeserving man by giving "His only begotten Son" (John 3:16) as the payment for sin. On the basis of the death of His Son, God was free to declare men righteous by faith.

C. Salvation

Salvation is expressed by the periphrastic participle *este sesōsmenoi* ("you have been saved"). The perfect tense of the participle signifies the present state resulting from a prior occurrence.¹⁰ In other words, the Ephesian believers are now saved due to their past faith. However, the time element is not so clear and the focus may simply be on the present state of salvation with no implication of the prior action which produced it.¹¹

⁸ E.g., "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:2; emphasis added). Cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 1:3.

⁹ In Ephesians, salvation is equal to justification. This is not always true for Paul.

¹⁰ Ellicott, *Ephesians*, 49-50.

¹¹ F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 134-35 (hereafter referred to as BDF); C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2d. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 18-19.

In the writings of Paul, salvation may have different meanings depending on the context. For example, in Philippians, Paul uses *sotēria* ("salvation") in a temporal sense, as in 1:19: "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance (or "salvation": *sotēria*) through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (see also 1:28; 2:12).¹²

In Ephesians, salvation is equivalent to everlasting life. The context of Ephesians 1 and 2 makes this clear. The noun *sotēria* ("salvation"), is used only in Eph 1:13: "In Him you also, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your *salvation*; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (emphasis added).¹³ Some other Pauline passages where salvation is the same as in Eph 2:8 are:

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to *save* those who believe (1 Cor 1:21; emphasis added).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He *saved* us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; emphasis added).

D. Faith

The prepositional phrase *dia tēs pisteōs* ("through faith") follows next.¹⁴ The preposition *dia* denotes means.¹⁵ This might also be ex-

¹²For a discussion of these passages see Robert N. Wilkin, "Working Out Your Salvation: Philippians 2:12," *The Grace Evangelical Society News* (May-June 1993), 2-3.

¹³In Ephesians, the verb *sōzō* ("save") is used only in 2:5, 8.

¹⁴Some commentators believe the article is here used as a possessive pronoun, i.e., "through *your* faith." This would support the idea that faith is personal and is not a gift from God. See Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 3:94; Eadie, *Ephesians*, 154.

¹⁵Eadie, *Ephesians*, 153; Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989), 219; Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament Edition, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 624; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 111; Salmond, "Ephesians," 289.

pressed as cause¹⁶ or agency.¹⁷ The means or agent of salvation is faith.¹⁸ Lincoln comments about faith:

God's act of grace is the ground of salvation and faith is the means by which it becomes effective in a person's life. In Paul's thinking faith can never be viewed as a meritorious work because in connection with justification he always contrasts faith with works of the law (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:2-5, 9, 10; Rom 3:27, 28). Faith involves the abandonment of any attempt to justify oneself and an openness to God which is willing to accept what he has done in Christ. The same applies here in regard to salvation. Faith is a human activity but a specific kind of activity, a response which allows salvation to become operative, which receives what has already been accomplished by God in Christ.¹⁹

That salvation is by faith in Christ is a consistent theme in the writings of Paul:

Even the righteousness of God, through *faith* in Jesus Christ to all and on all who *believe* (Rom 3:22; emphasis added).²⁰

To demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has *faith* in Jesus (Rom 3:26; emphasis added).

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by *faith* apart from the deeds of the law (Rom 3:28; emphasis added).

Therefore, having been justified by *faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1; emphasis added).

¹⁶ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, rev. and augmented F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. *dia*, 180 (hereafter referred to as BAGD); Ellicott, *Ephesians*, 49; M. J. Harris, "Appendix," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 3:1189-90.

¹⁷ Robertson, *Grammar*, 582.

¹⁸ Although the object of faith is not mentioned here, Paul elsewhere writes that the Lord Jesus Christ is the object of faith (cf. Rom 3:24, 26; Gal 2:16).

¹⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 111.

²⁰ In Greek, the phrase "through faith in Jesus Christ" is *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou*. *Iēsou Christou* is the objective genitive. Jesus Christ is the *object* of faith. This is also the case in Rom 3:26 and Gal 2:16.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by *faith* in Jesus Christ, even we have *believed* in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by *faith* in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Gal 2:16; emphasis added).

And Luke records the words of Paul in Acts 16:31:

“*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved” (emphasis added).

Concerning faith, Eadie concludes:

But this grace does not operate immediately and universally. Its medium is faith . . . Salvation by grace is not arbitrarily attached to faith by the mere sovereign dictate of the Most High, for man’s willing acceptance of salvation is essential to his possession of it, and the operation of faith is just the sinner’s appreciation of the divine mercy, and his acquiescence in the goodness and wisdom of the plan of recovery . . . Justification by faith alone, is simply pardon enjoyed on the one condition of taking it.²¹

E. The Demonstrative Pronoun

The phrase *kai touto ouk ex hymōn* (“and this not of yourselves”) occurs next in the verse. *Kai touto* is interpreted most simply as “and this,” although it may be understood adverbially as “and at that,” “and especially,” “and that too,” or “and indeed.”²²

The demonstrative pronoun *touto* is the neuter singular nominative of *houtos*, “this.” Generally, a pronoun agrees with its antecedent in gender and number. In this sentence, neither *chariti* (“grace”) nor *pisteōs* (“faith”) satisfy this requirement since both nouns are feminine in gender.²³

A pronoun also may agree *ad sensum* (in meaning or sense) with the antecedent. If this is the case here, then the likely antecedent of *touto* is the nearest one, i.e., *pisteōs* (“faith”). In this view, even the

²¹ Eadie, *Ephesians*, 154.

²² BAGD, s.v. *houtos*, 597; BDF, 151; Robertson, *Grammar*, 1181-82; Turner, *Syntax*, 45.

²³ This, however, does not absolutely rule out the possibility of the neuter pronoun referring to a non-neuter antecedent. See Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 51; Salmond, “Ephesians,” 289.

faith of the Ephesians has its origin in God.²⁴ Hanse comments:

God does not merely give to both Jews and Gentiles the possibility of faith; He effects faith in them. Eph. 2:8 makes it especially plain that all is of grace and that human merit is completely ruled out. To understand the Pauline and then the Lutheran doctrine of justification it is essential to make it clear that faith is not a new human merit which replaces the merit of works, that it is not a second achievement which takes the place of the first, that it is not something which man has to show, but that justification by faith is an act of divine grace. Faith is not the presupposition of the grace of God. As a divine gift, it is the epitome and demonstration of the grace of God.²⁵

A major problem with this position concerns the grammar. If Paul wanted to refer to *pistis* ("faith"), he could have written the feminine *hautē*, instead of the neuter *touto*, and his meaning would have been clear. Why would he change the gender if he wanted to refer to *pistis*?²⁶

A neuter pronoun may also be used to refer to a phrase or summarize a thought. This seems to be the best solution in Ephesians 2:8. *Touto* refers back to the entire phrase *tē gar chariti este sesōsmenoi dia tēs pisteōs* ("for by grace you have been saved through faith"). Therefore, the whole salvation experience, which occurs by means of the grace of God when a person believes, is what is referred to by *kai touto ouk ex hymōn* ("and this not of yourselves").²⁷

²⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 69, 149; *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 172-73; Salmond, "Ephesians," 289. Eadie says this position is supported by Chrysostom, Theodoret, Jerome, Erasmus, Beza, Crocius, Cocceius, Grotius, Estius, Bengel, Meier, Baumgarten-Crusius, Bisping, and Hodge. See Eadie, *Ephesians*, 155. This is also the clearly expressed position of the Living Bible paraphrase.

²⁵ H. Hanse, s.v. "*langchanō*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 4:2.

²⁶ Eadie, *Ephesians*, 155.

²⁷ Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 290; John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, trans. by T. H. L. Parker, ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 144-45; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, abridged ed., edited by John F. Walvoord (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1988), 2:129; Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 219; Hoehner, "Ephesians," 624; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 112; Robertson, *Grammar*, 704, 1182; *Word Pictures*, 4: 525; Salmond, "Ephesians," 289.

This position is further supported by the parallelism between *ouk ex hymōn* ("and this not of yourselves") in 2:8 and *ouk ex ergōn* ("not of works") in 2:9. The latter phrase would not be meaningful if it referred to *pisteōs* ("faith"). Instead, it clearly means that salvation is "not of works." Therefore, these two clauses refer back to the introductory clause of 2:8 and the entire salvation experience.²⁸

The preposition *ex* in the phrase *ex hymōn* ("and this not of yourselves") denotes source.²⁹ As a whole, the phrase means "not as proceeding from yourselves or of your own performance" (italics in original).³⁰ God is the Originator of salvation, not man. Justification is not based on personal righteousness but on the righteousness of Christ: "And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil 3:9). Calvin summarizes:

First, he asserts that the salvation of the Ephesians was entirely the work, the free work, of God; but they had obtained this grace by faith. On one side, we must look at God; and, on the other, at men. God declares that He owes us nothing; so that salvation is not a reward or recompense, but mere grace. Now it may be asked how men receive the salvation offered to them by the hand of God? I reply, by faith. Hence he concludes that here is nothing of our own. If, on the part of God, it is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but faith, which strips us of all praise, it follows that salvation is not of us.³¹

F. The Gift of God

Since *touto* refers to the previous phrase *tē gar chariti este sesōsmenoi dia tēs pisteōs* ("for by grace you have been saved through faith"), *Theou to dōron* ("the gift of God") is salvation. God gives everlasting life, by grace, to the one who believes in Christ. *Theou* ("of God") is placed first here for emphasis and to create a contrast with *ouk ex hymōn* ("not of yourselves").³² Grace is not a gift, it is

²⁸ Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 3:94; Eadie, *Ephesians*, 155-57; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 112.

²⁹ Eadie, *Ephesians*, 155; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 112; Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4: 525. This could also be termed *origin* or *cause*.

³⁰ Salmond, "Ephesians," 289.

³¹ Calvin, *Ephesians*, 144.

³² Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 51; Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 94; Eadie, *Ephesians*, 156; Ellicott, *Ephesians*, 50; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 112.

the *basis* of the gift.³³ Faith is not a gift, it is the means by which the gift is received. Salvation is the gift. Hoehner writes: "This salvation does not have its source in man (it is 'not from yourselves'), but rather, its source is God's grace, for 'it is the gift of God.'"³⁴

Scripture does not seem to support the idea that faith is a gift from God. The Bible simply calls upon people to believe. One example is in Romans 4. Here Paul cites Abraham as one who was declared righteous by God on the basis of faith and not works (4:1-3). In verse five Paul writes, "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, *his faith* is accounted for righteousness" (emphasis added). The personal faith of the one who does not work but only believes is what results in justification. There is no intimation that this faith is anything other than his own personal faith.

Another example is in John 11. In verses 25-26, Jesus addresses Martha and says, "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?" In 11:27, Martha responds by saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." In the interplay of the words of Jesus and Martha there is not the slightest hint that her faith is anything but her own conviction concerning the words of Jesus. There is a simple response of "Yes . . . I believe" to a simple question, "Do you believe this?"

