

Journal of the
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Evangelical Society

"Faith Alone In Christ Alone"

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GRACE
EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
"Faith Alone in Christ Alone"

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We Believe In: SANCTIFICATION

Part 4:

Man's Role in Present Sanctification (With An Appendix Containing Questions and Answers)

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Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, Texas

I. Introduction

This is the second article of a study on present sanctification begun in the previous issue. In the last article we considered *God's role* in present sanctification. In this one we will consider *man's role*.

Present sanctification is also called *progressive* or *experiential* sanctification. Present sanctification concerns the goal of the Christian life: progressive increase in the believer's experience of holiness.

Some extreme Calvinists actually believe that Christians have *no* personal role in their own sanctification. I remember a conversation I had years ago with a young man just about to enter the pastorate. We were talking about progressive sanctification. He told me that the growth of believers, and even the amount we sinned, was all determined by God. He was convinced that we could do nothing to effect our growth either positively or negatively!

Years later I debated an educator who was preparing men and women for ministry. The topic of our discussion was saving faith. He, too, was advocating the view that man has no role at all to play in his growth in holiness.

In the course of the debate I asked him, "If God is totally in charge of our present sanctification and we have absolutely nothing to do with it, why do we ever sin?" He had a clever, though in my estimate unpersuasive, explanation.

He told the story of his grandfather's Model A Ford. It seems it had a bent frame. As long as you held onto the wheel, it would track straight ahead. If, however, you let go, even for a moment, the car would sharply

and immediately veer off the road. So it is, he said, with the Christian life. God "lets go" of our lives from time to time to show us how much we need Him. He then soon retakes control of our lives so that we don't sin very much!

These are not the views of a select few. These two individuals represent quite a number of pastors, theologians, and laypeople today. Not only have I personally met many others who hold this view, I often receive questions from people who have been approached by people promoting it.

The idea that present sanctification is solely a work of God, that man has absolutely no active role to play, is unbiblical and unhealthy. We don't need to sin in order to see our need for the Lord. Surely in eternity, when no believer will ever sin, we will never lack awareness of our need for Him.

A few months ago I had lunch with a man who is on the staff of a very large and very affluent church. He said that it is sometimes hard working with very powerful people. He said, only partly in jest, that the attitude of many of those powerful people is that while they hope God will bless what they are doing, if He doesn't, they can bring about the desired result without Him!

As I pointed out in the previous article, present sanctification is impossible apart from God's work in the lives of believers. A balanced, biblical perspective is that both God and the believer play a role in present sanctification. The role of man is just as clear in the Bible as the role of God. The Scriptures clearly and repeatedly show that the believer has an active role to play in present sanctification. A passage like Phil 2:12-13 brings this out well:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation¹ with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

The following are a listing of but a few of the many texts which call upon the believer to take an active part in his Christian experience:

John 14:15: If you love Me, keep My commandments.

¹The expression *work out your own salvation* does not refer to working to obtain eternal salvation. Rather, it refers to bringing about deliverance from temporal difficulties. For further discussion see "Working Out Your Salvation (Philippians 2:12)," *The Grace Evangelical Society News*, May-June 1993, 2-3.

1 Cor 9:27: But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.²

Heb 13:1-5: Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers . . . Remember the prisoners . . . Fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have . . .

Jas 1:22: But be doers of the word, and not hearers only . . .

1 Pet 1:16: Because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

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

The idea that believers have no role to play in their own sanctification is not only unbiblical. It is also unhealthy. It certainly leads people to doubt whether they are saved, since according to this view if you fail to persevere you prove that you were never saved in the first place. That, in turn, leads to despair. To know that hell is real and yet to lack certainty that we are eternally secure is terrible. Some respond to the despair by doing what their view says they can't: trying harder. Others respond to it by giving up. After all, if it's all up to God, what difference does it make what I do?

Man has a role to play in present sanctification. It is not an independent role. Apart from God taking the initiative and giving us "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3), no growth would take place. However, since God has done this, believers can respond. It is to that response that we now turn our attention.

What follows are a number of specific things which God has commanded believers to do. They are important aspects of the believer's responsibility in present sanctification. Our success or failure in carrying out these commands has a definite impact on our progress in the faith.

II. The Believer's Responsibilities in Present Sanctification

A. Living by Faith

Believing in Christ is a condition of both justification and present sanctification. On the one hand, only those who believe in Christ are

²*Disqualified* here means *disapproved for reward*. For more discussion see Zane C. Hodges's *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989), 201-202.

regenerate (John 3), and only regenerate people can experience present sanctification. On the other hand, it is possible for a believer to take his or her eyes off the Lord Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2). In order to continue to grow as a Christian, we must continue to look to our Savior. While we are eternally secure from the moment we trust Christ (John 5:24; 10:27-29; Rom 8:38-39), that does not mean that our faith will never falter.

Galatians 2:20 includes a statement about the need for *ongoing* faith in Christ. It reads:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh *I live by faith in the Son of God*, who loved me and gave Himself for me (emphasis added).

Likewise, 2 Cor 5:7 says, "For *we walk by faith*, not by sight" (emphasis added).

The portions italicized highlight an important aspect of present sanctification which many believers underestimate or ignore: continuing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The path of righteousness begins and ends by grace through faith. If our faith falters, so, too, does our progress in holiness.

Ultimately, of course, believers are commanded to believe all aspects of God's truth. When people become Christians they believe that Jesus Christ freely gives them eternal life. They know that they have eternal life because they trust His promise (e.g., John 6:47). However, that does not mean that they either know or believe *everything* the Bible says.³ They need to read and study the Bible so they can come to know and believe more and more of what it contains.

While there are thousands of vital truths to be believed in Scripture, most believers recognize a handful of basics, or fundamental truths (often called *the Fundamentals*). These include the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His literal, bodily resurrection from the dead, His Second Coming, and the inerrancy of Scripture. For a person who has been a Christian for years to stray from the truth on one of these subjects, even if he or she remains clear on the Gospel itself, is a major problem. Compare, for example, 2 Tim 2:17-18, which concerns doctrinal defection regarding the future resurrection of our bodies; 2 Thess 2:1ff., which

³ For example, while I believe the Bible teaches baptism by immersion, that is not a part of the Gospel. A person could be saved without even knowing about or believing in baptism by immersion.

deals with defective thinking on Christ's Second Coming; and Gal 2:11ff., which reports an occasion in Antioch when Peter and Barnabas withdrew from the Gentile believers there and would not eat meals with them.

Zane Hodges writes:

Let there be no mistake. The failure of one's faith is a grim possibility on the field of spiritual battle. To deny this is to be spiritually unprepared for the enemy's assault.

But equally, to acknowledge it is not in any way an invitation to fall prey to satanic falsehoods—far from it. The Commander still challenges us to stand firm against our foe. He still commands allegiance to His truth.⁴

B. Being Baptized

Some denominations and groups *overemphasize* baptism by making it a requirement for eternal life. That view is called *baptismal regeneration*. Scripture rejects such a view since it teaches that the only condition of eternal life is believing the Gospel (cf. John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-27; 20:30-31; Acts 10:43-48; 1 Cor 1:17).⁵

Other denominations and groups go to the other extreme and *underemphasize* baptism by rarely practicing it or talking about it. At one time I was a member of a large conservative church which was solid on the Gospel but weak on baptism. Baptism was almost never mentioned from the pulpit and baptismal services were rarely scheduled. I recall only a handful of people being baptized over the course of five years. Sometimes a whole year would go by without one baptism being conducted.

Before He ascended to heaven, our Lord Himself taught that baptism is the first step in discipleship:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. . .

(Matt 28:19-20).

⁴*Absolutely Free!*, 111-12.

⁵See *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, "We Believe in Water Baptism," by Arthur L. Farstad, Spring 1990, 3-9; "The Gospel and Water Baptism: A Study of Acts 2:38," by Lanny Thomas Tanton, Spring 1990, 27-52; "The Gospel and Water Baptism: A Study of Acts 22:16," by Lanny Thomas Tanton, Spring 1991, 23-40.

Note what He told the apostles to do in order to make disciples: (1) baptize and (2) teach. The words translated "baptizing" and "teaching" are participles in Greek as well as in the NKJV. They are circumstantial participles expressing the *manner* in which the command they modify (make disciples) was to be carried out.⁶ This, of course, presupposes that they would evangelize (cf. Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). The apostles were to baptize and teach those who came to faith in Christ.

On the day of Pentecost the apostles began carrying out the command to make disciples. They baptized and began teaching those who came to faith as a result of their preaching that day. The apostles baptized 3,000 people on the Church's birthday (Acts 2:41). Then they set about to teach them. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Baptism is more than a public confession of our faith in Christ. It is also an indication that a person is entering into discipleship.⁷ Thus, while baptism is not a condition of eternal life, it is nonetheless important. It is an important first step on the road of present sanctification. To avoid being baptized is to disobey the Lord's command and to miss out on a vital element of our Christian experience.

C. Counting the Cost

One cannot read the teaching of Jesus on discipleship without recognizing that discipleship is costly. To follow Christ on the path of obedience is to pay a price.

Putting it another way, present sanctification extracts a price. To grow significantly as a Christian we must make a decision at some point in our Christian experience: Is it worth the cost to follow Christ? Am I willing to suffer for Him? Am I willing to give up my time, money, pleasures, friends, family, or whatever it takes to do what He says (cf. Luke 14:26-33)? Ultimately to be a wholehearted disciple of Christ

⁶ See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 749n.; Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 436. See also A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1128.

⁷ Discipleship in the NT has at its basic sense being a pupil or learner of Christ. See Bauer, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), s.v. "*mathēteuō*" and "*mathētēs*," 485.

we must be willing to give up everything we have and hope to have, including not only our possessions, but also our reputations, our comforts, and our time. Jesus said, "Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

Lordship Salvation advocates claim that *unbelievers* must count the cost of discipleship and decide if they are willing to pay the price in order to obtain eternal life. In his book *Christ's Call to Discipleship*, James Montgomery Boice has a chapter entitled "Counting the Cost" (pp. 105-14). There he gives the following answer to the question "What [is] the minimum amount of doctrine or belief a person [has] to have to be a Christian?":

The minimum amount a person must believe to be a Christian is *everything*, and the minimum amount a person must give is *all*. I say, "You must give it all. You cannot hold back even a fraction of a percentage of yourself. Every sin must be abandoned. Every false thought must be repudiated. You must be the Lord's entirely" [*italics in original*].⁸

I am deeply saddened to read such a terrible distortion of the Gospel of God's Grace. To confuse justification and present sanctification is a grievous error. It hinders unbelievers from being saved since it presents them with a badly garbled gospel.

God requires that we count the cost of discipleship repeatedly. In Rom 12:1 Paul urged the believers in the church at Rome to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." That every believer needs to do this daily is suggested by the context and by other passages of Scripture. Romans 12:2 goes on to speak of the need to be transformed by the renewing of one's mind—surely something which must be done repeatedly. Likewise, in Luke 9:23 Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me . . . let him take up his cross *daily*" (emphasis supplied).

I went to school with a young man of Arab descent who grew up in the Middle East. When he trusted in Christ, he had to count the cost of following Christ immediately. He knew that if he submitted to Christian baptism, his family would disown him. He counted the cost and was baptized. As he had feared, his family then disowned him. They considered him as a dead man. They would not have anything more to do with him. I was touched by his level of commitment. It encouraged me to be ready to pay any price in *my* walk with Christ.