The fact that faith is a personal response on the part of people must be balanced with the fact that God is sovereign. The Bible clearly teaches that God convicts men of their need for salvation:

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven (Matt 16:17).³⁵

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up the last day (John 6:44).

Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father (John 6:65).

³³ As Hodges has said, "The *giving of a gift is an act* of 'grace,' but 'grace,' when viewed as a principle or basis of Divine action, is never said to be a 'gift' or part of a 'gift'" (italics in original). See Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 219.

³⁴ Hoehner, "Ephesians," 624.

³⁵ This is the response of Jesus to the declaration by Peter in Matt 16:16: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged (John 16: 8-11).

But as has been shown, the Bible also clearly *exhorts* individuals to believe. The fact that God convicts people of their need of a Savior and reveals to them the truth concerning Christ is not the same thing as saying that He gives them their faith. In commenting on Eph 2:8, Chafer writes:

The point in the verse is that salvation is by grace in its totality . . . Though it is true that faith on the part of an unsaved person would be impossible apart from divine help, it nevertheless is a human decision, however difficult it may be to separate the human work from the divine work. The problem with making faith a particular gift from God is that it removes from man any responsibility to believe and leaves it entirely in the hands of God. If this were true it would be useless to exhort men to believe inasmuch as they could not do so.³⁶

The relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man is an age-old question and one that is a paradox from a human point of view. God convicts people of their need to be justified. He discloses to them the truth of the person of Christ. But "the convicting work of the Spirit in itself does not assure salvation."³⁷ Individuals must believe. Ephesians 2:8 simply states that when a person believes in Jesus Christ, he receives the free gift of salvation. Eadie concludes:

Men are saved by grace . . . and that salvation which has its origin in grace is not won from God, nor is it wrung from Him; "His is the gift." Look at salvation in its origin—it is "by grace." Look at it in its reception—it is "through faith." Look at it in its manner of conferment—it is a "gift." For faith, though an indispensable instrument does not merit salvation as a reward; and grace operating only through faith, does not suit itself to congruous worth, nor single it out as its sole recipient. Salvation, in its broadest sense, is God's gift.³⁸

³⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:129.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:130.

³⁸ Eadie, *Ephesians*, 157.

IV. Conclusion

Ephesians 2:8 is a magnificent statement concerning the eternal salvation which is graciously provided by God through the medium of faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not a divine gift from God. Faith is a personal conviction which a person exercises when he or she encounters Jesus the Christ. The clear exhortation from Paul and the other NT writers is for people to believe. There is no biblical data to warrant the belief that faith itself is given by God. Robertson correctly concludes, "'Grace' is God's part, 'faith' ours."³⁹ God provides the free gift of salvation on the basis of His grace. People must receive the free gift of salvation by means of faith. Such is the clear and distinct message of Eph 2:8.

³⁹ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4: 525.

A Voice from the Past:
PAUL'S GOSPEL *

WILLIAM R. NEWELL †

There are two great *revelators*, or unfolders of Divine Truth in the Bible—Moses in the Old Testament, and Paul in the New.

Someone may say, "Is not Christ the Great Teacher?" In a sense this is true; but in a real sense Christ is the Person *taught about*, rather than teaching, in the *Gospels*. The law and the prophets pointed *forward* to Christ; the Epistles point *back* to Him; and the Book of Revelation points to His *second coming*, and those things connected with it. The Four Gospels tell the story how He was revealed to men, and rejected by them.¹ *Christ, Himself*, therefore is the *theme of the Bible*. Moses in the Law reveals God's holiness, and thus by means of the *Law* reveals human sin, and the utter hopelessness and helplessness of man. Paul in his great Epistles reveals Christ as our Righteousness, Sanctification, Redemption, and All in All.

* "This is a great tract," wrote Lewis Sperry Chafer, "a clear treatise on the truth of God for this age. The author was one of America's greatest Bible expositors. It glorifies the Savior as the author desired it to do. It should be distributed by hundreds of thousands." Ed.

† William Reed Newell (1868-1956), once the assistant superintendent of Moody Bible Institute, was an author, Bible teacher, and evangelist. D. L. Moody appointed him as teacher of weekly Bible classes in Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, and St. Louis, where he had a tremendous impact grounding believers in the Pauline Gospel of grace.

His *Romans Verse By Verse*, a 590-page commentary (1938), and *Hebrews Verse By Verse* (1947) are very valuable works.

The present sample illustrates Dr. James M. Gray's commendation: "Two things can be said of Mr. Newell without qualification. One is his soundness in the faith, and the other the plainness and the force with which he expresses the truth as it has been revealed to him" (dust jacket of *Romans Verse By Verse*).

Newell's writing also includes the much loved Gospel song "At Calvary" (see "A Gospel Song of Grace" in this issue). Ed.

¹ Christ, when on earth, did not "start anything." He said, in Matthew 16:18: "I will build My Church;" but He had not yet built it. He was a "minister of the circumcision" (Rom 15:8; Matt 15:24); and though He taught, it was to discover to men their helplessness, and lead them to rely on Him. Finally, all failed in Gethsemane. Then came the Cross and the end of all things human. Then the resurrection, and a *new beginning*.

The twelve Apostles (Matthias by Divine appointment taking the place of Judas) were to be the "witnesses" (Acts 1:22) of Christ's resurrection—that is, of the *fact* of it. They were not to unfold fully the doctrine of it, as Paul was. The twelve were with Jesus personally, and knew Him as a man; and when He died they *saw* it. When He was buried, they knew it personally, as eye-witnesses. And when He was raised, they found it out experimentally, visiting His actual tomb, and seeing that it was empty. They were also to see and handle the physical, risen body of our Lord. And it was with them that our Lord abode on earth forty days after His resurrection, "shewing Himself alive" (physically, in a body) "by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3).

This great fact—that is, that the Person that the Jews themselves well knew they had crucified and buried, was risen from the dead and ascended to heaven—this tremendous fact the twelve Apostles witnessed to Israel at Jerusalem, and everywhere else. Thus we find the opening chapters of the Book of Acts filled with the single testimony that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead; and that remission of sins was through Him.

But unto none of these twelve Apostles did God reveal *the great body of doctrine for this age*. Just as God chose Moses to be the revelator of Israel for the Ten Commandments, and all connected with the Law dispensation; so God chose Saul of Tarsus to be the revelator and unfold of those mighty *truths* connected with our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, and His ascended Person. And all the "mysteries" or "secrets" revealed to God's people in this dispensation by the Holy Ghost are revealed by Paul. Finally, Paul is the unfold of the great company of God's elect, called *the Church, the Body of Christ*, the individuals of which body are called *members* of the Body of Christ—members of Christ *Himself*.

No other Apostle speaks of these things. Peter himself had to learn them from Paul (2 Pet 3:15-16). When Paul finishes his thirteen great Epistles (Romans to Philemon), those which belong to the Church, God indeed permits him to give a message then to the *Hebrews*. This is not part of the Church's doctrine, but is simply explaining to Hebrew Christians the character, the real application, the typical meaning, of their Levitical system—that is, how it pointed forward to Christ.

James addresses his Epistle to "the twelve tribes"—that is, his Epistle has special reference to the Jewish Christians in the early days, and to such throughout the dispensation, for that matter. Peter writes to "the strangers who are sojourners of the Dispersion," that is, to the dispersed Jews who acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.

In the second of Galatians we are distinctly told by Paul, that James, Cephas and John were to go to the circumcision, while Paul tells us that his message was to the Gentiles. Since then the testimony by the Jewish Apostles to the Jews was duly given, there is now no distinction between Jews and Gentiles; and Paul's message holds good for the world, both Jews and Gentiles. So that we find Paul finally sets the Jewish nation aside in the last chapter of the Book of Acts, and opens his great Epistle to the Galatians at the center of the world with the statement that "there is no difference" between men; for "all have sinned;" and that there is again "no difference," for "*whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved;" since the same Lord is "Lord of *all*" (Rom 3:22-23 and Rom 10:12).

God does as He pleases, and it pleased Him to choose—first to save people in this dispensation through "the foolishness of preaching," or the "preached thing"—that is, through the message about the Cross, and what was done there (See 1 Cor 1:21). And second, it pleased Him to choose *Paul* to be the great proclaimer and revealer of *just what the Gospel* is for this dispensation.

You can judge any man's preaching or teaching by this rule—Is he *Pauline*? Does his doctrine start and finish according to those statements of Christian doctrine uttered by the Apostle Paul?

No matter how wonderful a man may seem in his gifts and apparent consecration—if his Gospel is not Pauline, it is not *the Gospel*; and we might as well get our minds settled at once as to that. Paul calls down the *anathema*—that is the *curse* of God Himself—upon anyone who preaches any other Gospel than that which he declared (Galatians 1).

Not for one moment are we to believe that James, Peter and John were at *variance* with Paul—not in the least. They were given certain things by the Spirit, to say to certain classes of people. They do not conflict with Paul. And their words are included in the statement that "All Scripture is profitable" (2 Tim 3:16).

But, nevertheless, Paul is the declarer and revealer of the Gospel to us. Take Romans to Philemon out of the Bible and you are bereft

of Christian doctrine. For instance, if you were to take Paul's Epistles out of the Bible, you cannot find anything about the Church, the Body of Christ, for no other Apostle mentions the Body of Christ. You cannot find one of the great mysteries, such as the Rapture of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Corinthians 15) or the mystery of the present hardening of Israel (Romans 11). No other Apostle speaks of any of those mysteries. Paul alone reveals them—the great doctrines such as Justification, Redemption, Sanctification. And what is perhaps the most tremendous fact of every real Christian's life, that of his *personal union* to the Lord in glory. Paul is the great divinely-chosen opener to us of truth for this age.

The great doctrines that Paul reveals may be outlined as follows—

1. The *unrighteousness before God* of all men.
2. The *impossibility of justification by works* before God—that is, of any man's attaining a standing of righteousness before God, by anything done by him. Do what a man may, he is a condemned sinner still.
3. The fact and the scripturalness of *righteousness on the free gift principle*—that is, of a Divine righteousness, separate from all man's doings, conferred upon man as a free gift from God.
4. *Propitiation*. That satisfaction of God's Holy nature and law for man's sins rendered by Christ's blood.
5. *Reconciliation*. The removal, by Christ's death for man, of that obstacle to righteousness which man's sin had set up between God and man.
6. The plan of *the actual conferring of the gift of righteousness upon all who believe*, without any distinction. This change of a sinner's standing before God, from one of condemnation to one of righteousness, is called *Justification*. *Negatively*, it is deliverance from guilt on account of Christ's shed blood, and deliverance out of the old creation, by identification in death *with* Christ on the Cross. *Positively*, it is a new standing in the risen Christ before God.
7. *Redemption*. The buying back of the soul through the blood of Christ from sin; from the curse of the law—even death, involving exclusion from God, under penalty; from the "power of death," which involves the hand of the enemy; and from all iniquity.
8. *Forgiveness*. The going forth of Divine tenderness in remitting penalty for sin, in view of the blood of Christ trusted in; and in com-

placency and fellowship, to creatures who before were necessarily under Divine judgment.

9. *Remission of sins*. That is, the actual removing of transgressions or trespasses from the sinner, so that for all time and eternity his sins shall not again be upon him.

10. *Identification* (see above, Justification). The great fact that those who are in Christ *were united* with Him at the Cross, by God's overreign inscrutable act; were crucified with Christ and buried with Him; so that their history is now ended before God; and when Christ was raised up as the First-born of the new creation, they also were raised up with Him, and their history began as new creatures in God's sight, in Christ, the Last Adam.

Of course, in the experience of the Christian, there comes a time when he is actually made partaker of this new life—that point of time when he is, as we say, saved, or converted, or born again, etc. Nevertheless, the life that is in every Christian came up out of the tomb, and it is in *Christ Jesus* that a man is created anew.

11. *Incorporation*. This tremendous doctrine Paul alone mentions, and he makes it practically the foundation of all his exhortations to the saints with regard to their conduct and life. By "incorporation" we mean the fact that all those who are really saved and are new creatures in Christ Jesus become members of one organism, which is more real than the very earth we tread upon, called "the Body of Christ"—Christ Himself in heaven being the Head of this Body, and every real Christian a member of it. So that believers are thus members of Christ in heaven, and also members one of another here on earth. No wonder Paul is able to exhort the saints to love one another when they are members one of another! (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4).

12. *Inhabitation*. The wonderful fact that the Body of Christ and each member of it *individually* is inhabited, indwelt, by the Holy Ghost Himself, and not only so, but that the Church is being "built together" as a great temple of God so that in the future God's actual eternal *dwelling place* will be this wonderful, mysterious company built into a building called "a holy habitation of God in the Spirit."

This mystery is a great and marvelous one, the fact that we are saved, are partakers now of the life of the Lord in glory, that the Holy Spirit indwells us.

13. *Divine Exhibition.* That is, that through the Church, in the ages to come, is to be made known that which God counts His "riches," even His Grace (Eph 2:7; 3:10).

The failure or refusal to discern the Pauline Gospel as a separate and new revelation and not a "development from Judaism," accounts for two-thirds of the confusion in many people's minds today as regards just what the Gospel is. Paul's Gospel will suffer no admixture with works on the one hand or religious pretensions and performances on the other. It is as simple and clear as the sunlight from heaven. The end of *man* is where God *begins* in Romans 3, at what might be called the opening of the Pauline Revelation. Most unsaved people today believe in their hearts that the reason they are not saved is because of something they have not yet done, some step that remains for them to take before God will accept them. But this is *absolutely untrue*. When Christ said, "It is finished," He meant that He had, then and there, paid the debt for the *whole* human race. "He gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:6).

Now Paul in his wonderful revelation declares that God *has* reconciled the world to Himself; that God was in Christ (at the Cross) reconciling *the world* to Himself; (2 Cor 5:19). Men do not know this, but they conceive that something stands between them and God, before God will accept or forgive them. If you tell a man that God is demanding no good works of him whatsoever, no religious observances or church ordinances, that God is *not asking* him to undertake any duties at all, but that God invites him to believe a *glad message* that his sins have *already been dealt with* at the Cross, and that God expects him to believe this good news and be exceedingly happy about it—if you tell an unsaved man such a story as this, he is astonished and overwhelmed—yet this is the *Gospel!*

Would that we had grace just as vigorously to defend his great message today, whether from its enemies or its real friends who do not see it clearly as yet; or who, like Peter (Galatians 2), through fear of others, are ready to compromise and tone down the Gospel of God.

HOW TO SHARE THE GOSPEL CLEARLY

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Once, when I was invited to preach at an evangelistic rally in Dallas, the organizing pastor introduced me to a dear woman before the meeting. He had talked with her previously, but remained unsure whether she was saved or not. He left me alone with her, so I asked some “diagnostic” questions to find out for myself. I concluded that she did not really understand the Gospel, so I explained it to her as clearly as I could, then led her to place her faith in Christ.

When we returned to the pastor to tell him the good news, she instead pointed her finger in his face and in an accusing voice rebuked him, “Why didn’t you explain it clearly to me? You never made it clear!” (No evidential fruit of the Spirit at this point!) It is hard to say who was embarrassed more—I or the pastor who had just graduated from seminary as a “Master of Theology!”

Academic credentials are no guarantee of clarity in communication. Sometimes it seems seminary degrees uniquely qualify a person to make a simple message confusing or complicated—anything but clear. One could even say that seminary grads become more obscure *by degrees*! Telling the Gospel clearly can be an exercise in art as much as in academics. Preachers and speakers of any kind are word artisans. A speaker shapes a message by the language and methods he uses.

In Col 4:4 Paul asked for prayer to make his Gospel telling “*manifest*, as I ought to speak.” The NASB and NIV translations prefer the word *clear* or *clearly*. F. F. Bruce translates it this way: “that I may publish it openly in the words which I ought to speak.”¹ Paul understood that it was easy to garble the Gospel. He wanted to word

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians and Colossians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 298.

it clearly. The word he used, *phaneroō*, has the idea of “to make visible” and is from *phainō* which means “to manifest” or “to light up.”² The job of the Gospel-teller is to shed light on the message, to make it clear, not to obscure it.

How important is it to tell the Gospel clearly? Well, we only need to think about what is at stake. Only in the Gospel is there the “power of God to salvation” (Rom 1:16). No wonder Paul had an “anathema” for those who misstate the message!

The main assumption behind this article is this: God can use us to reach more people with a clear message than with a cloudy one. A clear presentation of the Gospel is not only more powerful, it also gets people off to a well-grounded start in their Christian walk. They will begin with a firm assurance and appreciation of their new salvation. Below are four essential elements that make for a clear Gospel witness.

I. A Clear Motive

A compromise in integrity will likely tilt the telling of the Gospel. For example, one who is looking for bragging rights about his evangelistic prowess, or one who sweats his monthly field report on the number of conversions, may be tempted to take a shortcut with the Gospel message.

Once I was presenting the Gospel as clearly as I could to about twenty Cambodian refugees. At the end of our time, I invited all who would like to trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior to raise their hands. Everyone’s hand went up! Though it would have made a good story, I never assumed this was a mass conversion. There were too many unknowns: The language barrier made me wonder if they understood my words. (I was speaking through a translator.) The religious barrier made me doubt they really understood concepts like sin and faith. (Most of them were Buddhist.) The cultural barrier made me wonder if they were not just being polite. (Asians are extremely polite, especially to teachers.) The social barrier had me wondering if they only wanted to please me because they saw me as a way to get some-

² *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged in one volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 1244-45.

thing more in life (money, a job, etc.). The headlines in my newsletter, “A Miraculous Movement of the Spirit on Refugees,” would have to wait.

How did the apostle Paul handle the temptation to take shortcuts in sharing the Gospel for personal gain, or so that he could impress others, or get quick results? In 2 Cor 4:1-6 Paul states his approach to telling the Gospel, first negatively and then positively.

A. Negatively Speaking

Note Paul’s negative terms first in v 2. He renounces “the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully.” He refuses to adopt questionable or shady practices which would bring shame if exposed. He would not use a convenient device or trick to achieve an end. He would not distort, dilute, compromise, adulterate, or falsify God’s message. Paul would never manipulate or pressure people into a profession of faith.

When I was an unchurched teenager, some friends and I went to an all-you-can-eat pizza bash at a local church. As we approached the church entrance, I asked an usher where we could find the pizza. He told us we would have to listen to the evangelist preach first. We looked at each other. Well, if that’s what it took to get pizza, okay. We sat down and listened.

At the end of his message, the evangelist asked all those who were not sure they were going to heaven to raise their hands. I raised my hand, but was determined to do nothing else. But he kept on, and before long we were all standing in place. Then, after we reached the point of no return (and imminent public embarrassment if we sat back down), he got us all to walk down the long church aisle to the front. We had been trapped like tuna in a net—but like dolphins, we didn’t belong! At least we knew we would have the last laugh—we would get their pizza, even if it was a bit cold!

We may have made that evangelist look successful, and we may have been statistics in his newsletter, but I, for one, was not saved. Deceptive or even questionable tactics have no place in sharing the Good News.

Improper motives may muddy the message and methods of telling the Gospel. Below are some unacceptable practices that can grow from wrong motives.

1. Deceitful Practices

Deceptive manipulation, such as I just illustrated, is unethical. No one should be tricked into hearing or responding to the Gospel. A minister friend told me how before he was saved he was invited to a luncheon to hear a well-known businessman speak, only to find that the man preached the Gospel. He was furious and had to sit on his hands during the car trip back to work so that he wouldn't deck his friend who invited him!

2. Dubious Practices

Some methods Christians have adopted are not clearly deceptive, but questionable. Invitations to walk an aisle are not necessarily manipulative—it all depends on how the invitation is stated. A "Friend Day" at church can be a good activity for the church and your friends if they know what they are in for when they get there. By the way, could the door-to-door "surveys" conducted by Christians be more accurately named?

3. False Promises

We must also be careful of making false promises of a trouble-free life for those who would trust in Christ. When people get saved, their marriage may not also be saved, their daughter may still want to get her nose pierced, and the IRS *will* still want their money.

When I was in India recently, a pastor friend told me that with Hindus they do not use the promise of an improved family as a reason to become a Christian. The Hindu family is strong, and divorce is not a big problem. Besides, it is the *Christians* (who usually hold "Western" values) who have the weaker families in India. The pastor said that their appeal in telling the Gospel is the promise of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. How novel!

4. Sensual Appeal

The Children of God cult used to urge their followers to proselytize through "Flirty Fishing." Attractive young ladies would lure naive young men to their religious meetings with the impression that punch and cookies was not the main dish afterward. This is an extreme example of a sensual method. But is it so very different from luring people to Christ through the hope of finding a Christian husband or wife, or the promise of financial prosperity or physical healing?

Jesus could get a crowd by handing out free fish sandwiches, but He later chased them away by telling them, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life” (John 6:27). Missionaries warn of “Rice Christians,” those who profess conversion in hopes of obtaining more of the missionaries’ supplies.

5. Trivialized Pursuits

A free dinner for two awarded to the visitation team with the most conversions will likely compromise the message or the methods they use. One friend, who used to be with a para-church organization, told how the pressure to share the Gospel with others was so great he often only shared a brief watered-down word so that he could list the person on his statistics sheet. Once he witnessed to a potted plant and recorded “her” as “Fern”!

I am aware that Gospel blimps and placards with “John 3:16” at football games *may* have a place in God’s big world. I also remind myself of evangelist D. L. Moody’s words to someone who criticized his methods of evangelism. He told him, “I like the way I’m doing it better than the way you’re *not* doing it!” But I question the effectiveness of methods that handle the Good News flippantly. The Gospel deserves more than a game-show approach if others are to take us and it seriously.