⁸ *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 114.

D. Receiving Christian Instruction

Closely related to counting the cost is getting involved in Christian instruction. The Scriptures plainly teach that present sanctification requires education. There is no such thing as instant spirituality. One does not "arrive" in the Christian life at the point of faith—or at some significant point of commitment, either. Growth takes time plus obedience to what God has said. And to learn what God has said takes instruction.

The apostle Peter ended his second epistle with these words:

You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter's readers knew that growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior requires Christian instruction (cf. 1 Pet 4:10-11; 5:1-5; 2 Pet 1:12-15; 3:16).

The normal place for Christian instruction is the local church. Paul instructed Timothy to teach "faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). Likewise, Paul told Titus: "Speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). The sound doctrine Paul had in mind was not merely doctrine about salvation, the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, eschatology, and the like. He clearly also had the doctrine of the Christian walk in mind, for he went on to speak of the need to be sober, reverent, temperate (v 2), not given to much wine (v 3), loving one's spouse and children (v 4), and so forth.

There are many ways in which a person can receive instruction, including hearing the Word taught on Sunday morning and Sunday evening, Sunday school, training union, participating in Bible study groups, reading commentaries and books, listening to tapes, and attending a Christian College, Bible College, or seminary.

Unfortunately, today some people define discipleship so narrowly that they unwittingly discourage certain meetings of the church. I was an elder in a church where the issue of Christian instruction and discipleship became a topic for extended board discussion. The pastor felt that the only real Christian instruction and discipleship took place in small groups that met outside the church building (in homes and restaurants, for example). He did not think that meetings in the church, such as Sunday School, the preaching service, the Lord's Supper, seminars, conferences, or special classes, were elements in discipleship!

Many believers today receive a major part of their Christian instruction through parachurch groups such as Christian colleges, seminaries, on-campus Christian organizations, Overseas Christian Servicemen Centers, prison ministries, and others. This is not unbiblical, for all of those outreaches should be designed to assist the local church, not to rival or supplant it. However, care must be taken that a person doesn't begin to view his involvement in a parachurch organization as replacing his need for local church involvement.

One growing problem is that church attendance and involvement is dropping off for members of conservative churches. A generation or two ago it was common for Christians to go to church at least three times a week: Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening. Sadly some conservative Christians today are not even in church three times in a month.

Commenting on the importance of corporate worship on Sunday, Charles Ryrie writes, "To neglect the Lord's Day is to slight Him, to blunt the testimony to His resurrection, and to miss the benefits of the ministry and protection of corporate worship" (*italics added*).⁹

Christian instruction is a lifetime proposition. You can't end your education prior to going to be with the Lord without calamitous results. Anyone who thinks that he no longer needs instruction is sadly mistaken.

E. Abiding in Christ

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

One's Christian experience is at its heart a personal relationship. While there are commands to be obeyed, it is wrong to think of walking with Christ as some legalistic exercise. He cares whether we obey His commands or not because it pleases Him when we do and grieves Him when we don't (cf. 2 Cor 5:9; Eph 4:30).

On several occasions God has changed the commandments. In the Garden of Eden there were only a few commands: tend the garden, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and don't eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Once Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, two of those commands were no longer in force. Under the

⁹*Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 432.

Mosaic Law there was a host of laws for purification and many sacrifices that we no longer are obligated to obey (though we are obligated to apply those timeless *principles* which they taught, Rom 7:12; 2 Tim 3:16-17). "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4).

What is timeless is that God delights in the obedience of His children. He is deeply grieved by things like idolatry (which he calls *playing the harlot!*—cf. Jer 2:20; 3:6; Ezek 16:20ff.), taking His name in vain, immorality, haughtiness, lying, false measures, etc. He wants His children to live like children of God—which is what believers are (John 1:12).

In Romans 7 Paul teaches that if a Christian focuses on the prohibitions he will likely fail to obey God. Being obsessed with commands is the path to disobedience and despair, not to obedience and joy (7:13-24). Rather, Paul goes on to say, we must focus on Christ Himself (7:25). By looking to Him, we can find the motivation and strength we need to obey.

Witness a small child at play in the home of a stranger. What do wise parents do when their child begins to play with things in that home which are dangerous or fragile? They do not recite a set of rules to a one year old. Instead, they divert the child's attention to something else which is safe. So, too, when a child of God is tempted to sin, he or she needs to look to Christ. By contemplating Him, we regain proper focus and the appeal of the temptation diminishes.

This is one of the main reasons why the Lord gave us His Supper. We are to contemplate Christ as we eat the bread, drink the fruit of the vine, and hear the Word taught (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-33; 14:26-39). Regular participation in the Lord's Supper in a contemplative environment can do wonders for one's walk with Christ.

We can contemplate Christ in many other ways as well: prayer, Bible reading and Bible study, fellowship, witnessing, and meditation on Scripture. Contemplation of Christ is not some great mystery reserved for monks and recluses. All believers can and should regularly contemplate Christ.

Our aim in life should be "to be well pleasing to Him" (2 Cor 5:9). Our allegiance is not to a cold set of rules. It is to a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ (Col 3:24). We are obeying a Person who loves us and whom we love (1 John 4:19: "We love Him because He first loved us"). Attitude is a key element in man's role in present sanctification. Our attitude should be an abiding determination to obey our loving Lord.

F. Feeding on God's Word

Present sanctification relies heavily on regularly partaking of God's Word. After all, God communicated with us so that we might know how to obey Him and that we might be continually motivated to do so.

The Psalmist said to God, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps 119:11). Paul instructed Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). Peter wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet 2:2). The Lord Jesus, citing Deut 8:3, said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).

Many churches are moving away from verse-by-verse Bible exposition and replacing it with string-of-pearls sermons which merely touch on a text briefly and then, like the prodigal son, depart to a far country. I think that this is a dangerous trend. Illustrations and applications, while important, should not become the heart of messages.

Take a look at the Christian books which are popular today. Self-help books do well. Commentaries and books on theology, however, do not. In fact, it is not uncommon to go into a Christian home and find few if any commentaries or books on doctrine.

I am not suggesting that preachers and teachers should eliminate illustrations and applications. What I am saying, however, is that a vital element in discipleship is learning *from the Scriptures*. Well-chosen illustrations and applications can help us understand and apply the text. However, it is the Word of God which is of primary importance.

The Word of God is profitable for reproof, correction, teaching, and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16-17). It is vital, then, that we take it in, chew on it, and allow it to transform our way of thinking and acting (Rom 12:1-2). This can be done by reading (I like reading through the entire Bible in a year using a one-year Bible), study, memorization, meditation, and listening to it being taught.

Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote:

It is as His Word abides in the believer that he is in the place of spiritual achievement (John 15:7). There is little hope for victory in daily life on the part of those believers who, being ignorant of the Word of God, do not know the nature of their conflict or the deliverance God has provided. Over against this, there is no estimating the sanctifying power of the Word of God. Our Savior prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).¹⁰

¹⁰ *Systematic Theology*, 8 volumes (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 2:333.

G. Praying

God delights in the prayers of His children (Psalm 147; Rev 5:8; 8:3-4). In the words, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11), it is clear that God wants us to *daily* beseech Him to meet our needs. The apostle Paul commanded the Thessalonian believers, and through them all believers, to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). He was asking them to do something which was characteristic of his life (e.g., "without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day"—1 Tim 1:3). Daniel made it a practice to pray three times each day, even when he knew it might well cost him his life in a lion's den (Dan 6:10). So, too, did David (Ps 55:17).

Regular, daily prayer takes discipline and concerted effort. It is sadly possible for a believer to go through the whole day and not speak to God even once. This should not be. Prayer is a vital aspect of man's role in present sanctification.

In fact, part of our prayer life should be directed at praying for our own sanctification (Ps 32:6; Matt 6:13; 26:40-41; 1 John 1:9; Jude 20) and for that of others (2 Cor 13:7; Eph 3:14-21; Phil 1:9-11; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1-2; 1 Tim 2:1ff.). We should beseech God to give us strength to control our tongue, to stay free of bitterness, covetousness, envy, jealousy, and immorality, and to walk in a manner pleasing to Him.

I know a prominent figure in the debate over the Gospel who has been widely attacked in print for his strong advocacy of the Free Grace position. All who know him recognize him as a man who not only believes in grace but who also lives it. He has indicated that he is convinced the reason he has not become bitter in the face of all the harsh words thrown at him is because every day he asks God to keep him from bitterness.

Prayerlessness makes us vulnerable to temptation (cf. Matt 6:13; 26:41) and works against our growth. Prayer is the linchpin of present sanctification. Neglect prayer and the wheels may come off your spiritual cart!

H. Stirring One Another Up to Love and Good Works

Hebrews 10:24-25 reads:

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Assembling together with other believers is a biblically mandated way "to stir up love and good works" on the part of the believers present. A person who comes each week to a church where God's Word is clearly taught in a loving, caring environment is not likely to fall away from the Lord. Rather, as the author of Hebrews says, that typically has the effect of stirring one up to love and good deeds. Or, stated oppositely, one who stays away from the assembly of the local church runs the real risk of backsliding in his or her Christian experience.¹¹

To walk with God one must assemble together with other believers to partake of the Lord's Supper, to be taught, to be exhorted, to pray, to sing, and to worship. The group may be large or small. Size is not the point.¹² Assembling regularly with other believers in a local church is.

I. Witnessing

God wants all believers to share the Gospel with unbelievers. While only some Christians have the spiritual gift of evangelism, all are called on to evangelize. Compare Matt 10:32-33; Mark 16:15; 2 Cor 5:20. That last verse indicates that *all* Christians are ambassadors for Christ.

Believers who think that their growth will not suffer if they fail to share their faith are sadly mistaken. Witnessing helps us grow in the faith in many ways. It causes us to study God's Word more so that we can answer the questions which we are asked. It moves us to pray for the lost and to pray for new believers. It keeps ever before us the fact that we are strangers and aliens in this world.

When someone trusts Christ through our witness, we are encouraged. If we then help the new believer grow in the faith, we ourselves grow as we teach.

In addition to these things, sharing our faith is a means by which we share in Christ's sufferings. Paul told Timothy: "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Tim 1:8). Similarly Jesus said, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Matt 5:11).

¹¹ See, for example, the comments by Zane Hodges in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT Edition, s.v. "Hebrews," (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 805.

¹² The editor of our Journal, for example, has had a church that meets in his home for over twenty years. The group is small. But the impact on those attending each week is not.

No Christian is exempt from witnessing. Few have the gift of giving, but all are commanded to give. Few have the gift of helps, but all are needed to help. Few have the gift of evangelism, but all are commanded to evangelize.

Clarity in evangelism is, of course, absolutely crucial if we are to please God when we witness. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses go door to door regularly. Some of them spend 30 hours or more a month at it. Yet this does not please God because their *message* is wrong.

I once heard a missionary tell how he supposedly led a tribe to Christ. The chief came to him and said, "We want to become Christians. What do we need to do?" The missionary's answer to this thrilling question was this: "Follow Christ." How sad I was to hear this. The man wanted to know what he needed to do to become a Christian. He should have been told that eternal life is a free gift to all who simply trust Jesus Christ and Him alone for it. Instead, he was essentially told to work his way to heaven by following Christ.

How tragic it is that many of the missionaries and evangelists today are not clear on the Gospel. The fact that this is so makes it even more important for those of us who are clear on the Gospel to share our faith. The need is great.