B. Positively Speaking

Paul disdains all unworthy tactics. Instead, in 2 Cor 4:2 he states positively that he preaches “by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” The word *manifestation* is derived from our word *phaneroō* again. Paul preached clearly, openly, and honestly even when discouraging circumstances tempted him to get fast results. The result of his ministry was that “every man’s conscience”—whether saved or unsaved—commended him for his honesty, and more importantly, so did God.

I once overheard two seminary students discussing a Scripture passage. One said, “I don’t think that’s what the passage is saying.” The other replied, “Yeah, but it’ll preach!” Our standards must be higher than “It’ll preach.” We must only say what God says and in the way He would say it.

In a ministry of light, there is no room for darkness. Paul reminds us that a dark, demonic veil blinds unbelievers (vv 3-4). It is penetrated only by "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." Dark motives and methods cannot penetrate or disperse the darkness. That is why Paul says "we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord" (v 5). His preaching did not call attention to himself, like the "super apostles" who were subverting his reputation in Corinth (11:5). He lifted up Jesus Christ as the One who died for sins, rose from the dead, and now reigns as Lord.

It is significant that Paul uses the word *kēryssō* for "preach." In the ancient world, one who proclaimed in this sense was called a *kēryx*, or "herald." A herald was someone sent by his master to proclaim in public the master's message. He dared not change the announcement because it was not his own. His responsibility was only to proclaim it accurately. That is how Paul understood his Gospel ministry. He was merely a servant proclaiming his Master's Good News. The herald should be lost in his message. Only the Gospel of light dispels darkness and brings new life. That's how Paul got saved (v 6), and that's how we get saved.

The acid test of a true witness is what he does when no one responds. It is a test of integrity. Skewed motives will skew integrity by a compromise in the message or the methods of telling the Good News.

At the end of my meeting with the Cambodian group, I left them with an assurance of my love and my desire to see them come to know the Lord Jesus as their Savior. Their last words to me came through the translator in his rough English: "They say, 'Thank you for *advertising* Jesus Christ to us.'" I doubt that any of those people even remember my name today, but I trust some of them know Jesus Christ. We advertise Him.

It is a great privilege to be a herald of the Gospel. But we must remember that the greatest thing about preaching the Gospel is the *Gospel*, not the preacher!

II. A Clear Content

What does a person have to believe in to be saved? I have heard everything from "Believe in God" and "the Ten Commandments"

(or “the Sermon on the Mount”) to “Just believe that Jesus loves you.” What is the content of the Gospel and how can we articulate it clearly?

A. Defining the Content

Most of our readers should not need a review of the Gospel’s content. It is laid out no more clearly than by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul reminds the Corinthians about the Gospel that he preached, that they received, and by which they were saved (vv 1-2). The message was the one Paul received personally from God (v 3; cf. Gal 1:11-12).

In vv 4-5 we find two great propositions of the Gospel and their supporting evidence. We could diagram the verses like this:

Christ died for our sins	1) First proposition
according to the Scriptures	1a) Scriptural proof
and was buried	1b) Physical proof
He arose	2) Second proposition
according to the Scriptures	2a) Scriptural proof
and was seen	2b) Physical proof

In summoning the evidence for his propositions, Paul is arguing his case like any good lawyer (the possible oxymoron noted!). A brief explanation of each of the statements follows:

Christ died for our sins. The concept of “Christ” may not have been entirely understood by the Corinthian readers, but the meaning of “anointed” and His work of dying for sins certainly points to a special divine messenger. That He died for our sins implies that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. The word “for” (*hyper*) conveys the idea of “on account of,” i.e., to deal with our sins.

According to the Scriptures. The OT Scriptures pictured or predicted the suffering of God’s Messiah (e.g., Exodus 12; Leviticus 16; Psalm 22, 110; Isaiah 52-55, especially 53:4-6).

And was buried. This statement functions as Jesus’ death certificate. It reminds the reader of the many eyewitnesses to His death, the best evidence which could be summoned. Only *dead* men are buried. Christ’s death was witnessed by multitudes, including the soldier sent to break His legs. The grave and body were also attended by Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the women.

He arose. The second proposition attests to Christ's resurrection from the dead, which implies that God accepted the sacrifice. A dead man cannot save anyone. A Savior has to be alive. Only then can He offer and effect salvation.

According to the Scriptures. It is harder to find the resurrection of Christ in the OT. However it is there not only explicitly (e.g., Ps 16:8-11; 110:1), but also implicitly. When the suffering and death of the Messiah is discussed, this is often followed by a declaration of His reign (cf. Isaiah 53). The implication is clearly that He rose from the dead.

And was seen. Paul lists those who were eyewitnesses. This included the apostles (men of repute), a multitude of five hundred, and himself (vv 5-8).

B. Communicating the Content

Having reviewed the biblical content of the Gospel, what errors do Christians commonly make in articulating its contents? The art here is discerning how much to say. We can say too little or too much.

1. Saying Too Little

People can be told that God loves them, but certainly that is not enough to save them. They can be convinced they are terrible sinners, but still not know how to deal with that sin (cf. Acts 2:36-37). A persuasive speaker can move people to some kind of response without them knowing exactly what they are responding to. Evangelists know this. Some abuse this. Much so-called "evangelism" is more hype than substance. No wonder there are so many false professors in the church! They are the fodder that feeds the Lordship Salvation teaching.

2. Saying Too Much

A witness is not the time to dump our "smarties" on a bewildered unbeliever. There are at least two ways Christians frequently do this.

A Bible survey. Too often we try to give too much biblical data. If we start in Genesis, there's a good chance we will lose our audience by Leviticus, the Bermuda Triangle of the Bible. How much Bible did Jesus use with the woman at the well (John 4), or Paul with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16)? We can tell people only what they need

to know from the Bible to be saved, unless circumstances require more explanation.³

A crash course in Theology 101. I recently asked a missionary candidate with seminary training to tell me how he explains the Gospel to someone. I expected a brief outline of his main points. Instead, he took a deep breath and submerged into profound meditation for a good part of a minute. When he surfaced, he began a deep theological explanation of the sinfulness of man. I interrupted him, because I feel I have endured my share of boring lectures.

Lessons in theology work best with *Christians*. That is why Paul wrote the heavily theological Epistle to the Romans to Christians. But in 1 Cor 15:1-6 he reminds the readers of what he preached to them as *non-Christians*. Secular Sam does not need to know the definition of *justification* in order to be justified. He does not need to understand the *Abrahamic covenant* to become a son of Abraham. Neither does he need to comprehend the *ordo salutis* to be saved in that order. *Melchizedek* will be a fascinating study for Sam—*after* he is saved.

Again, we appeal to Jesus' example in the Gospels. Isn't it beautiful that God made the Gospel so simple that a child can understand it? Yet it is so simple that millions miss it. Still, keep it simple!

III. A Clear Condition

Just when I had talked myself into the benefit of becoming involved with my community's ministerial alliance, they decided to launch a community-wide evangelistic survey. A smorgasbord subcommittee of pastors designed the evangelistic tract that would be handed out door to door. To be thorough, I guess, the tract covered all the bases. It spoke of believing in Jesus as Savior (Amen!), but went on to tell the poor chap at the door (who was probably dying to get back

³ Having said all that, we state an important caveat: It does no good to talk about concepts like sin unless our audience has an idea of what it means. We must be careful not to assume too much biblical background for our audience. Paul started his witness with creation in Athens (Acts 17). When in a remote African fishing village, I also found it necessary to begin my witness with the account of creation and the fall of man. Our society is growing increasingly secular and will need more and more explanation, but usually we give too much anyway.

to his television ASAP) that he must *confess his sins, call on the name of the Lord, open the door of his heart, receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, and let Him take control of the throne of his life*. It's not that all of this language is unbiblical (though most of it is), but it is so *confusing*. Since the alliance would not let our church use different literature, I had to drop out of my first foray into cooperative evangelism. The reverends were miffed. Maybe I will check in on them again in a year or so when they calm down.

We will save ink by affirming to our readers that the only condition of salvation is "faith alone in Christ alone." But this is where much Gospel telling takes a space-walk. Let's review some language commonly used to explain the condition of salvation.

Ask Jesus into your heart. Not that the heart is not universally understood as the very essence of our being and person. But the issue of trust in Jesus as the One who died in our place is hardly communicated. And wouldn't this be confusing to a child who thinks concretely instead of abstractly?

As a mother drove with her young daughter in the car, she was explaining what it meant to have Jesus in her heart. The little girl leaned over and put her ear to her mother's chest. "I'm listening to Jesus in your heart," said the daughter. "What did you hear?" asked Mom. The little girl replied, "Sounds to me like He's making coffee!"⁴

Give your heart (or life) to God. A Halloween gospel tract designed for children to leave at homes when trick or treating ends, "Well, thanks again for the treat, but the best treat for me would be for you to give your heart to Jesus."⁵ How appropriate this could be for Halloween! A child might imagine this as a gruesome display for the local haunted house. Again, picture the scene conveyed to a naive child. When asked to give his heart to God, one child broke into sobs saying, "If I give my heart to God, how am I going to live?"⁶ The issue in salvation is not what we give to Him anyway, *but what He gives to us*. Eternal life is Christ's life in us (1 John 5:11).

⁴ James Dobson told this story on his March 1, 1994 broadcast.

⁵ "Thanks for the Treat," Faith, Prayer, & Tract League (Grand Rapids).

⁶ Larry Moyer, "Guiding Children to Trust Christ," *Moody Monthly* (December 1987): 42.

Invite Christ into your life. This is certainly a courteous approach, but we must remember that it is the Lord who does the inviting. Another form of this is the admonition to “open the door of your heart,” based on Rev 3:20. Though I used to use this verse a lot, I now see that it was written to the Laodicean church as a whole and was more of an invitation for fellowship than salvation. Again, after you get a child to stop wondering where the knob on the door of his heart is, you have really told him nothing about what it means to believe in Christ. Adults are not helped either.

Receive Christ as your Savior. This one I hesitate to criticize and even find myself using it sometimes, though I try to avoid it. There is some biblical support for the idea of receiving Christ—John 1:11-12 and Col 2:6. Both uses are in the past tense, pointing to the result of faith, however. Receiving Christ is what happens when we believe and He comes to live in us.⁷ *Accept Christ* is similar, but not used for faith in Christ in the NT.

Make Christ Lord and Savior. Spare the effort. No person can do this. The Bible says *God the Father* “has made this Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Of course Jesus is Lord! But He is Lord whether we accept Him as such or not.

Make Christ Lord of your life. This is Lordship Salvation when used as a condition for salvation. Lordship decisions are decisions for Christian obedience made by believers in the light of transforming grace (Titus 2:11-12), not something done *to merit* that grace (Titus 3:4-7). Sometimes we hear “If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.” Would somebody please tell me what this saying means?

Put Jesus on the throne of your life. In other words, give Him control of all areas of your life. Has anyone accomplished this? It is a commendable admonition for a believer, but again teaches Lordship Salvation if it is made a condition for salvation. It is better to deal with this issue after a person understands the issue of faith in Christ for salvation. I know, however, that some people believe in Christ as Savior and surrender to Him as Lord simultaneously. They inherently understand that if Christ saves us, He also deserves to rule us and both decisions appear as one. Still, the issues are distinct.

⁷Note how the immediate context of each passage refers to faith as the condition of salvation.

Confess your sins. To a priest? How many sins? What about ones that are overlooked, forgotten, unintentional, or by omission? This is confusing. Of course, we must all acknowledge that we are sinners before God, and we confess this to Him when we agree with Him that we are.⁸ We are saved *from something*, and that is our sin. But the above statement implies our problem is specific individual acts rather than our sinful position or nature. God wants to cure the cause, not the symptoms.

Repent of your sins. Sometimes less sensitively stated as "Turn or burn!" If by this it is meant that we must turn from every individual sin in our lives, then salvation and assurance would be impossible. Repentance in the NT speaks of an inner change of attitude and heart, not an outer change in conduct. Changed conduct is the expected result of true repentance, but we should not confuse the root with the fruit. As we come to faith we may change our minds about a number of things, for example, our sinful status before God, our need for salvation, or our opinion of who Christ is.

Pray this prayer. I have a pamphlet entitled "God's Anointed Soul-Winning Plan" in which the author is explaining how to present the Gospel. The wording he suggests ends like this:

What I'm going to do toward closing our talk is to say a prayer. And as I say this prayer you can repeat it softly and He'll come into your heart—but you have to REALLY MEAN it or the prayer won't work.

Before we pray the prayer I want to say this, this prayer we are about to pray is a *special* prayer. Do you need to pray this prayer EVERY DAY to go to heaven, or just ONCE to go to heaven? (emphasis his).⁹

I am not making this up. Believe me, you don't want to see the prayer.

We should not give someone the impression that they can be saved by a ritual such as prayer. It is better to tell them that they must believe in Christ, and they can tell Him *through* prayer that they want the gift of eternal life or that they are thankful for what He has done.

⁸The word translated "confess" is *homologeō*, which means "to speak the same thing," thus "to agree with (some person with reference to something)." See Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1944-55), 1:177-78.

⁹Larry Beckmann, "God's Anointed Soul-Winning Plan," Baldwin Park, CA: n.p., 1982.

Not all of the above conditions are totally void of all truth. The point is that they are often misleading or confusing. Why not be as biblical as possible in our communication of the condition for salvation? In the Gospel of John the verb *believe* is used ninety-eight times as the condition for salvation. We should take the hint, especially when the Holy Spirit had John tip us off that he wrote his book in order to bring people to faith in Christ (John 20:31). We don't find any of the above language there.¹⁰

IV. A Clear Invitation

A minister acquaintance told me an *almost* humorous story of his conversion. When he was a totally pagan, long-haired bartender and bouncer, he attended a revival and went forward at the evangelist's invitation. When he got to the front, the host pastor met him and asked, "Do you come to make a profession of faith in Christ?" Bill looked confused. The pastor asked several times. Bill finally said, "Look, I don't know what you're talking about. I just want Jesus." He told me if it had not been for the evangelist's clarity in the sermon, he would not have found Christ up front with the pastor. As one of my seminary professors, Howard Hendricks, was fond of saying, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew."

A clear telling of the Gospel can easily become unclear when the invitation is given. Whether it is an invitation in a one-on-one encounter or a public invitation by a preacher, there are certain things that will keep it clear. Let's look at some of the common invitations and comment on each.

Come forward. The invitation to come down the church aisle is used by many preachers, though criticized by others—sometimes rightly so.¹¹ It *has* only been around since the 1800's. Some people will quickly respond to such a public expression, and others would rather go through an IRS audit before they would stand up in front of a crowd. In spite of 18 verses of "Just As I Am," *they* are singing to themselves, "I Shall Not Be Moved"!

Walking the aisle is not harmful if the person clearly understands the issue. We probably all know someone who came to faith in this

¹⁰ Except, as noted above, the mention of receiving Christ in 1:11-12.

¹¹ See my review of Jim Ehrhard's article in the periodical review section of this issue.

way. But people should never be led to believe that they *must* walk an aisle in order to be saved—even if the preacher's ego *is* at stake. They should be encouraged to walk an aisle if they want to talk to someone about their salvation or if they want to make a public statement that they have trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior during the meeting.

Bow your heads and close your eyes. (Not, *Close your heads and bow your eyes*, as one hapless preacher stated it!) Why must Christians always get saved with their eyes closed? In a séance opening the eyes might break the spell, but in a Gospel confrontation faith can appear with eyes wide open. Funny, but Jesus was always *opening* people's eyes! On the serious side, closed eyes and bowed heads can create a safe, confidential, and prayerful environment for those who may want to respond publicly.

Raise your hand. Again, we must avoid implying that a physical act is necessary. However, raising a hand is less threatening to a person than walking an aisle. It may give the preacher more opportunity to identify those who are interested in salvation. In fact, I ask people to raise their hands in my invitation, because I want to follow-up with them. I will often tell them something like this:

You don't have to bow your head or raise your hand to be saved. You can believe in Jesus Christ with your eyes wide open while you are looking at me. I would just like to know that you have placed your faith in Christ as your Savior or that you want to know more about that. The only way I can know who you are, so I can speak with you later in private, is if you raise your hand. I really would like to talk to you about it.

Sign a card. This is also non-threatening to many people, even though a few may have fearful visions of a three-person Evangelism Explosion team ambling up their sidewalk later in the week. It is often wise to ask this only if *all* the people present at the meeting fill out cards. This makes people feel less conspicuous. A card could include these categories to check:

- ☐ I have trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior today.
- ☐ I want more information about knowing Jesus Christ as Savior.
- ☐ I want to know for certain that I have eternal life.
- ☐ I want to speak to someone about my salvation.

Pray a prayer. An invitation involving prayer *can* be handled correctly. The Gospel teller must be careful to make the issue faith. When inviting people to Christ, I explain how it is that Christ saves us through faith, make sure they understand the issues, then ask, "Do you believe this?" If they say "Yes," I say, "Then why don't you thank Him right now in prayer for dying for you and for giving you eternal life?"

It may not be possible to validate a public invitation from the Scriptures. But then we could not validate Gospel tracts and evangelism training classes either. Sharing the Good News implies an invitation to believe, and giving a clear invitation may help many to actually do it. The main point in relation to the invitation is that in no way do we want a person to get faith mixed up with works. If we have told someone that salvation is a free gift, then we must be consistent and not demand any action as a condition. In fact, when someone decides to respond to any kind of invitation, it seems logical that he or she is already trusting in Christ and just desires to express it somehow. An invitation gives people an opportunity to tell others about their faith, something they should be doing the rest of their lives. Such an expression can help affirm them in their faith.

V. Conclusion

Clear communication is an art. When it comes to telling the Gospel it is an art worth refining. We must work to tell the Gospel as clearly as possible. Not always will we succeed. But isn't it a wonderful fact of life that God can still use us in spite of the misplaced approaches and methods that we use? We know, however, that He can accomplish more through us according to how clear and biblical our message and our methods are. And that means that we are clear in our motives, in our Gospel content, in our statement of the condition for salvation, and in our invitation to believe. Given all that is at stake, we want to share the Good News as clearly as possible in a way that is pleasing to God, not just convenient to men.

We give the last word to the Bible:

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

(1 Thess 2:4)

BOOK REVIEWS

What Was God Doing on the Cross? By Alister E. McGrath. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992. 123 pp. Paper, \$7.99.

What religious organization in its right mind would choose a noose or an electric chair as its logo? Symbols are crucial to people's perception of what something stands for. The British Labour party, our author points out, was clever to change its logo from a red flag (cf. Mayday in Moscow) to a red *rose* (veddy English!). Some have suggested that Christianity would be smart to drop the cross as its symbol and get a more "user-friendly" logo.

McGrath, a lecturer in Christian doctrine at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford (where W. H. Griffith Thomas taught before coming to Canada and USA to lecture), believes in the power of Christ's cross and literal resurrection. He is seeking in this well-written little paperback (complete with a cover featuring Salvador Dali's famous painting of the crucifixion viewed from *above*) to reach the masses, who have no idea about theories of the atonement.

He starts from scratch, uses modern, relevant illustrations, and a few well-chosen quotations from Luther, Calvin, C. S. Lewis, et al.

Christ's victory on Calvary and at Easter is pictured as a battlefield, a court of law, a rehabilitation clinic, release from prison, and healing in a hospital.

How does one get to benefit from this work of Christ? By faith, which McGrath sees as an open hand and an open mouth to receive salvation as a gift. "The gospel constantly stresses that everything which we could never achieve or ever hope to purchase is offered to us freely. That is what grace is all about—the graciousness of God in giving us things we do not deserve and dared not hope for" (p. 102).

McGrath defines faith as believing *that* something is true, trusting in it, and receiving Christ. He does not speak of commitment, works, or the usual Lordship Salvation terms. He does compare faith to having a relationship with our Lord not unlike marriage (cf. Paul and Luther).

Does McGrath think we should change Christianity's logo from the cross—which some see as a symbol of death and suffering only?

No, he ends his book with these words: "A symbol of hope in the midst of a world of death and suffering? *Yes!* A symbol of a God who is with us in this dark world, and beyond? *Yes!* In short, the cross stands for a hope that is for real, in a world that is for real. But that world will pass away, while that hope will remain for eternity" (p. 118).

We agree: Christ's cross is not merely a logo; it is the central fact of our faith.

Arthur L. Farstad

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Dallas, TX

Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom. By Samuel Fisk. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1973. 175 pp. Paper, \$5.99.

"Brethren, be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth. Rise above the babyhood which cannot believe two doctrines until it sees the connecting link. Have you not two eyes, man? Must you needs put one of them out in order to see clearly?"

These words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon printed on the back of this volume stress the attempt to reconcile the two apparent opposites in the book's title.

Samuel Fisk says that he generally tried to avoid quoting "works of an Arminian nature, or those which might naturally be regarded as anti-Calvinistic." The book is largely made up of quotations from well-known evangelical leaders of the past and present (especially Baptists), many of whom reject both usual Arminian and Calvinistic views. These include such names as Alford, Broadus, Gaebelien, Godet, Hobbs, Ironside, Lightner, Meyer, Moody, Orr, A. T. Robertson, Scofield, Spurgeon, Truett, Griffith Thomas, Vine, and many more.

Neither Arminians nor Calvinists will be thrilled with the contents of this book (mostly quotations), and the explanation of "election" certainly seems closer to the former than to the latter. Ironside is

quoted: "D. L. Moody used to put it very simply: 'The elect are the "whosoever wills"; the non-elect are the "whosoever won'ts." This is exactly what Scripture teaches . . . Remember, we are never told that Christ died for the elect" (pp. 46-47).

No matter what your view, this inexpensive little volume is worth having, if only for its wide palette of colorful quotations, bibliography, acknowledgments, and two indices.