Robert Lightner comments on the need for Christians, as ambassadors of Christ, to be clear on the Gospel:

Another outstanding characteristic of an ambassador is the fact that he has news to tell. It is not his prerogative to amplify, add to, or alter that news in any way. He simply delivers information from those who sent him.¹³

III. Conclusion

God plays a vital role in the growth of every believer. Apart from His work in our lives, growth would not take place. However, He has not arranged it so that growth takes place totally apart from the believer himself. Believers have a role to play as well (Phil 2:12-13).

The believer's role in present sanctification includes living by faith, being baptized, counting the cost, receiving Christian instruction, abid-

¹³ Cf. Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, The Savior, And Salvation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 277. See also Charles Bing's article, "How to Share the Gospel Clearly," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring 1994, 51-65.

ing in Christ, reading, feeding on God's Word, praying, stirring one another up to love and good deeds, and witnessing.

The Free Grace position powerfully promotes progressive sanctification, yet without annihilating assurance or muddling motivation.

Appendix: Questions and Answers About Man's Role in Present Sanctification

Question #1. What is the relationship between present sanctification and assurance of salvation?

There are many today who teach that clearly evident progress in present sanctification (i.e., good works) is indispensable for assurance of salvation. This view, however, is unbiblical and leads to devastating practical problems.

To disprove that view all one needs to find is one verse in which someone had assurance of salvation *apart from* works. There are a host of such passages.

Consider John 11:25-27, where Jesus questioned Martha as to whether she believed in Him and then accepted her confession of faith without objection. If assurance were dependent on ongoing good works, Jesus would have had to add a warning that she might not be truly saved.

The apostle Paul had complete assurance of salvation (Rom 8:38-39), and yet he was not certain he would persevere until the end of his life (e.g., 1 Cor 9:27).

Paul affirmed the salvation of Timothy and Titus in Scripture, mentioning only their faith (cf. 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:5; Titus 1:4). He did not restrict that assurance in any way. He was 100% sure that they were saved apart from their works. And, since Paul was an apostle and he was asserting their salvation in inspired Scripture, Timothy and Titus were certain of their own salvation apart from their works.

Likewise, the apostle Peter told Cornelius and his household that they were saved (Acts 10:43-48). On what basis did he do this? Surely not on the basis of their works, for they had only been Christians for a few minutes when he made his declaration. They hadn't had time to do any good works. They certainly hadn't persevered in the faith until the end. Rather, Peter asserted their salvation on the basis that they had "received

the Holy Spirit" (v 47). And it is clear in context that they received the Holy Spirit as a result of believing in Jesus Christ (v 43).

The apostles were absolutely 100% certain of their salvation. They knew they could not possibly do anything to lose it or to prove they never had it in the first place. They had Jesus' own word for it (cf. Luke 10:20; John 13:10). Their assurance was not dependent on their progress in present sanctification either.

In addition, there are many passages which promise such assurance to anyone who trusts Christ and Him alone for eternal life. In John 6:47 Jesus said, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life." In John 5:24 He said, "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

Biblically the evidence is clear. Assurance is not dependent on progress in present sanctification. Practically this follows as well. Not one of us could have assurance if it were linked to our works, since our works are imperfect (1 John 1:8,10). Only perfect works could grant certainty of salvation (which is what assurance is). In fact, even if a person lived a perfect life for years, he couldn't be sure that he wouldn't sin the next day and lose his salvation or prove he never really had it!

Linking assurance to works can have devastating results. Christians who accept this teaching are discouraged and insecure (because they know hell exists and yet they aren't sure if they will spend eternity there or not) and are in denial as to the extent of their own sinfulness. This greatly hinders their progress in present sanctification. Discouragement and insecurity do not promote holiness. Neither does denial of one's own sinfulness.

Non-Christians who accept this teaching are also discouraged and insecure and in denial as to the extent of their sinfulness. Worse still, this teaching greatly hinders them from being saved. It reinforces their natural inclination to attempt to be good enough to merit eternal salvation.

Question #2. What are proper and improper motivations to pursue personal holiness?

There are two major improper motivations: fear of hell and seeking the praise of men. Believers should not fear hell (John 10:28-29; Rom 8:38-39). To attempt to live a godly life so you can avoid going to hell is works-salvation thinking pure and simple.

Believers should also avoid seeking to please men as a primary aim (Gal 1:10). We are to seek to please God, not men. To be baptized to impress one's parents or friends, for example, is wrong. Similarly, to attend church so others will think more highly of you is to be wrongly motivated.

Positive biblical motivations include love and gratitude, the prospect of God's blessings if we obey and of His discipline if we disobey, and the Judgment Seat of Christ and eternal rewards.

The grace of God produces a powerful sense of love and gratitude which should motivate the believer to please God (2 Cor 5:14).

While the blessings are not always material, God does bless obedience (e.g., Matt 6:31-34; Gal 5:22-23). Things go better for the obedient believer. On the other hand, the disobedient believer will experience trials and difficulties as part of God's hand of discipline (Prov 22:8; Heb 12:3-11).

There are also significant future consequences to how we live. Those who are enduring in the faith when they go to be with the Lord will have eternal treasure and will rule with Christ forever (Matt 6:19-21; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Tim 2:12). All believers will appear at Jesus' Judgment Seat someday. Only those who have done well in their Christian experience will hear His "Well done" (Luke 19:11-26; 2 Cor 5:9-10).

It is naive to think that if a person can be absolutely certain of his salvation apart from his works that he would have no motivation to holiness. Love and gratitude, blessings for obedience and discipline for disobedience, and the prospect of eternal rewards all are powerful motivators for the person who is sure of his salvation to please God.

Question #3. Is present sanctification optional?

Lordship Salvation advocates feel that Free Grace people treat the issue of backsliding believers too casually. As a result, they often ask the question, "Is present sanctification optional?"

Actually, it grieves us to hear of fellow believers who have experienced a major fall. Sin is sad. The difference is, we do not conclude that a sinning believer must not be a Christian at all. This in no way, however, condones the sin.

Present sanctification is commanded by God (1 Pet 1:16; Heb 12:14). In that sense it is clearly not optional.

God does not remove all sinful desires from believers until they die or are raptured. After that time believers are sinless and perfectly holy

in their daily experience (1 John 3:1). Prior to that time they fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10).

Thus progress in present sanctification is a matter of degrees and is not an all-or-nothing proposition. If the above question is understood to mean something like, "Is it possible for a Christian to disobey God and to grieve Him?"—the answer is Yes (cf. 1 Kings 11:1-11; 1 Cor 3:1-3; 11:30; Eph 4:30; James 5:19-20).

Question #4. Is some minimum level of personal holiness guaranteed?

There is no passage in Scripture which promises such a thing or which paints a picture of the minimum level of godliness which all believers will attain. Even those in the Lordship Salvation camp find it impossible and undesirable to create a picture of what such a minimum level would look like.

What of a Christian who dies seconds after trusting Christ? Surely this has happened a number of times in history (e.g., deathbed conversions, battlefield conversions). How many good works could a person do in a few seconds?

Even when considering those who live for decades after trusting Christ, why should they aim for mediocrity? Why not excellence? Paul said, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that it is from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance" (Col 3:23-24).

The Bible does teach that God desires all believers to produce fruit which honors Him (e.g., Eph 2:10). Like a track coach calling to his charges to do their best, God calls upon believers to obey Him (1 Pet 1:16). Even more, He provides the power necessary to obey (2 Pet 1:3). He does not, however, remove our ability to disobey or guarantee some minimum level of achievement.

Question #5. Is perfection possible in this life?

First John 1:8 says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This looks at our present experience. Verse 10 of 1 John 1 looks at our past experience and affirms that past sinlessness is also impossible: "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

It is impossible to achieve sinless perfection prior to death or the Rapture. After those events, however, it is guaranteed for the believer (1 John 3:2).

Question #6. *Is there such a thing as a carnal Christian?*

In 1 Cor 3:1-3 Paul chides the Corinthian Christians for being carnal. The word *carnal* means *fleshly*. The Corinthian believers to which Paul was writing had been believers for about 4 or 5 years. That was plenty of time for them to have grown and matured in the faith, yet they were "still carnal" (v 3) and were still "babes in Christ" (v 1).

On the one hand, Paul clearly says that Christians can *be* carnal. That is, Christians can live in such a way that they are not manifesting spiritual maturity.

On the other hand, Paul does not use the expression "carnal Christian." He does not establish this as a special type of believer, any more than a baby is a special type of human. Carnality is a stage of development that all new Christians should soon grow out of as they mature in the faith. Unfortunately, however, just as adults can act like children, so too those who have been believers for years, like the Corinthians, can still act in immature childish ways.

Therefore, the answer to this question is "Yes and No." Yes, Christians can be carnal and can act carnally. No, there is technically no special category of believer called carnal believers.

Question #7. *Hebrews 12:14 reads: "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." What does that mean? Does it teach that there is a certain level of holiness we must achieve in this life in order to be saved?*

Lordship Salvationists see in this verse a warning to all believers. They suggest that this passage implicitly teaches that believers prove whether they are true or false believers by their behavior. True believers will heed this warning and will achieve final salvation. False believers will not and will be eternally condemned.

Such an interpretation is illogical. If eternal security is true, and it is, then no believer can lose his salvation. Believers don't need any commands or warnings in order to stay saved. Even false professors, those who think they believe the Gospel and yet are actually believing a counterfeit gospel, do not need to be warned to get to work. They need to be warned that they don't believe the Gospel. No such warning is present here since the author is writing to Christians (cf. Heb 12:2, "looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith"). False professors need to be given the Gospel so that they can believe it and be saved. However, the Gospel is not presented here.

The Lordship Salvation interpretation is also forced. They are reading their theology back into a verse, not letting the verse speak for itself. The verse says that no one will see the Lord without holiness. It is clear from verses like 1 John 3:2, "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," that when believers see the Lord we will be perfectly holy, sinless. That is what is called ultimate or future sanctification.

The author of Hebrews is challenging believers to strive now to live like we will live forever. It is like Peter citing the Lord's command from Leviticus, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16). It is also like Paul saying, "I . . . beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Eph 4:1).

Question #8. *Second Corinthians 13:5 reads, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." What does that mean? Does it command believers to look at their works to see if they are regenerate?*

Some see in this verse a command to test our salvation by our works. But that interpretation flies in the face of Scripture. In both First and Second Corinthians Paul asserted that he was writing to genuine believers: "To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:2). "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor 6:19). "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart" (2 Cor 3:2-3). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ . . ." (2 Cor 5:10). Why would Paul come to the end of the second letter and question the salvation of people whose salvation he had consistently affirmed? He wouldn't.

If the Corinthian believers needed to examine themselves to see if they were saved, then so do all believers. There is no hint here of this being a special requirement for assurance in Corinth. And, if believers need to do this once, then they need to do it over and over again, for our works are not perfect and they do not remain static.

However, we know that people like the apostles, Timothy, Titus, Cornelius and his household, Martha, and many others had absolute certainty of their salvation apart from their works (see question 1 above).

Why would God provide absolute assurance apart from works for some believers and not for all?