Arthur L. Farstad

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Dallas, TX

Why We Left Mormonism: Eight People Tell Their Stories. By Latayne C. Scott. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990. 166 pp. Paper, \$7.99.

Conservative Republicans with "family values"; neat teenage "elders" with white shirts and dark trousers going door to door; a world-class choir—these are the images that Mormonism evokes for many. Historically-minded readers will think of the Westward trek to Utah—and the reason: polygamy.

This aggressively "evangelistic" religion is one of salvation by works with a vengeance. Character, performance, good deeds, human merit, even building towards potential "godhood" are Mormonism's hallmarks.

This is not a hateful book but one filled with testimonies of ex-Mormons that includes a former BYU scholarship student, a bishop, a great granddaughter of Brigham Young (one of many—he had 27 wives!), and a self-styled "super-Mormon." This constitutes Part One. Their stories are varied, convincing, and centered on coming to believe in the *real* Jesus, though the new church connections are varied, and not all ones that GES members might choose.

Since Mormonism is a community religion, it is very hard to resist the pressure to stay in it, even for those who no longer believe.

Part Two is well described as "Identifying Factors Involved in Leaving Mormonism and Effective Nurture of Ex-Mormons." A weekly meeting or two at a church is not enough to keep most former

"Latter-day Saints" going. They need special love and encouragement. The eight "Latter-day Saints" of Part One, who are now, to use Dr. Ironside's phrase, "Former-day Saints," tell specifically what techniques Christians have used that affected them, including approaches that proved to be counter-productive.

Being a conservative family-oriented person is nice, but it won't save a person from hell (which Mormonism has reduced to a very rare possibility for most).

The *Bookstore Journal* rightly labels this little paperback as "an excellent resource for Christians who want to know how to help Mormons."

Arthur L. Farstad

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Dallas, TX

Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World.

By John F. MacArthur, Jr. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993. 254 pp. Cloth, \$17.99.

Having been concerned for years about some aspects of the modern church-growth movement, I hoped to find in this book careful analysis of the problems or potential problems. I was partially satisfied.

MacArthur points out a number of problems in the church-growth movement, which he refers to variously as "the user-friendly movement," "the church-marketing movement," and "the church-growth movement." Some of the problems he highlights are: (1) changing the Gospel message from salvation from hell to a message of salvation "from meaninglessness and aimlessness in this life" (p. 47), (2) preaching which is at times biblically inaccurate, (3) avoiding those passages of Scripture which are negative and lack a feel-good message (e.g., p. 133), (4) preaching which is often decisionistic, (5) allowing pragmatism rather than Scripture to drive one's methodology and theology (pp. 74-79), and (6) aiming at a potentially unworthy goal: numerical growth.

Especially worth noting by our readers is the author's discussion of divine discipline in the cases of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts

5:1-11) and carnal Corinthian believers (1 Cor 11:30). Based on his earlier books, *The Gospel According to Jesus* and *Faith Works*, one would expect him to conclude that those who died under God's judgment must be unsaved. Yet in this book he seems to suggest that Ananias and Sapphira and the Corinthians who died all were genuine believers. See pp. 57-63, especially noting p. 62, where he writes, "God judges His own people before He turns His wrath on pagans."

While I found myself in essential agreement with the problems MacArthur raised, I also was sorry this book didn't do more. The book is weakened by the following: (1) failing at times to cite sources (e.g., p. 47, where six quotations are given without reference to sources); (2) failing to show how widespread the problem is (Are all such churches guilty of all the problems cited? Are some not guilty of any?); (3) giving insufficient analysis of the problems raised. (For example, why is a twenty-minute sermon bad? Does some passage of Scripture indicate how long sermons must be? While I would agree a diet of 20-minute sermons, especially if heavily loaded with illustrations and "practical applications," is not conducive to significant spiritual growth, more analysis is needed); (4) providing insufficient discussion of a major problem in the church-growth movement: the failure to disciple new and untaught believers; (5) attempting to link the church-growth movement exclusively with Arminianism (cf. p. 84), when, in fact, it is far from clear that this is the case. (I imagine some user-friendly churches even proclaim Reformed Lordship Salvation!)

I would have loved to have seen, for example, citations from sermons of those in the church-growth movement. Can it be shown that they garble the Gospel, undermine assurance, muddle motivation, distort the Scripture, etc.? If so, it would be helpful to see actual examples from actual sermons. Unfortunately, this we do not find.

MacArthur's Lordship Salvation theology is not prominent in this book. Possibly this was because he realized that many in the Free Grace camp are also concerned about excesses in the church-growth movement.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

The Gospel According to Matthew. By Leon Morris. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992. 781 pp. Cloth, \$39.95.

Here is a well written, scholarly, thorough treatment of Matthew's Gospel. However, it is flawed by a strong and consistent Lordship Salvation position.

Concerning Matt 5:20 Morris followed a statement concerning God's grace in salvation with these words: "This does not mean cheap grace, for the words of this verse bring out the truth that those who have been touched by Jesus live on a new plane, a plane in which the keeping of God's commandments is important" (p. 11).

In his exegesis of Matt 7:13-14 he answers the question, How does one enter by the narrow gate?, in this way: "We commit ourselves to follow Christ" (p. 175).

Matthew 7:21-23 receives this comment: "Verses 21-23 are a dreadful warning: the most orthodox avowals of faith have no value in the eyes of God if they are not translated into concrete obedience to his will. One may with his lips loudly profess his faith in God, and even invoke Jesus as Lord, yet deny him by thoughts, words, and acts" (p. 181).

Likewise, according to Morris, Jesus taught in Matt 10:32-33 that confessing Him "signifies an open declaration of allegiance" (p. 264) and that this is required for eternal salvation (pp.264-65).

His conclusion from Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler was that: "God demands undivided loyalty from those who would be his" (p. 492).

Due to its Lordship Salvation bias, this commentary is not for new or untaught believers. Only well grounded believers should use this work. However, for such persons this commentary can provide helpful exegetical insights if read critically.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Matthew: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels. By J. C. Ryle. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993. 296 pp. Paper, \$12.99.

This commentary, originally published in 1860, is part of the Crossway Classic Commentaries. It was republished, as is noted above, in 1993.

Anglican bishop J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) wrote this book at a popular level, so it is easy to follow. At times, however, it is difficult to find his description of a given verse, since he sometimes discusses a fairly large number of verses together under one heading without noting verse references in the subsections. Unfortunately, a worse problem is the book's Lordship Salvation message.

Notice part of his treatment of Matt 7:21-23: "It requires far more than most people seem to think necessary to save a soul. We may be baptized in the name of Christ, and boast confidently of our ecclesiastical privileges; we may possess head knowledge, and be quite satisfied with our own state; we may even be preachers, and teachers of others, and 'perform many miracles' in connection with our church, but all this time are we practically doing the will of our Father in heaven? Do we truly repent, truly believe in Christ, and live holy and humble lives? If not, in spite of all our privileges and profession of faith, we shall miss heaven at last, and be forever cast away. We shall hear those awful words, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (verse 23)."

On some occasions Ryle's exposition seems very grace oriented, only to shift to a Lordship Salvation emphasis. This is particularly evident in his interpretation of the rich young ruler passage (Matt 19:16-30). He begins by showing that the young man lacked a recognition of his sinfulness and lostness (pp. 171-72), but then concludes by suggesting that he remained unsaved *because he was unwilling to give up his money* (p. 173).

For further clear examples of his Lordship Salvation orientation, see his exposition of Matt 7:13-14 (pp. 51-52) and 16:24-27 (pp. 145-47).

While this commentary is well written and easy to follow, I cannot recommend it since it promotes Lordship Salvation.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

The Other Side of the Good News, Confronting the Contemporary Challenges to Jesus' Teaching on Hell. By Larry Dixon. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992. 216 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

This is a very timely book in a day when many doctrines within the evangelical community are being questioned. The eternal, conscious punishment of unbelievers in the lake of fire is not exempt from this speculation.

Larry Dixon has written a very up-to-date treatment of the doctrine of hell. He discusses three alternatives to the traditional view: universalism, annihilationism, and post mortem conversion.

Universalism states that all people will eventually get to heaven. This view is primarily defended by an appeal to God's love. Dixon rightly points out that God has more than one attribute, including among others, holiness and righteousness. These attributes demand that God judge sin. The Bible clearly teaches that people who reject Christ will go to hell.

The most serious challenge to the traditional view of hell is *annihilationism*. Dixon does an excellent job of refuting the evidences posited for this view. It appears that the main evidence revolves around words translated *destruction* and *perish*. There are many passages that show that *destruction* and *perish* do not mean extinction, but ruin. The use of words like *eternal* and *torment* argue strongly for eternal, conscious punishment. Luke 16:19-31, whether a parable or not, teaches the idea of conscious punishment after death.

The author then reviews belief in post mortem *conversion*, which has no biblical evidence.

His chapter on Jesus' view of hell is well done and has an excellent presentation of Luke 16:19-31. His last chapter deals with additional issues and questions that are related to the doctrine of eternal punishment.

The book is not without its weaknesses, however. There are some places that reflect the author's views on Lordship Salvation and perseverance, but they are only mentioned in passing.

Dixon also holds to the metaphorical view of hell, which states that the flames may not be literal, but that the word *fire* conveys torment of some kind. It would have been helpful to see a discussion of the pros and cons of the literal versus the metaphorical view.

However, this is a great resource on the doctrine of hell and should be read by anyone interested in this issue.

R. Michael Duffy

Missionary
The Hague
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Four Views on Hell. Edited by William Crockett. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992. 190 pp. Paper, \$10.99.

Four Views on Hell discusses the literal, metaphorical, purgatorial, and conditional views of hell. Each view is presented by a proponent and then critiqued by the proponents of the other three views.

John Walvoord defends the literal view of hell and presents relevant word studies on the issues involved in eternal punishment. His presentation of the word *eternal* was particularly well done. He shows that in the NT *aiōnios* is only used to mean *endless*. This word is used several times in reference to the punishment of the wicked.

William Crockett complements John Walvoord, as he has a particularly strong refutation of annihilationism. He points out that the view of the Pharisees in Jesus' day was one of eternal, conscious punishment. When Jesus spoke of hell this is what would have come to mind in His audience. The early church fathers also held to eternal, conscious punishment. Crockett disagrees with Walvoord on the issue of whether the flames and darkness are literal, contending that they only convey torment, but are not to be taken literally.

Zachary Hayes's presentation of *purgatory* is somewhat misplaced, as the rest of the book deals with the nature of *hell*. It is also misplaced because Hayes clearly holds to works salvation and appeals to tradition and fellow priests to defend his view.

Clark Pinnock presents the annihilationist view, namely that those who do not believe are *exterminated* in the lake of fire and *no longer exist*. Eternal destruction would then mean *extinction that lasts forever*. However, he does not explain the full range of the words used on this subject, nor Rev 14:11 and 20:10 adequately.

Walvoord and Crockett clearly refute the purgatorial and annihilationist views. Together they argue persuasively for eternal,

conscious punishment. Walvoord never directly addresses the question of how darkness and flames could co-exist, or how spirit beings could be affected by literal fire. A discussion on midget stars and black holes would have been a helpful analogy from nature of how darkness and flames can co-exist.

This is a valuable book and I recommend it as a resource tool.

R. Michael Duffy
 Missionary
 The Hague
 Netherlands

Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People Are Leaving the Church. William Hendricks. Grand Rapids: Moody Press, 1993. 305 pp. Cloth \$17.99.

When I opened my mailbox and saw *Exit Interviews*, the subtitle gripped my imagination: "Revealing Stories Why People Are Leaving the Church." This book did arouse my attention. So much is written on church growth, but little attention is given to the casualties.

Hendricks is trying to tell the story of the casualties through anecdotal evidence. He takes 25 real people, changes their names and church names, and clearly explains what happened. I found myself ready to give each person advice before hearing all that was said. Afterward, I wanted to give their former pastors advice.

Why should those who love Free Grace read this book? A couple of very good reasons emerge. One, there is a theology of backsliding to be learned in these pages. Person after person falls by the wayside, not over sin, but due to a more devastating reason—disillusionment. "I didn't get what was promised," is an often-heard cry. This is a faulty Evangel that promises what God does not deliver. Two, grace is the solution. Hendricks recognizes this: "Most churches preach grace and live works." The author continues in another place with a probing question: "How long is [the church] going to coddle legalists in its ranks?"

The implications of the Free Grace position go far beyond the witnessing opportunity. It must be worked out in how we "do church." *Exit Interviews* will help open the door to a better church of grace.

Brian R. Hardee

Pastor

Independent Bible Church

Leon, IA

Nothing But The Blood. By Bailey E. Smith. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987. 212 pp. Paper, \$6.95.

Nothing But The Blood is a book of good news and bad news. First, the good news.

This book is a lot of fun to read. It is filled with excellent illustrations. Dr. Smith's preaching, as it is recorded in this book, is exciting, personal, and interactive. This reviewer found himself getting excited with the author as he related encounters in his ministry and reflected on the Scriptures. Smith exudes a genuine heart for the lost. And therein lies the sadness of the bad news.

The bad news are the obvious, and sometimes even confusing, contradictions in the author's theology as it relates to the Gospel and assurance. On the one hand, Smith will affirm the sufficiency of the cross, and he leads one to believe that faith in Christ's work is enough. Yet, then, without missing a beat, he interjects a Lordship/perseverance emphasis. He appears, as many do, not even to notice the tension. A few examples will help.

On p. 32, Smith writes, "All you need to know is: He paid the price for your iniquity. He is your Redeemer, and when He died upon that cross, He did away with the guilt of all your sins." Then, across the page, Smith tells the reader that to get on the road to heaven, you must "*commit your life to Him* and what He did upon the Cross . . ." (italics added).

The author gives a telling exchange between himself and an inquirer after one of his messages. The concern was over the "automatic stuff" involved in salvation. When asked if he really believed that it was true that forgiveness was automatic when it was asked for, Smith replied, "Yes, I believe it because it's true—you are automatically

forgiven when you *repent and turn from your sins*" (p. 155, emphasis added). While something of believing may have been mentioned, it is never recorded.

One final example comes from Smith's closing chapter, entitled "Bearing the cross." The author uses an electric chair as a modern substitute for the idea of a cross. He paraphrases Jesus with these words, "If you are not willing to pick up your electric chair and follow Me, *I do not want you to be one of Mine*. You must be willing to be executed in order to be a follower of Mine" (p. 202, italics added).

The author mixes the concept of discipleship with that of being a Christian. He mixes following Christ with believing. He either attempts to redefine faith or add conditions to it. In so doing, Smith takes his readers on a journey that heads to Rome. That trip is bad news indeed!

Dan Hauge

Pastor

Tabernacle Baptist Church
George, IA

Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology. By Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1993. 1,052 pp. Cloth, \$30.00.

The purpose of this book is to fill a conspicuous gap in the historical development of the systematic theology of Protestant Christianity. The author's legitimate claim is that, of the twelve accepted categories of systematic theology, the important division of Israelology has been unjustifiably left out.

This book is the fruit of Fruchtenbaum's 13 years of post-seminary study, for which he earned a Ph.D. from New York University in 1989. Not only does the author carefully build a comprehensive and convincing case to prove that Israelology has been neglected in theological study, he goes on to write a complete Israelology based on the interpretational principles of Dispensationalism.

The first part of the book (pp. 14-317) is a comprehensive demonstration that Covenant Theology has largely formulated its decidedly non-dispensational approach precisely because of its failure to formulate accurate distinctions between Israel and the Church.

The next section (pp. 318-565) shows that Dispensationalism has, to date, developed the most adequate hermeneutic for understanding the theological significance of Israel. Here Fruchtenbaum demonstrates how Dispensationalism has been aided in its correct formulation of prophetic doctrine due to its sensitivity to Israelology. He also shows how it needs to improve and consistently apply this sensitivity to doctrinal concerns pertaining to the status of Israel in present and past history.

The third section (pp. 566-856) is Fruchtenbaum's main achievement and constitutes the great contribution this book makes to Dispensational Theology. It is a comprehensive and well-balanced, well organized, fully dispensational Israelology. It shores up Dispensationalism's weaknesses with respect to the doctrine of Israel past and present, and it also provides extremely valuable new theological proposals and insights in the area of dispensational prophecy.

The final portion of the book (pp. 857-1012) deals with controversies in contemporary Hebrew Christian/Messianic Jewish understanding and practice. Also included are brief commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Epistles of James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude.

Readers of *JOTGES* will appreciate Fruchtenbaum's strong commitment to the grace of God, salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, and the eternal security of the believer. For Fruchtenbaum the defining verse for becoming a Christian is John 1:12. He quotes the verse, and then says that in order to become a Christian one must "trust the Messiah and His work for one's salvation" (p. 753). With regards to faith versus works, he says, "No one, not even the Jew, can make any claim on God, but God will save men only by grace through faith, both among the Jews and among the Gentiles. Insofar as the basis of salvation is concerned, law and grace, works and faith, are mutually exclusive" (p. 741).

Although this reviewer thinks Fruchtenbaum's brief commentaries on the above mentioned epistles could be improved (Hebrews 6 and James 2 in particular), it must be kept in mind that his goals and

purposes are systematic and theological in making proper distinctions with regard to Israel, rather than writing exegetical commentaries.

The main strengths of the book are its organization and comprehensiveness, its wide references to other theological writers as well as its accurate and well-documented substantiation of their viewpoints, and its well-founded development of a complete Israelology from the biblical text. Fruchtenbaum is definitely a heavyweight. This book is a "must have," "must read," and "must reference."

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PERIODICAL REVIEWS

"We Who Are by Inheritance Jews; Not from the Gentiles, Sinners," Hendrikus Boers, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, April-June 1992, pp. 273-81.

In two influential works (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Fortress, 1977] and *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* [Fortress, 1983]), E.P. Sanders has argued that Paul developed his Gospel of justification by faith, not in answer to any alleged Jewish doctrine of works righteousness, but in answer to Jewish exclusivism. As Sanders explains, in the Pauline phrase "not by works of the law" the emphasis is on "law" (i.e., Jewish law), not on "works" abstractly conceived. The Judaism of Paul's day held to what Sanders calls "covenantal nomism," the belief that God bestows his favor on a particular community and that individuals gain that favor by joining up. In the case of ancient Judaism, one became a member by circumcision and then maintained membership by the observance of Torah (including its provisions for atonement). Paul, says Sanders, objected to this because he wanted to offer a Christian version of the same thing: one joined the Christian community by faith (which Sanders equates with baptism) and maintained membership by good works (coupled with repentance as needed).

In this article Boers attempts to take Sanders's work a step further. Sanders, says Boers, has correctly discerned Paul's rejection of a narrow Judaism, but he has failed to appreciate the implications of his "discovery." In rejecting *Jewish* exclusivism, Paul in principle rejected *all* exclusivism, and that includes Christian exclusivism too. *Pace* Sanders, Christian faith (=baptism) can no more be an "entry requirement" than can circumcision. Indeed, there are no entry requirements, if by that one means (as Sanders does) requirements to enter an elect community. For salvation is not the property of any group. On the contrary, salvation is a radically individual matter, obtained, says Boers, by one's own good works—of which faith (pious trust) is but one kind.

There is much wrong with Boers's article. I can mention only a few things. The first is Boers's inheritance from Sanders. Like Sand-

ers, Boers makes a big deal out of the fact that in the polemical phrase, "not by works of the law," the emphasis is on "law" and not on "works." But it doesn't follow from this, as Boers argues, that Paul allowed for justification by works *not* tied to the Mosaic law. Does Boers really think that Paul conceived of works pleasing to God other than those commanded in the Torah? For Paul the law of Moses was the law of God. He even says so in Rom 2:14, where morally upright Gentiles are described as manifesting "the work of the law" (where is the emphasis here?) written in their hearts. What could be clearer? For Paul, any good works, even Gentile ones "abstractly conceived," are Mosaic. Boers, following Sanders, has drawn a distinction without a difference.

Boers bases his doctrine of justification by works (though not exclusively Jewish works) on Romans 2, where Paul says things like "not the hearers of the law . . . but the doers of the law" will be justified. This is a well-known crux, but there are insuperable problems with Boers's reading of it. Not the least of these is that Paul specifically says it's by means of doing the "law" that one is justified (unless, of course, the emphasis here is on "doers" abstractly conceived!). At any rate, to the careful reader it is clear that Paul's statement in Romans 2 comes in the context of a diatribe against those who condemn others while doing the same things themselves (yet think that they will escape the judgment of God!). Verse 13 is offered as a warning to such persons that they will not be justified before God simply by hearing the law (and applying it to the failures of others!) but by doing it—which, of course, they are not, and as we learn elsewhere in Paul (*pace* Sanders), which they cannot. Paul's statement is offered *ex hypothesi*, that is, *for the sake of the argument*. It is *not* his account of justification.

Boers is, of course, absolutely correct to criticize Sanders for equating faith with baptism (it's high time that Oxford dons realize that Paul was *not* an Anglican). But his own equating of Pauline faith with pious works is almost incomprehensible. Paul could not have been more clear: "to him that *works not* but believes . . ." (Rom 4:5).

I could go on. Boers's mistakes are legion. But I will stop with one final and somewhat different criticism. Placed in its contemporary context, Boers's article is just plain trendy. After Boers does his thing with Paul, this ex-Pharisee-turned-apocalyptic-Christian of the

first century comes out looking remarkably up-to-date and multi-cultural. Boers would have us believe that Paul, thanks to his doctrine of justification, was able to tolerate anything except Judeo-Christian intolerance. Well, I'm not convinced.

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"The Gospel of Matthew. The Two Ways: Hypocrisy or Righteousness," David Rhodes, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, June 1992, pp. 453-61.