Note the last word in 2 Cor 13:5. In the Greek it is the word *adokimos*. Paul said in 1 Cor 9:27 that he feared that after he had preached to others he himself might be disqualified (*adokimos*). Clearly he did not fear hell. What he did fear was being *disapproved* for the prize of ruling with Christ (1 Cor 9:24-25; cf. 2 Tim 2:12). Likewise, the Corinthians were in danger of being disapproved for that prize.

It is a mistake to assume that "in the faith" here refers to being saved. A look at the preceding verses shows that some of the Corinthians doubted that Paul himself was Christ's spokesman (v 3). So in v 5 Paul asks them to examine themselves rather than him! They questioned whether he spoke for Christ. He challenges them to see if they speak for Christ. When he says, "examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith," he is referring to their experience, not to their position. Were they in the faith in their behavior?

Similarly, in this context when Paul questions them as to whether or not Christ is in them, he is not questioning their salvation. He is questioning their present sanctification. He wants them to see whether Christ is experientially active in their lives or not. Paul wrote something very similar to the Ephesian believers. He prayed "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3:17). These were saved people and he was praying that Christ might dwell, or be completely at home, in their hearts.

GOD USES GOSPEL TRACTS

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I. Introduction

"It's too simple!" That's the crux of the debate about the Free Grace Gospel. The simplicity of the Free Grace message has increasingly drawn the fire of the Lordship Salvation camp.

Likewise, that is the attitude of many contemporary Christians toward literature evangelism—using tracts to share the Gospel. "It's too simple!" I have bumped into this attitude regularly during my last ten years as an editor of gospel tracts.

I've been told that tracts are archaic and don't fit in with the evangelism styles of the 90's. Here's a case in point: I had contacted the publications board of a very large, high-profile, evangelical church in the northern United States to suggest partnering with them to produce a few evangelistic tracts. They told me that while they believed in the ministry of tracts, their church's evangelism philosophy encouraged Christians to develop a personal relationship with seekers. This church would not endorse what it did not use. There is a subtle dichotomy here: If you seek to get *personally involved* with those you want to lead to the Lord, you don't need tracts! Thus, some believe that tracts are only useful in *impersonal* witnessing situations, such as mass evangelism.

II. Gospel Tracts Are Powerful Evangelistic Tools

In fact, the opposite is true: If you make friends with a seeker and desire to share the Gospel with him or her, tracts are even *more* effective because you have prepared the way for the message by demonstrating personal friendship and concern.

Balance is needed here. Many Christians *do* use gospel tracts in their witness for Christ. The organization I work for produces over 25,000,000 tracts a year, used by thousands. But many other Christians do not use tracts. Why? Looking beyond the sad reality that some Christians do not regularly share their faith in *any* way, a couple of reasons are evident.

First, like the church mentioned previously, many Christians stereotype tract distribution as a person standing on a windy street corner and shoving tracts at passersby, or going door-to-door in neighborhoods and apartment complexes. Many people associate tracts only with mass evangelism.

Second, many Christians don't see the fruit of tracts, the lives changed for eternity when Christ confronts and convicts someone through the printed page.

I am convinced that the labor of planting the seed of gospel tracts will become more tolerable, even attractive, when we consider the abundant evidence that God has used and still uses them to confront non-believers with their sin and the Sin-Bearer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, a gospel tract is no more effective than the "version" of the Gospel it presents. But the presentation of the simple, biblical Gospel emphasizing the free grace of God through the sacrifice of His Son in a simple tract has proven to be a dynamic tool in the hands of believers through the centuries. With that in mind, here are eight true stories about how God has used gospel tracts to bring lost souls into His glorious kingdom.

A. The Tract that Influenced Europe:

It Kept Going and Going and Going!

Soon after the invention of the modern printing press in the 1450's, religious literature flourished. This is especially true of the tracts used by Martin Luther and other reformers during the Protestant Reformation in the early-to-mid 1500's.¹ In 1557, a young French officer, wounded in the battle of Saint Quentin, lay weak in bed in an enemy fortress where he was imprisoned. His brother, a covert Huguenot,² visited him bringing a few evangelical books and tracts. The wounded officer read one of the tracts and trusted Christ as his Savior. When he was released from prison months later, the officer, Gaspard de Coligny, joined the Protestant movement embodied in the Huguenots of France, and he became one of the great spiritual leaders in the history of that country.

But this same tract had still more work to do. Coligny's nurse retrieved the tract from his sick bed and gave it to the Lady Abbess, the superior among the nuns at a local convent. The abbess, Charlotte of Bourbon, read the tract, and she too was converted. She later renounced her vows

¹ Perry C. Brown, "Preaching from the Print Shop," *Christian History* 11 (No. 2, Issue 34): 34-35.

² Huguenots were French Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries.

and fled to the Netherlands. There she met and married a young Hollander. She bore him six daughters, and she influenced him greatly for the cause of Christ across Europe. Her husband was William of Orange, who was to the Netherlands what George Washington was to the United States. William became a champion of liberty and of Christ in Europe, and he established the political foundations of that European country that still stand today.³

This story is a wonderful example, not only of the long heritage that gospel tracts have enjoyed, but also of the principle of multiple readership. While some tracts may be discarded before they are read, many others may be read many times; their message consistently repeated over and over because of the fixed nature of the Gospel in print.

A contemporary personal example illustrates this well. After having lunch at a local restaurant, I left a colorful cartoon tract with my tip for the waitress. A friend happened to be sitting at another table in the same restaurant and observed what happened to the tract after I left. The waitress picked up my tract with the tip and took it with her to an empty booth next to the kitchen. There she sat intently reading the tract, and soon a couple of her co-workers appeared at the kitchen door. They asked her what she was reading, and she invited them to slide into the empty booth behind her so they could peek over her shoulder and read along with her. I had left the restaurant minutes before, but the tract continued to speak clearly to that huddle of three. The story of Admiral Coligny and Charlotte of Bourbon brings up another point that shouldn't be underestimated: God has used tracts to save those who have become influential leaders in His Church, and who have in turn led many to the Lord.

The next account is a striking example of that truth.

B. The Tract That Sent the Gospel to China

"The best thing I can do is enjoy the pleasures of this world, for there's no hope for me beyond the grave."⁴ So thought 16-year-old James.

³ L. H. Lehmann, *The Drama of William of Orange* (New York: Agora Publishing Co., 1937), 18-19, 27 (footnote); A. W. Whitehead, *Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France* (London: Methuen, 1904), 59, 68; Paul Lee Tan, *The Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* (Rockville, Md.: Assurance Publishers, 1979), 750.

⁴ Roger Steer, *J. Hudson Taylor: A Man in Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: H. Shaw Publishers, 1993), 1-8; for a full personal account of Taylor's conversion, see Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor in Early Years: The Growth of a Soul* (London: China Inland Mission, 1927), 66-67.

Although he had been raised in a devout Methodist home, he was frustrated by his growing feelings of doubt about God. He had tried to *make* himself a Christian by doing the right things and associating with the right people—and he failed. “For some reason,” he concluded, “I cannot be saved.”

One afternoon, James found a gospel tract on a bookshelf in his home. While reading through the tract he was struck by the phrase “the finished work of Christ.” “What does that mean?” he questioned.

In a moment he remembered something from his religious training: “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

Then he said, “If the whole work was finished and the whole debt paid, what is there left for me to do?”

Years later James penned these words about that moment of truth: “With this [thought] dawned the joyful conviction . . . that there was nothing in the world to be done but [to] . . . accept this Savior and His salvation.”

It was not long after this eternal decision that James—James Hudson Taylor—now heralded as one of the pioneer missionaries of the 19th century, received his call from God to take this same Gospel of grace to China.

God’s heart for missions explains why He has so often used gospel tracts not only to carry the good news to foreign lands, but also to motivate men and women to become the messengers.

The following is another example of a tract that had a profound influence on its reader, who in turn had a profound influence on foreign missions. This story is a striking example of how God can use a tract even in adverse circumstances, and also how a concerned Christian can prepare the way for the good news in print.

C. Encounter in Copenhagen: A Seed that Bore Fruit Later

A stranger stopped 18-year-old Thomas Bach on the streets of Copenhagen, Denmark and persistently offered him a gospel tract.⁵ “Why don’t you bother other people with your religion?” Thomas barked. “I’m quite able to take care of myself!”

Furiously, Thomas snatched the gospel tract from the stranger’s hand, ripped it into pieces, and stuffed it into his pocket. “You attend to your business, and I’ll attend to mine!” he snapped.

⁵ Tom Watson, Jr., *T. J. Bach; A Voice for Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 12-17.

Instead of answering Thomas's anger, the stranger simply turned away to a nearby doorway, folded his hands, closed his eyes, and began to pray. To the astonishment of Thomas, who was still watching, the stranger had tears on his cheeks.

Making his way back to his room, Thomas was overcome by curiosity. He dug the scraps of paper from his pocket and began to piece them together on his desk. Then he read the simple message that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

"As I read," Brother Bach relates, "I came under conviction, and it seemed like the mighty hand of God was upon me. Before I had finished reading the tract, I was down on my knees asking God for the forgiveness of my sins. He was faithful, and then and there He brought me into the glorious liberty of the children of God."⁶

Out of gratitude for what God had done for him, Thomas Johannes Bach served God for years as the General Director of TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission). He was a spiritual leader to the mission's eight hundred workers who labored around the world sharing the same good news that Thomas encountered that day in Copenhagen.

It is trendy today to talk about sharing Christ with "seekers." But what about those who are *not* seekers in our sense of the word? What about those who are antagonistic to the Gospel? Can we, should we, tell them the good news too, as with Thomas Bach? With tracts we can, for a tract will often speak to a person's heart after that person is alone, away from a face-to-face confrontation, when the Spirit of God can work in quiet conviction.

Moishe Rosen's story beautifully illustrates this.

D. A Jew Meets Jesus

Mrs. Rosen prayed for her husband every day, often weeping as she asked the Lord to show him the truth about Jesus Christ.⁷ She knew that she couldn't talk much about her newfound faith in Christ, because it was still so upsetting to her husband.

However, she did leave a little booklet about heaven on a table in their home. She knew that her husband was naturally inquisitive, and sure enough, he read it.

⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁷ Moishe Rosen, *Jews for Jesus* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1974), 8-9.

A few weeks later Mr. Rosen blurted out one day, "Heaven's not like that guy says!"

"What guy?" asked Mrs. Rosen.

"The guy who wrote the pamphlet that you left lying around," replied Mr. Rosen.

But when he began to point out where the pamphlet was wrong, Mr. Rosen was forced to face his own thoughts about God honestly, and he recognized his prejudice. The pamphlet he had read had forced him to examine Christianity so that he could disprove his wife's faith. But the information he had gleaned had planted the seed of the Gospel in his own heart.

Both of them were surprised when Mr. Rosen trusted Christ. The next morning they went to church together, where Mr. Rosen publicly proclaimed his faith.

And God had plans for Moishe Rosen. He became the founder of Jews for Jesus, now a worldwide ministry dedicated to proclaiming the good news of forgiveness and eternal life purchased by a Jew named Jesus Christ.

Sharing the Gospel with family members demands a special delicacy, for unlike the man on the street or the neighbor next door, a rejection of the Gospel by a relative may mean severing flesh-and-blood ties.

But even after religion becomes a taboo subject between relatives, gospel tracts keep on speaking—as Kaye found out in our next story.

E. Her Father's Salvation: Overcoming Family Objections

Kaye was faced with a decision that no young person should have to face.⁸ She had just become a Christian; she had been born again and for the first time in her life she knew real forgiveness of sins.

So what was the problem? Kaye's parents had raised her in a church that was part of a mainline denomination, and she had been taught to trust Christ *plus* tradition, not Christ alone, for her eternal salvation. Now her parents gave her an ultimatum: Come back to the church and forget this born-again nonsense, or leave home. Kaye was forced to leave home.

For years she had little communication with her parents, and she carried a heavy burden for their salvation as well. And even as time somewhat broke down the barriers between her and her parents, they still remained hardened against the message of the Gospel.

⁸ Account taken from a personal letter to the American Tract Society.

Kaye's father had always been sensitive about keeping out of debt, and when Kaye saw a gospel tract entitled "Paid in Full"⁹ at a church in Rhode Island during her summer vacation, she saved one for her dad. The tract discussed the biblical phrase "It is finished!" (John 19:30). It declared that "Jesus Christ ended the agony of bearing the punishment for the debt of the world—your sins and mine—on a Roman execution cross." Kaye's selection of this tract was appropriate not only because her father was sensitive to debt, but also because of his trust in Christ *plus* tradition to make him acceptable before God. The tract she gave him stressed that "God is satisfied that Christ's payment covered the debt you have with Him. Now all He asks is that you acknowledge the debt and accept the payment. The Bible calls that 'believing in Christ' for salvation (Acts 16:30-31)."¹⁰

With much prayer, Kaye gave the copy of "Paid in Full" to her father, and she kept praying as her father considered the claims of the Gospel as he read them in the tract. After weeks of anticipation, Kaye's father trusted in Christ alone for his salvation. The barrier between Kaye and her dad was finally gone, and so was the barrier of sin between her dad and God.

So many, like Kaye's father, know the Gospel, but resist it. But many more—more than we imagine—have still never heard a clear presentation of faith alone in Christ alone.

The next story shows how a tract can cut through the clutter of "religion" and get to the heart of the Gospel, and how quickly its fruit can multiply.

F. A Waitress and the Bread of Life

Sumner Wemp is a widely known Baptist evangelist who has been an untiring advocate for gospel tracts for decades. During one of his trips, Sumner had stopped at a restaurant in Salt Lake City, Utah for lunch.¹¹ As was his habit, after the waitress took his order he shared a gospel tract with her and politely asked her to read it when she had the time. A short time later she brought his lunch and then left to wait on a few other tables.

Later she came by to check on Sumner and said, "I read your little paper."

⁹ "Paid in Full," American Tract Society (1991), 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ Account taken from personal correspondence with Sumner Wemp.

"Great!" said Sumner.

"I didn't know that," she said.

"You didn't know *what*?" Sumner asked.

"I didn't know that Christ suffered for my sins," she said, her eyes now full of tears.

Sumner's heart leaped for joy, and he quickly said, "Christ really did suffer and die for sins. He took the punishment and paid the debt for all we have ever done wrong and then rose again from the grave. He is alive today, and we can know Him personally." Then he carefully explained the Gospel and how we are not saved by our works but by what Christ did on the cross.

When Sumner asked if the waitress understood what he had told her, she said, "Yes, I see that now." He asked her to trust Jesus as her Savior. Almost crying now, she believed in Christ for eternal life. She had assurance that now she was truly saved. She had served Sumner a meal that would feed him for a few hours, but he had introduced her to the Bread of Life (John 6:35) that would save her for eternity—all because he shared a simple gospel tract.

Some who are confronted by the claims of Jesus Christ in a tract may not be actively searching for the key to their sin problem. But in other cases, God sovereignly directs a tract into the hands of an active seeker, giving him the answers to precisely the questions he was pursuing.

When that happens, as in the next account, the teamwork of the Holy Spirit, the Christian, the gospel message, and a tract is powerful.

G. A Pilot and a Pamphlet

It was still early on the morning of December 7, 1941, when 183 Japanese planes left American warships burning in Pearl Harbor.¹² In the skies above, the air commander of the Japanese strike force was safely flying back to his ship to revel in the overwhelming victory. The commander's name was Mitsuo Fuchida.

After the war, Mitsuo was so troubled by the strife that had led to the bombing of Pearl Harbor that he wrote a book entitled *No More Pearl Harbors*. It was a warning and a plea to pursue peace. But although he preached peace, Mitsuo had no clue to the source of power that could generate such peace.

¹² Donald A. Rosenberger, "What Happened to the Man Who Led the Attack on Pearl Harbor?", *Command* (Fall/Winter 1991): 4-9.

On a trip to Tokyo, Mitsuo was handed a pamphlet entitled "I Was a Prisoner of Japan," written by former prisoner of war Jacob DeShazer. Locked in a Japanese prison for forty months, DeShazer almost went insane because of the brutality of the guards. But he happened to get a copy of the Bible in solitary confinement and after reading it became a Christian. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, DeShazer found that his hatred for the Japanese had turned to love. After the war he returned to Japan to tell the people there about the love of Jesus Christ, and part of his witness included distributing tracts that told of his miraculous rebirth.

From that tract Mitsuo discovered the source of power that could turn hatred into peace—power that he was looking for. He bought a copy of the New Testament in Japanese. By the time he had read about Jesus' crucifixion in Luke 23, Mitsuo had accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. A simple gospel tract had played a vital role in leading to Christ the commander of the Japanese planes that attacked Pearl Harbor.

I do not want to leave the reader with the impression that gospel tracts are the alpha and omega of evangelism. They are not. They can stand alone and work independently if need be, but God can best use them in tandem with the personal contact of a caring Christian and, in the last example, the full-blown testimony of the Scriptures. Tracts are but a piece of the evangelism puzzle, but the puzzle is not complete without them.

Having said that, tracts often do build bridges to unbelievers that sometimes cannot be constructed through personal contact. Tracts can transcend race, nationality, economic and social barriers, language, geography, ideology, denomination, personal enmity, and all the other factors that keep us isolated from one another in this fallen world.

This final story is so compelling because it illustrates just this transcending nature of gospel literature. Mary related her story to personnel at the offices of American Tract a couple of years ago. She took the time to recount it to them because of her astonishment and excitement over how God had honored her obedience, and over His startling faithfulness to use His written word *today*, in the worst of situations.

H. A Teacher and a Tract

Mary was in trouble.¹³ For years she had left gospel tracts on her desk for the students in the algebra class she taught. A lawyer on the school

¹³ Account taken from telephone conversation with the subject.

board had vowed to have her fired because of her overt Christian witness, and when he was elected president of the school board, he made good on his threat.

Fighting her dismissal, Mary finally got her job back after six months. In a strange turn of events, she discovered that the board members who had lobbied for her dismissal were themselves guilty of certain misdeeds, and they were in turn dismissed from the board—including the hostile lawyer. Again he vowed that he would one day ruin her and that his children would never be allowed in her classes.

Months later Mary attended the funeral of a student at her school. She arrived late and was seated next to the irate lawyer! Though uncomfortable, Mary felt compelled to hand the lawyer one of the tracts she always had in her purse. The only one she had happened to be written by a Christian lawyer.

Time passed, and at the beginning of a new semester the lawyer's daughter was assigned to Mary's algebra class. Mary told the lawyer's daughter that she should be assigned to another teacher, in keeping with her father's wishes. Smiling broadly, the lawyer's daughter said that would not be necessary, for *her father had accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior* because of Mary's faithful witness and because of the tract that she had handed him that day at the funeral!

Mary's story is current, plucked fresh from our contemporary culture. Her testimony, like that of so many others, is that God is still honoring the distribution of gospel literature today, just as He has done for centuries.

III. Conclusion

It should be obvious that every tract given to a non-Christian will not bring a response like the ones chronicled in this article. However, some will! So even if our own personal success stories using tracts are few and far between, we still can better fulfill our commission to take the Gospel of grace to the ends of the earth with the help of clear gospel tracts.

With the evidence of God's blessing upon gospel tracts at hand, here are five guidelines for developing *your own strategy* for telling your world about Jesus Christ—with tracts.

First, obtain some sample tracts and evaluate which ones you would be comfortable using. Many Christian bookstores carry a wide assortment of tracts, and a few samples will cost you little more than pocket change. If you don't find exactly what you want at the store, contact

the tract publishers directly and ask for their catalogs. (Look for these addresses on the backs of the tracts at your local Christian bookstore.) You will have a much larger selection to choose from, and most publishers will send you free samples of the tracts you are interested in purchasing. Evaluate tracts on their quality (Do they look good?); on the way they capture the reader's attention (Do they arouse interest?); and on their presentation of the Gospel (Is it both simple and complete?).

Second, keep tracts handy. Designate a place in your home, in your car, and at your work where you can keep your tracts available. Access is the key. If you cannot get to them when you need them, or if you don't know where they are, you will not use them. And don't forget the built-in tract rack on just about every shirt and some blouses—the front pocket!

Third, identify two or three key situations in which you want to begin using tracts. Plan to have a tract with you when you eat in a restaurant so you can leave one with your tip. (Try writing a personal note to the waiter or waitress on the back of the tract.) Look for an opportunity to share a tract with the neighbor who has been talking with you about spiritual matters. Plan to include a Christmas tract in your Christmas cards this year to focus attention on Jesus Christ, not just the trappings of the season. If you visit the sick or elderly, take a tract with you and leave it with the person. The possibilities are endless. Just ask yourself, "Where do I have contact with unbelievers?", and then consider using a tract there.

Fourth, prepare the way for the tracts that you give away. That means praying that God will use your tracts, developing as much personal rapport with the person as the situation will allow, and never *forcing* your tract on someone who doesn't want it.

Fifth, write your own tract, possibly using your own personal testimony.

Evangelist Sumner Wemp says, "God uses gospel literature; do you?" The world already knows the value of literature in promoting ideologies, and in this sense the "sons of this age" have proven themselves more shrewd than the "sons of light" (Luke 16:8). Consider this final challenge:

From right-wing politicians to Marxists, today's would-be influencers have grasped modern media and, like the advertisers, developed colossal and effective techniques of national and international propaganda. Films, records, tapes and the printed page have a much

greater value to them than bombs, tanks and guns. Their doctrine has already penetrated thousands of villages where the Gospel has never been preached.

We had better not dream about opportunities for tomorrow. Quality tracts are tools within reach of every Christian, and that means responsibility today. Let's begin to put the best of them to work for the kingdom.¹⁴

¹⁴ Colin Wolrich, "Tracts—The Facts," *Buzz* (September, 1986): 21.

A Voice from the Past:

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF GRACE *

LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER ¹
(1871-1952)

I. Introduction

The exact and discriminate meaning of the word *grace* should be crystal clear to every child of God. With such insight only can he feed his own soul on the inexhaustible riches which it unfolds, and with such understanding only can he be enabled clearly to pass on to others its marvelous, transforming theme. Here is a striking illustration of the fact that very much may be represented by one word. When used in the Bible to set forth the grace of God in the salvation of sinners, the word *grace* discloses not only the boundless goodness and kindness of God toward man, but reaches far beyond and indicates the supreme motive which actuated God in the creation, preservation, and consummation of the universe. What greater fact could be expressed by one word?

The meaning of the word *grace*, as used in the NT, is not unlike its meaning as employed in common speech—but for one important exception, namely, in the Bible the word often represents that which is limitless, since it represents realities which are infinite and eternal. It is

* This article is the first chapter in the 1933 Moody Colportage (now Moody Press) book *Grace*, long out of print. Chafer called the chapter “The Theme” but we have renamed it. Not a word of Chafer’s has been changed. Only a slight updating of punctuation and capitalization, plus the use of the NKJV for the 1611 (really 1769) KJV, are substituted for easier reading. Ed.