The theme of the Gospel of Matthew is viewed in this article as an ongoing contrast between "two ways," or two differing ethical patterns, in living out the Jewish law. The first path is that of the Pharisees—a hypocritical, outward obedience to the law that ends in destruction. The second path is that taught by Jesus—a life empowered to carry out the righteousness of the law in harmony with Messiah's new interpretation of it.

While similar ideas of the "two ways" are adopted by some evangelicals, Rhoads's approach is from a more liberal theological perspective. He rejects the traditional authorship of the first Gospel by the apostle Matthew (the disciple of Christ), replacing him with an unknown Jewish-Christian scribe or rabbi who wrote ca. A.D. 80-90. For the author, Matthew wanted to show that those who rejected Jesus' way were destroyed in the Roman conflict of A.D. 66-70. On the other hand, those who accepted Jesus' way are now "inheriting the earth" by carrying out the Great Commission among the Gentiles.

After agreeing with the higher-critical consensus on the historical background to Matthew, Rhoads surveys the "two ways" perspective as it is supposedly developed in the narratives, parables, and discourses of Christ. The clearest presentation of these contrasting lifestyles is posited to be in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the Woe Judgments against the Pharisees (Matthew 23).

Evangelical or non-evangelical, a "two ways" persuasion distorts Matthew's (and Jesus') theology of salvation and the role of the Mosaic Law. As an example, Rhoads sees Jesus' statement about needing a greater righteousness than the Pharisees to enter the kingdom of God (Matt 5:20) as a righteousness (an obedience to the law) which flows from inner integrity. He argues that a thorough inner change must take place before righteous living can occur.

But while it is mentioned that Jesus died to forgive sin, faith in no form is ever mentioned in the article. Nor is it suggested that the transformation needed is a divine regeneration made possible only by God, not by an existential experience. A "two ways" theory reads Matthew in relative isolation from the rest of the NT and denies the analogy of faith. In other words, "two ways" stresses a twist of biblical theology that undermines systematic theology. Since Paul taught that justification by faith alone was as relevant to the OT as to the NT (cf. the discussion of Abraham in Romans 4), Jesus' statement in Matt 5:20 must be seen as a pre-Pauline allusion to justification (righteousness) by faith alone.

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"Out of My Sight!," "Get behind Me!," or "Follow after Me!": There Is No Choice in God's Kingdom," by Dennis C. Stoutenburg, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March 1993, pp. 173-78.

Stoutenburg, who teaches NT at Providence College and Seminary (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada), has written a provocative article offering a slightly different understanding of Matt 16:23-24 than is usually taken. The passage is Jesus' response to Peter after Peter rebuked the Lord for predicting His death.

There are three traditional approaches to Jesus' words. In the first, the NIV's translation "Out of my sight!" is taken as a reprimand to Peter to leave Jesus' presence. The second, in the KJV, NKJV, and

supported by the NASB and NRSV, is seen as either a command to figuratively “get out of the way” or to physically get behind Jesus. The third, argued by Robert Gundry, is to understand the statement in terms of discipleship. The best translation would be “Follow after me!” and is Jesus’ way of telling Peter, not a disciple at this point, to assume the position of a disciple by literally following and obeying Jesus as Master.

Stoutenburg shows that when *opisō mou* (“behind/after me”) or *opisō* without *mou* is combined with a verb of coming, it invariably refers to discipleship. Jesus was telling Peter to get in a position behind Him and to be a follower, or disciple. The problem sometimes raised with this interpretation is that the vocative *Satan* is a strange subject to charge with discipleship! Stoutenburg remedies this with the suggestion that the Greek subject, *satana*, should be understood generically as “adversary,” especially since it does not have the usual Greek article before it when it refers to Satan.

The bottom line is that “Jesus required unconditional obedience of his followers. No opposition would be tolerated. If one were to be called a disciple, there was only one position for that person: behind Jesus and in a position of submission to Him as Lord. Compromised discipleship was intolerable and worthy of the Master’s rebuke” (p. 178).

As I reexamined the context, I saw other possible arguments for this view. In v 23 a human “adversary” would fit the designation of “an offense” or “stumbling block” (*skandalon*) better than Satan. Stoutenburg notes the possible geological pun on Peter’s name, “the Rock.” Also, the subject is said to be “mindful” of “the things of men.” It makes sense that a human “adversary” would be swayed by human concerns more than “Satan.” Finally, v 24 has Jesus also telling the other disciples to follow Him in a life of obedience and self-denial.

The article is worth reading and deserves more investigation. It will certainly give readers a new and interesting interpretation to think about.

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"The Dangers of the Invitation System," by Jim Ehrhard, *Reformation & Revival Journal*, Summer 1993, pp. 75-94.

Criticizing public invitations to salvation is almost a tradition within Reformed circles (e.g., Iain Murray's *The Invitation System*). Usually one must sift through the arguments against an invitation to arrive at a balanced perspective. This is true with Pastor Ehrhard's article.

First, it is obvious that Reformed theology shapes his views of the Gospel and salvation. But I will forego discussion of these to get to the issue at hand. Is there *any* credibility to a public invitation?

Ehrhard is against any public invitation, be it a walk down the aisle, a raised hand, or a "decision card." He cites several dangers: asking more than the Bible demands for salvation, eliciting a response that is purely emotional, confusing the public response with salvation itself, counting false professors who later discredit their profession, and giving assurance to unsaved professors. In general, he argues that the Bible sustains no such invitation system; it only became common practice in the 1800's.

His "better way" is to trust the power of God's Word to truly save and change a life, and to make an urgent appeal for people to come to Christ now. We cannot argue with this. Here he also cites several examples from the 1800's where people came under great emotional distress at the time of their conversions apart from a public invitation. Though Ehrhard mentions C. S. Lewis and other "modern examples" which "could also be given," he leaves the impression that people got saved better in the good ol' days.

We should admit that all of Ehrhard's concerns are valid. I have seen each of these dangers do their damage in people. But we must also see that a blanket condemnation of public invitations is too hasty. An invitation *can* help people if its purpose is clear and does not confuse the Gospel of Free Grace. A preacher can ask those to respond who would like to know more about Christ, who are unsure of their salvation, or who have decided to trust in Christ. A response sometimes allows the preacher to know who needs clarification or follow-up counseling. Contrary to Ehrhard, I believe there is also an affirming value in telling others about your salvation. It gets people started in what they should be doing with the rest of their lives.

To argue that a *public* response to salvation was never called for in the Bible may be correct (although baptism was demanded for a public display of one's faith). But arguing from silence in the Bible could cause us to do away with everything from pulpits to Gospel tracts in evangelism.

There is no one way to present the Gospel. God saves people under many different circumstances. Sometimes He saves people in spite of our mistakes and lack of clarity. Undoubtedly, however, He saves more people when we are biblical in content and appeal.

The truth is, some people will never respond to a public invitation because of their personality. Others will always seek a public opportunity to display their spiritual decisions. We should carefully use methods that will reach both and *always* use discernment in evaluating their response.

An invitation can be effective if it is presented clearly and in truth. The Scriptures allow it and experience affirms it.

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A GOSPEL SONG OF GRACE

FRANCES A. MOSHER

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Dallas, Texas

AT CALVARY

Years I spend in vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,
Knowing not it was for me He died on Calvary.

By God's Word at last my sin I learned;
Then I trembled at the law I'd spurned,
Till my guilty soul imploring turned to Calvary.

Now I've given to Jesus everything;
Now I gladly own Him as my King;
Now my raptured soul can only sing of Calvary.

Oh, the love the drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span, at Calvary!

Refrain:

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty, at Calvary.

William R. Newell (1868-1956)

The lyrics of "At Calvary" affirm Paul's assertion in 1 Cor 1:18: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The author, William R. Newell, contrasts his attitude toward the Cross of Calvary before his conversion, at the point of his conversion, and since his conversion.¹ Prior to his conversion he lived in pride, apparently unaware of, and unconcerned about, his own sinful

¹ For a brief summary of Newell's ministry see this issue's "Voice from the Past," 45.

condition. He may have been one of the multitude of people who vaguely agree with the idea that our Lord somehow died for “sinners,” but who fail to see that *they themselves* are among those sinners and therefore in need of Christ’s atoning blood.

In the second stanza, Newell testifies that it was through the Word of God that he finally became aware of his personal sinful state. This brings to mind Ps 119:130: “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” The author’s realization of the seriousness of his failure to meet the standards required by God’s law and his subsequent turning to the Cross of Christ echoes Gal 3:24: “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Newell’s experience of the validity of this truth should remind the believer who desires to win souls that he must depend upon the Holy Spirit working through the written Word of God to bring conviction of sin and the need for a Savior to the unbeliever’s spirit.

The hymn’s refrain seems to express Newell’s experience at the point of his conversion. He found great mercy, free grace, “pardon multiplied,” and liberty. This is a clear statement of the doctrine of grace. Salvation is completely the result of God’s mercy, grace, and pardon showered on undeserving sinners.

The author’s acknowledgement of Christ’s lordship in his life is clearly proclaimed in the song’s third stanza. It should be noted that the sequencing and the choice of words make it apparent that this dedication came as a *result* of the author’s experiencing of God’s saving mercy and grace rather than as a *condition* that had to be met before God would save him. Indeed, as the final phrase of the fourth stanza states, it was *God* who spanned the “mighty gulf” that sin has created between Him and man. No work, effort, or aspiration on the part of sinners could have served in any way to bridge this chasm.

Daniel Towner (1850-1919), who composed the tune used for “At Calvary,” was born in Rome, Pennsylvania. At the age of twenty he became the music director of the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church in Binghamton, New York. He later served at the York Street Methodist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio before joining Dwight L. Moody in 1885.² Beginning in 1893, and continuing until his death in 1919, he served as head of the music department at Moody Bible

² Phil Kerr, *Music in Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 181.

Institute.³ “He edited many hymnals and composed hundreds of songs, including ‘Redeemed,’ ‘Anywhere with Jesus,’ ‘Grace Greater than Our Sins,’ and ‘Trust and Obey.’”⁴

Although many do not consider the melody of “At Calvary” to be one of Towner’s better compositions, it provides a classic example of the elements common to “gospel song” tunes: it is repetitive, it uses “bouncy” rhythmic patterns, it has a repeating refrain, it is in slow harmonic rhythm (i.e., only one or two chords are used in each measure), and it uses only the three primary chords of the key in which it is written. Because it invariably appears in hymnals in the key of C major (an easy key for most piano students), and because of its repetitiveness and simple harmonic structure, I have found this a good hymn for introducing students to hymn improvisation—the creation of an accompaniment to the melody other than the simple playing of the voice parts as printed in standard hymnals. It is satisfying to know that as students practice the music of this hymn they are also being exposed to lyrics which make such a clear statement regarding God’s grace in the salvation of sinful men, women, boys, and girls.

³ William Jensen Reynolds, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, Inc., 1963), 107.

⁴ Kerr, *Music*, 181.

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