¹ The “Voice from the Past” in our very first issue of *JOTGES* was by the beloved Lewis Sperry Chafer: musician, preacher, Bible teacher, and principal founder of The Evangelical Theological College (now Dallas Theological Seminary). Many of us GES people studied under, not Dr. Chafer himself, but his former students. All who knew him agree that he was not only a strong supporter of grace doctrines but was himself a very gracious and godly Christian. Ed.

nothing less than the unlimited love of God expressing itself in measureless grace.

The word *favor* is the nearest biblical synonym for the word *grace*. In this connection it may be observed that the one thought which is almost exclusively expressed in the NT by the word *grace*, is, in the OT, almost exclusively expressed by the word *favor*. Grace is favor, and favor is grace. Thus, in considering the Bible teaching on this great theme, equal attention should be given to all passages wherein either the word *grace* is used or *favor* is found. *Grace* means pure unrecompensed kindness and favor. What is done in grace is done graciously. From this exact meaning there can be no departure; otherwise grace ceases to be grace. To arrive at the scope and force of the Bible doctrine of salvation by grace alone we need to follow consistently the path indicated by the exact meaning of the word.

II. Seven Fundamental Facts About Grace

A. Grace Is Not Withheld Because of Demerit

This fact about grace is more evident, perhaps, than any other. It is the sense of demerit more than anything else which impels a soul to cry out for the kindness and benefits of grace. So, also, grace finds its greatest triumph and glory in the sphere of human helplessness. Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to withdraw it in the presence of human failure and sin. In fact, grace cannot be exercised where there is the slightest degree of human merit to be recognized. On the other hand the issue of human sin must be disposed of forever. Christ the Lamb of God, having taken away the sin of the world, has by His cross forever disposed of the condemnation of sin. He has by the cross created an entirely new relation between God and man. Consequently, men are now either accepting or rejecting Christ who has borne their sins. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). There is no middle ground. All questions of demerit have been banished. Thus God is righteously free to exercise grace in every case. Salvation is by grace alone.

B. Grace Cannot Be Lessened Because of Demerit

God cannot propose to do less in grace for one who is sinful than He would have done had that one been less sinful. Grace is never exercised

by Him in making up what may be lacking in the life and character of a sinner. In such a case, much sinfulness would call for much grace, and little sinfulness would call for little grace. The sin question has been set aside forever, and equal exercise of grace is extended to all who believe. It never falls short of being the measureless saving grace of God. Thus grace could not be increased; for it is the expression of His infinite love: it could not be diminished; for every limitation that human sin might impose on the action of a righteous God has, through the propitiation of the cross, been dismissed forever.

God does not ignore or slight the fact of human guilt and sin; for He has met these issues perfectly and finally for all men in the death of His Son. There remains no demerit, nor degrees of demerit, to be considered or recognized. By grace there is now offered alike to *all* men *all* the infinite resources of the saving power of God. The grace of God is, therefore, exercised in perfect independence of human sin, or any degree of human sin.

C. Grace Cannot Incur a Debt

An act is in no sense gracious if under any conditions a debt is incurred. Grace, being unrecompensed favor, is necessarily unrecompensed as to obligations which are past, unrecompensed as to obligations which are present, and unrecompensed as to obligations which are future. Grace must always remain unadulterated in its generosity and benefit. How emphatically this is true of the grace of God towards sinners! Yet how often this aspect of divine salvation is perverted! Infinite and eternal transformations are wrought by the power of God when He exercises His grace. He is thereby glorified and sinners are saved. Such far-reaching results cannot fail to satisfy and delight Him eternally; but He remains *unrecompensed* for His salvation through grace. What He does He bestows as a *gift*. Rightfully a benefit cannot be called a gift if it is paid for before, at the time, or after. This is a fundamental truth of the Word of God, and it is imperative that it be kept free from all confusing complications.

When a recompense for the gift of God is proposed, every element of salvation is obscured, and the true motive for Christian service is sacrificed as well. The Scriptures everywhere guard these two truths from such perversion; for, in the Bible, salvation is always presented as a *gift*, an unrecompensed *favor*, a pure *benefit* from God (John 10:28; Rom 6:23). And, in like manner, no service is to be wrought, and no offering is to be given, with a view to *repaying* God for His gift. Any

attempt to compensate God for His gift is an act so utterly out of harmony with the revealed Truth, and exhibits such a lack of appreciation of His loving bounty, that it cannot be other than distressing to the Giver. All attempts to repay His gift, be they ever so sincere, serve only to frustrate His grace and to lower the marvelous kindness of God to the sordid level of barter and trade. How faithfully we should serve Him, but never to repay Him! Service is the Christian's means of expressing his love and devotion to God, as God has expressed His love to those whom He saves by the gracious things He has done. Christian service for God should be equally gracious.

It therefore becomes those who have received His gifts in grace to be jealous for the purity of their motives in service for Him. Unwittingly the grace of God is too often denied by well-meaning attempts to compensate God for His benefits. No semblance of the most vital facts about divine grace can be retained unless salvation is, in its every aspect, treated as a *gift* from God, and Christian service and faithfulness is deemed to be only the expression of love and gratitude to God.

According to the Scriptures, salvation is never conditioned on human faithfulness, or on the promise of human faithfulness. There is no payment required, past, present, or future. God saves unmeriting sinners in unrelated, unrecompensed, unconditioned, sovereign *grace*. Good works should follow; but with no thought of compensation. Christians are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph 2:10); they are to be a "special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14); and "those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8). Thus, and only thus, are "good works" related to the gracious salvation from God through Christ Jesus. Grace is out of question when recompense is in question.

D. Grace Is Not Exercised in the Just Payment of a Debt

The fact is self-evident that the payment of an honest debt could never be an act of grace. In no circumstances, however, is the recognition of this truth more important than when grace is declared to be the present divine plan for the salvation of sinners. If God should discover the least degree of merit in the sinner, this, in strict righteousness, He must recognize and duly acknowledge. By such a recognition of human merit, He would be discharging an obligation toward the sinner and the discharge of that obligation toward the sinner would be the payment, or recognition, of a debt. "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (Rom 4:4).

It is therefore imperative that every vestige of human merit shall be set aside completely if an opportunity is provided whereby pure grace may be exercised in the salvation of men. For the sole purpose that pure grace might be exercised toward men, the human family has been placed under the divine judicial sentence of sin. It is obviously true that all men are sinners both by nature and by practice; but the present divine decree goes far beyond this evident state of sinfulness wherein one man might be deemed to be more, or less, sinful than another. For God, in this dispensation, which began with the cross, has pronounced an equal and absolute sentence of judgment against all, both Jew and Gentile. Men are now "condemned already" (John 3:18); they are "sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2); not on the ground of their own sinfulness, but on the ground of their federal headship in fallen Adam. Men are now judicially reckoned to be in "disobedience" (Rom 11:32); they are "under sin" (Rom 3:9; Gal 3:22); and they are "guilty" (Rom 3:19). Thus all human merit has been disposed of absolutely and forever, and there is no longer the slightest possibility that, because of personal merit, a divine obligation may now exist toward any individual. The sole divine object in thus universally and judicially disposing of all human merit is clearly revealed: "For God has committed them all to disobedience that He might have mercy on all" (Rom 11:32). Also, "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Gal 3:22).

That God now saves sinners by grace alone and apart from every human merit is the teaching of His Word: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:8-10).

In this passage the only order which can exist between divine grace and human merit is made clear. Man is permitted to *do* nothing until God has *done all* that His grace designs. "Good works" grow out of, and are made possible by, the gracious work of God. To this exact order all revelation concerning divine grace is in agreement.

A striking emphasis is given to the fact that God now saves by grace alone when the biblical doctrines of salvation by grace and the believer's rewards for service are contrasted. Salvation, being always and only a work of God for man, is always and only by *grace* alone; while rewards, being always and only that which is merited by the faithful service of the Christian, are always and only based on *works*. Human merit is always

in view in the divine bestowment of rewards; and the grace of God is never mentioned in connection with His bestowment of rewards (1 Cor 3:9-15; 9:18-27; 2 Cor 5:10). So, also, human works are never included as forming any part of the divine plan of salvation by grace.

An act ceases to be gracious, therefore, when it is a recognition of merit, or the payment of a just debt. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24).

E. Grace Is Never the Over-Payment of a Debt

Grace is no longer grace if it is complicated in the slightest degree with the payment of a just debt. It can never be that which is added to, or a part of, a righteous transaction. A bounty may be added to the payment of a debt—an extra amount above the full measure due; but in no case should this extra amount be considered a matter of pure grace. The character of the bounty thus added would, of necessity, be qualified to some extent by the relation of the bounty to the debt. The bounty will be either more, or less, than it would have been had it stood alone. Inevitably it will be affected to some degree by the righteous transaction with which it is combined. In the Word of God, as in common usage, the word *grace*, in its exact meaning, precludes any complications with other acts or issues, however righteous and just. Grace speaks of a gift, not of barter or trade, however unequal. It is pure kindness, not the fulfilling of an obligation. An act, in order to be gracious, must stand disassociated and alone. Divine salvation is, therefore, the *kindness* of God toward sinners. It is not less than it would be had they sinned less. It is not more than it would be had they sinned more. It is wholly *unrelated* to every question of human merit. Grace is neither treating a person *as* he deserves, nor treating a person *better* than he deserves. It is treating a person *graciously* without the slightest reference to his deserts. Grace is infinite love expressing itself in infinite goodness.

Through the death of Christ by which He took away the sin of the world, and through the divine decree which has constituted all to be "under sin," grace is free to save in *every* case, and only grace can save in *any* case. Divine grace is never decreased or increased. It offers a standardized, unvarying blessing to every individual alike. The blessing is measureless since it represents in every case no less than *all* that God, being actuated by infinite love, can do.

F. Grace Does Not Appear in the Immediate Divine Dealings with the Sins of the Unsaved

It is probable that no point in the Gospel of God's saving grace is so misunderstood, and, consequently, so misstated as the revealed truth concerning the immediate divine dealings with the sins of the unsaved. It seems most difficult for the mind to grasp the fact that, as revealed in God's Word, God does not deal with any sin in mercy, or leniency. The sinner is never forgiven because God is big-hearted enough to remit the penalty, or to waive the righteous judgments. Any presentation of divine forgiveness which represents God as directly exercising clemency toward a sinner is a fatal detraction from the meaning of the cross of Christ, and is a disastrous misrepresentation of the truth contained in the Gospel of His saving grace. Those who dare to preach the Gospel should give to the cross its true place of vital importance as given to it in the Word of God. How can God utter a more alarming warning on this point than is disclosed in the revelation of the unrevoked anathema upon all who pervert the Gospel of grace? "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8-9).

Turning from human speculation to the Scriptures of Truth, we discover one basic fact: The Lamb of God has already "taken away" the sin of the world (John 1:29). The fact that Christ as Substitute, has *already* borne the undiminished righteous judgments of God against sin, is the sole ground upon which divine forgiveness is now exercised. The forgiveness of God toward sinners, therefore, is not an immediate act of grace; it is rather a judicial pardon of a debtor in view of the fact that his debt has been fully paid by Another. We could not know how *much* He paid; yet, though unable to measure redemption, we may rejoice in the fact that *all*, even to the measure of the righteous reckoning of God, is absolutely and eternally paid by Christ. It is not a question of the relative benefits which might possibly accrue to the sinner under one form of forgiveness or another—were he forgiven graciously, or in strict justice; it is a question of the *basis* upon which *any* divine forgiveness can be extended righteously. This righteous basis has been provided in the cross. By Gospel preaching, sinners are to be told that they may now stand forever pardoned before God: not because God is gracious enough to excuse their sins; but because there is plentiful redemption that is in Christ Jesus through His blood (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7). Being free

to forgive at all, God is free to forgive *perfectly*. On no other ground can the marvelous statement—"having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:13), be understood. This Scripture is addressed to Christians and it exactly defines the scope of divine forgiveness which is theirs. It likewise indicates the measure of forgiveness which is offered to the unsaved.

When God thus forgives, absolutely and eternally, through the cross of Christ, He is acting as Judge. By this judicial decree, He sets aside forever all condemnation. Such judicial forgiveness, which guarantees an unchangeable standing and position in sonship, should not be confused with the Father's forgiveness toward His sinning child, which is wholly within the family relationship, and which restores lost fellowship and joy to the child of God.

Every unsaved person is under the three-fold sentence of sin. He is a sinner *by practice*, a sinner *by nature*, and a sinner *by divine decree*. God deals with this three-fold aspect of sin by a three-fold achievement in grace. There is *forgiveness for man* in view of the fact that he is a sinner by practice; there is *imputed righteousness for man* in view of the fact that he is a sinner by nature; and there is the *divine decree of justification for man* in view of the fact that he is a sinner who, by divine decree, is "under sin."

Judicial forgiveness itself is not an act of grace, nor is judicial forgiveness a mere act of divine clemency for some particular sins of present moment to the sinner. Judicial forgiveness covers *all* sin, and by it the sinner is, as to possible condemnation, pardoned *forever*. This pardon covers *all* sins past, present, or future. God the Righteous Father will, in infinite faithfulness, correct and chasten His sinning child, and the sinning child will need to confess his sin in order to be restored into fellowship with his Father; but the Father will never *condemn* His child (John 3:18; 5:24; Rom 8:1, R.V.; 1 Cor 11:31-32). The forgiveness of God toward the sinner is, then, made possible only through the cross and is never an act of immediate grace, and, when it is free to be extended at all, it is *boundless*. It contemplates and includes *all* sin. It forever absolves and acquits the sinner.

Though divine forgiveness results in a position for the sinner wherein there is no condemnation, this fact should in no wise be confused with the deeper aspect of God's saving grace wherein He justifies the sinner. Forgiveness cancels every debt before God, but justification declares the sinner to be forever judicially righteous in the eyes of God. One is subtraction, the other is addition; and both are righteously made possible through the cross.

Of the various divine undertakings in the salvation of a sinner, some are acts of divine justice, and some are acts of the immediate, super-abounding grace of God. Those acts which deal with human unworthiness and sin are acts of justice. These include forgiveness, justification, death to the law, freedom from the law, and the whole new creation. All this is made possible through the cross of Christ and, therefore, is not accomplished by an act of immediate grace. On the other hand, those aspects of salvation wherein God is revealed as imparting and bestowing His benefits are said to be immediate acts of grace. These include the gift of eternal life, the imputed righteousness of God, and every spiritual blessing. Limitless grace is seen in the love of God which provided the cross; but when that cross *is* provided, every saving act that is based upon it becomes an act of *justice*, rather than an act of immediate *grace*. "That he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).²

G. Grace Does Not Appear in the Immediate Divine Dealings with the Sins of the Saved

The divine dealings with the sins of the saved are similar to the divine dealings with the sins of the unsaved in one particular, namely, what God does in either case is done on the ground of the cross of Christ. By that cross *all* sin, whether it be that of saint or sinner, has been righteously judged, and the ransom price, which satisfies every demand of infinite holiness, has been paid. By His death, Christ provided the sufficient ground for both the salvation of the unsaved, and the restoration of the saved. It is because of what has already been accomplished in the cross concerning the sin of the world, that the unregenerate are freely forgiven and justified. This is a part of God's saving grace, and is wrought on the sole condition that they *believe*; while the regenerate are forgiven and cleansed on the sole condition that they *confess*. These two requirements indicated by these two words, it will be noted, are wholly different. The human obligation as represented by each word is exactly adapted in each case to the precise relationships which, on the one hand, exist between God and the unsaved, and, on the other hand, exist between God and the saved. The salvation of the sinner is unto *union* with God; the restoration of the saint is unto *communion* with God.

² At this point in the original book there is a footnote extending over three pages. Since the first issue of *JOTGES* (Autumn 1988) contains Chafer's article covering the same material in greater detail we refer the reader to that.

Believing and *confessing* are two widely differing human conditions, or obligations, and should never be confused or interchanged. The lost are never saved by *confessing*, and the saved are never restored by *believing*.

That there is no greater demand imposed upon the unsaved than that he *believe*, and no greater demand imposed upon the saved than that he *confess*, is due to that which Christ accomplished on the cross. He wrought in behalf of sinner and saint in bearing the sin of the world, and every requirement of infinite justice is met for all in the finished work of Christ. In the one case, there is nothing left to be done but to *believe*; while in the other case, there is nothing left to be done but to *confess*.

The revealed attitude of God toward all men is that of *grace* alone. Therefore He does not need to be coaxed or persuaded. With His hand outstretched to bestow *all* that His grace can offer, it is highly inconsistent to plead with Him to be gracious, or to coax Him to be good. By the unvarying teaching of God's Word, and by the inexorable logic of the accomplished value of the cross, the forgiveness and blessing of God to the unsaved is conditioned upon *believing*, and to the saved it is conditioned upon *confessing*.

First John 1:5 to 2:2 is the central passage in the Bible wherein the divine method of dealing with the sins of Christians is stated. A portion of this most important passage is as follows: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness . . . My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

According to this Scripture, four vital elements enter into that divine forgiving and cleansing which constitute the restoration of a sinning saint: (1) Confession is the one and only condition on the human side; (2) Absolute forgiveness and cleansing is promised on the divine side; (3) The Christian, while sinning, has been safe as to divine condemnation, because of his Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and (4) Divine forgiveness and cleansing is exercised toward the believer in unchallenged faithfulness and justice because Christ is "the propitiation for our sins."

In this transaction, as it is thus disclosed, the believer makes no disposition of his own sin; that has been made for him. So, also, the Advocate makes no excuses for the sinning Christian, nor does He plead for the clemency of the Father in behalf of the believer who has sinned. The Advocate presents the sufficiency of His own blood to meet the

condemnation of every sin. The Father does not act in gracious kindness when forgiving and cleansing the believer: He acts in strict *faithfulness* to His covenant and promise of eternal keeping, and in strict *justice* because of the shed blood. Such is the unchanging value of the propitiation which Christ made in His blood.

It should also be noted that, according to this revelation, the sinning saint is never before any tribunal other than that of his own Father. The eternal relationship between the Father and His child can never be set aside. The Father may correct and chasten His erring child (1 Cor 11:31, 32; Heb 12:3-15), and through confession the child may be restored to the place of fellowship; but all of this is wholly within the inner circle of the family and household of God. Condemnation, which would expel the child from the place of a son, is forever past. Nor does the sinning Christian draw on the mercy and favor of God when he is restored to fellowship in the household of God. How easily mercy and favor might be exhausted and overdrawn! On the contrary, the Christian, sheltered under the blood of propitiation, and standing in the merit of his Advocate, is on a basis where no past offenses have accumulated against him; for he is cleansed and forgiven under the legal justice of the Father. The justice of God is made possible and is righteously demanded in view of the shed blood of His own Son.

Let it not be supposed that this divine plan of restoration of the child of God to the Father's fellowship will react in an attitude of carelessness on the part of the Christian. The sufficient answer to this challenge is three-fold: (1) True confession is the expression of a very real repentance, or change of mind, which turns from the sin. This is the exact opposite of becoming *accustomed* to the sin, or becoming *careless* with regard to it. (2) This very revelation is given, we are told, not to encourage, or license us to sin; but rather that "you may not sin" (be not sinning). According to the Scriptures and according to human experience, the believer's safety in the faithfulness and justice of the Father and the advocacy and propitiation of the Son is the greatest incentive for a holy life. It is clearly revealed that God has, by other and sufficient means, guarded against all careless sinning on the part of those whom He has eternally saved through the merit of His Son. And (3) God can righteously deal with sin in no other way than through the absolute value of the blood of His Son; but when sin has been laid on the Substitute, it can never be laid back on the sinner, or on any other. In the cross of Christ, the question of a possible condemnation because of sin is adjusted forever. Mercy and grace can never be co-mingled with divine justice.

Boundless grace is disclosed in the provision of a perfect propitiation for the sins of the believer; but the application of the propitiation is never gracious; it is none other than the *faithfulness* and *justice* of the Father. Therefore grace does not appear in the forgiving and cleansing of the Christian's sins.

III. Conclusion

It may be concluded that the word *grace*, as used in the Bible in relation to divine salvation, represents the uncompromised, unrestricted, unrecompensed, loving favor of God toward sinners. It is an unearned blessing. It is a gratuity. God is absolutely untrammelled and unshackled in expressing His infinite love by His infinite grace (1) through the death of His Lamb, by whom every limitation which human sin could impose has been dispelled, (2) through the provision which offers salvation as a gift by which human obligation has been forever dismissed, and (3) through the divine decree by which human merit has been forever deposed. Grace is the limitless, unrestrained love of God for the lost, acting in full compliance with the exact and unchangeable demands of His own righteousness through the sacrificial death of Christ. Grace is more than love; it is love set absolutely free and made to be a triumphant victor over the righteous judgment of God against the sinner.

Having examined into the meaning of the word *grace*, the three-fold divine ministry and undertaking in grace should be considered. It will be observed that:

1. God *saves* sinners by grace,
2. God *keeps* through grace those who are saved, and,
3. God *teaches* in grace those who are saved and kept how they should live, and how they may live, to His eternal glory.

Grace in the Arts:

THE ALPHA STRATAGEM

An Annotated Work of Fiction

Part 1

FRANK D. CARMICAL

Evangelist
Harvester Ministries
Plano, TX

*Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold . . . But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world . . .*¹

1 Pet 1:18-20

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

Eph 1:4

And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was . . . Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world . . .

John 17:5, 24

Prologue

Having read the biblical passages above, meditate on the phrase *before the foundation of the world*. Let your imagination take flight back to that time before time.

Imagine what it could have been like *after* God created the Universe of starry galaxies, when all the angelic sons of God sang for joy. Then imagine that fearful day when Lucifer, the anointed cherub, began to lead a rebellion against the Most High. What ingredients went into that fateful decision faced by every angelic being—to choose loyalty to the Creator or disloyalty, forever heading down the path of eternal doom?

¹All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 1984.

Think back to that same era of pre-history when the incarnation of the Son of God and His work on the cross were events in the distant future. Conceive of a time when salvation by grace was only a prophecy, pre-written in Heaven. What awesome preparations were made for our redemption, not only before we were born, but before the Earth itself was born?

Fasten your seatbelts. You are about to embark on a fictional journey down the corridor of time, across the ages of history, and back to eternity past.

I

"My twelve very distinguished associates, I've come to visit all of you today here in your grand mountain palace to invite you to accompany me on a most interesting and rewarding journey."

Gaia² rose to her feet gracefully, her blue-green dress cascading to its full, majestic length. "Sir, you waste your time coming to Olympus. We'll never join your Rebellion."

"Your highness, queen of planets, did I mention anything about joining? Did I even hint at such a thing as pledging loyalty to my—to *our* Cause?"

² Let no reader suppose that the author believes in gods, goddesses, or the Earth-worshiping, New Age, radical feminist claptrap of the "Gaia" cult (see "When God Was a Woman," *Time*, May 6, 1991). In classical Greek, *gē* generally meant "the earth or world; the land in contrast to the water . . . In ancient Gk. mythology, *gē* and *ouranos*, sky, are among the oldest deities." See "Earth, Land, World," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 517. In this story, Gaia, Ouranos, and the other characters named after the Greek deities are the angels assigned to govern and control the planets of their same name or characteristic. For example, here Gaia is the planetary angel of Earth, third planet from the Sun.

Also note that this author does not believe in male or female angels, as clearly taught by Jesus Christ in Matt 22:30. However, although angels consistently were spoken of in the masculine and took on the human form of *men* (Gen 19:1-5; Judg 13:1-21; Mark 16:5), at least one passage leaves open the possibility that angels could also be viewed as feminine (Zech 5:9-11). Thus, for fiction, *The Alpha Stratagem* posits unfallen, masculine and feminine angelic beings portrayed by the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, who decide in the story to join or not to join Lucifer's rebellion.

For the classic theological treatise on this subject of angels and their relation-

There was a disturbing silence among the twelve angels of Olympus. The guest continued. "There, you see, your highness, your fears are quite unfounded."

"I don't fear you," she replied.

"Which is more than I can say for your younger sister Artemis³ beside you. Look at her blush!"

Artemis looked away, her flawless, ivory-white face now crimson. She reached for her goblet of nectar and nervously took a sip. "You're widely known to use any means necessary to *recruit* others to your side."

"No offense, please, my lovely Artemis. The hunt is *your* prerogative—not mine. Contrary to official propaganda, I recruit no one. I come proclaiming the good news of freedom from bondage. A fundamental tenet of my doctrine is that without total commitment and absolute surrender no one can be saved. For now, all I ask is that you accompany me on this excursion."

Gaia turned to Apollo⁴, her face bathed in the warmth shining from his orb. "Can't you stop this thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy the eleven satellites of your solar system?"

Apollo stood up from his throne and addressed the visitor. "Doesn't our Sovereign Lord rightly call you a slanderer?"

"O Great Apollo, bearer of light and truth, is it slander to state the obvious? Doesn't His own Word say, 'Speak the truth in love'?"

ship to physical matter, see *The Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas, *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 19:269-377.

For the classic fictional presentation of planetary angels as well as the idea of masculine and feminine angelic beings, the author highly recommends C.S. Lewis's "Space Trilogy": *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength* (all published in paperback in New York by Macmillan Publishing Co.). In the author's opinion, this trilogy is among the most creative fiction *ever* written.

For the classic work on these gods and goddesses in Greek mythology, see Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1940), 24-46.

³ Artemis, also known as Diana (see Acts 19) daughter of Zeus and twin sister of Apollo. In this fictional piece (and contrary to Greek mythology), Artemis is the planetary angel controlling the Moon, satellite of our planet Earth.

⁴ Phoebus Apollo, son of Zeus and twin brother of Artemis. Because of his brilliance and light, Apollo was often mistaken for Helios, the traditional sun-god. That notion is carried over into *The Alpha Stratagem*, identifying Apollo as the angel assigned to control the physical functions of our Sun in the sky.

Apollo surveyed the faces of his planetary council. "Friends, it's not out of love that this one speaks, nor is it from the truth."

There was mock injury in the visitor's voice. "You condemn me without a trial. But, hasn't He Himself said, 'We can speak nothing against the truth, only for the truth'?"

Unable to contain herself, Gaia cried out. "That's always your way—like the slithering reptiles that inhabit my world—always twisting every word to suit yourself!"

"And may I remind you," said the visitor, "that even his overlordship, General Michael, won't dare bring a reviling accusation against me when I someday dispute with him about Moses' body—how much less should you, the matriarch of planets?"

"Is Gaia the only one here with a tongue? If she can't listen respectfully to one of my rank and position, then I fear she may someday lose her ability to hear your Sovereign Lord Himself. If none of you rebukes her, then don't you share her culpability?"

Before Gaia could answer, the place was shaken as if by thunder. Zeus⁵ jumped to his feet. "I've heard enough of you, Gaia! It's my turn to speak.

"Why not listen to this anointed cherub, if for nothing else out of respect for his office? Perhaps he is an accuser, but if we attack the greatest of all angels, doesn't that make us just like him?"

Apollo picked up the golden bowl of ambrosia from the white tablecloth and passed it across the table to Zeus. "Don't be foolish. If you defend him, you'll sway all the younger planets."

Zeus knocked the bowl from Apollo's hand. The ambrosia spilled out as the gold clanged against the marble floor. "Are you saying that I, Zeus, the greatest of the planets, would be disloyal?" He raised his thunderbolt in the sign of an oath. "All our visitor asks is that we take this trip with him. Alone, we're vulnerable, but together, as a tribe, we can withstand him."

Artemis shook her head. "Pride was the beginning of his fall. God resists the proud . . ."

"And He gives grace to the humble," singsonged the smiling guest.

"Zeus is right," said Chronus⁶, striking the floor with his sickle and

⁵ Zeus, also known as Jupiter, is the planetary angel over the fifth and largest of the planets in our solar system.

⁶ Chronus, also known as Saturn, was one of the great Titans, not one of the gods of Olympus. He has been included here as a fictional angel of the famous ringed sphere beyond Jupiter, and sixth planet from the Sun.

taking his place beside his older brother. "There's no sin in merely traveling with the shining one."

Salty tears welled up in Gaia's eyes. "How can you both capitulate so easily?"

Zeus struck his breastplate and lightning flashed in all directions. "Are you accusing Chronus and me of joining him? Who made you a judge and ruler over us?"

"Stop. All of you." Apollo held up his silver bow and lyre. "There is only one way to settle this peaceably. We will put it to a vote. Do we accept this invitation or not? You know the majority rule—a better than two-thirds vote is needed by the majority to refuse the invitation."

"Then let me be the first," said Gaia, "I, the most honored of worlds, vote no—tell him we won't listen to any more of his lies, for he is surely the father of them!"

"And I, Zeus, greatest of the planets, vote yes—let's go with the angel of light, for the true light will certainly cast out the darkness."

"And I, Chronus, second in magnitude of the planetary brothers, vote yes."

Ouranos⁷, the local incarnation of their celestial home, planet Heaven, spoke cautiously. "If that's how my two big brothers feel, then I too will say yes." He stood up and walked over to stand with Zeus and Chronus.

With trident in hand, their smaller, but powerful brother of the sea-planet took his place beside Ouranos and the two giants: "And I, Poseidon, add my affirmative to theirs."⁸

After a long silence, dwarfed, dark, and distant Hades⁹ whispered, "Yes."

Disappointed, Apollo turned to the younger, closer worlds within his orbit. "And how does Hera¹⁰ vote?"

"I abstain." With dignity, Hera turned her matronly head away from the giant Zeus on her one side and the small, but feisty Ares on the other.

⁷ Ouranos, spelled Uranus in English, is the planetary angel over the seventh planet in our solar system. See footnote 2 above.

⁸ Poseidon, also called Neptune, second brother of Zeus and planetary angel over our eighth planetary body.

⁹ Hades, also called Pluto, third brother of Zeus and planetary angel over our ninth planet.

¹⁰ Hera, also known as Juno, wife (and sister) of Zeus. Here she plays the role of the planetary angel over the world destroyed to produce the band of asteroids between the planets Mars and Jupiter.

Zeus yelled, his giant vocal chords vibrating like kettle drums. "You can't abstain! Vote!"

Her peacock quickly hid its head, folding its iridescent tail feathers together like a fan. Hera answered, "I abstain because a vote to go with him is a vote to join him, whether you admit it or not."

Gaia ran to her sister putting her arms around her. "Dear, if you feel this way, then join Apollo, Artemis, and me. It only takes four of us to block the majority!"

Hera shook her head sadly. "Don't you see? If it's come to this—that we must vote to defeat the members of our own planetary family—then were already finished as a solar system. He doesn't need to destroy our planets. We've destroyed them ourselves."

Hera looked at the visitor with daggers in her eyes. "In a few minutes of insinuations and innuendoes, he's already succeeded in putting us at each other's throats. What will happen if we actually go on this 'stroll'? I abstain."

Zeus raised his thunderbolt as if to throw it at Hera. "I won't forget this!"

The visitor remained oddly stationary, like a lizard in the moment before it strikes its victim. There was a skewed gleam in his pale violet eyes.

Ares,¹¹ a muscular, red-faced youth, dressed in glinting copper-colored armor, left the inner circle and stood by Zeus. "I can't resist an adventure like this! I vote yes!"

Gaia left Hera and turned to her sunward companion. "Aphrodite,¹² join us in outvoting our foolish brothers."

The maiden of love and beauty bowed her head, her chin almost touching the flower garland around her neck. "I can't, because I'm afraid of what they'll do to me."

Gaia lifted Aphrodite's chin with her forefinger. "But if you vote with them, they'll do worse than if you vote against them!"

"I can't help it. I vote yes."

Gaia got on her knees. "Hermes,¹³ you always face the sun. You're the smartest and most gifted of all of us. Don't devote your talents to the evil one, I beg you!"

¹¹ Ares, also known as Mars, son of Zeus and Hera, and angel over the fourth planet from the Sun.

¹² Aphrodite, also known as Venus, daughter of Zeus, serving as the planetary angel over the second planet from the Sun.

¹³ Hermes, known in Roman mythology as Mercury, son of Zeus, and angel over the first planet from the Sun.

For once, his winged cap and sandals seemed to droop a little. "I'm sorry to hurt you Gaia, but I, Hermes, cast my ballot with the others."

"Then we've won!" cried Zeus, as his brothers began to cheer.

"Not yet!" snapped Gaia. "Apollo and Artemis have yet to vote."

Apollo and Artemis, twin lights in Gaia's skies, the masculine and greater light, warm and courageously strong, ruling the day, and the feminine and lesser light, cool and beautifully mysterious, ruling the night. Together as Sun and Moon over Earth, they wove their voices like a single note strummed on Apollo's lyre: "No."

Gaia knelt by Hera's couch. "Please change your mind. It's not too late. We're one vote away from swatting this 'lord of the flies'."

"My vote counts for nothing."

"But you're wrong, dear. It counts for everything. When the good do nothing, how can evil help but flourish?"

Zeus reached out his hand to the visitor. "Gaia, you've said enough. Hera's abstention gives us the victory, 8 to 3. You can't stop us without her vote. Now, let's listen to what our distinguished guest has to say."

"Thank you, my son," said Lucifer.¹⁴ "The game begins."

II

The small band of twelve planetary angels and Lucifer flew faster than the speed of light from their solar system located in an outer arm of the Milky Way galaxy to the area of the Cosmos known as the Northern

¹⁴ Biblical interpreters are divided over the identity of "Lucifer" in Isa 14:12-15. Most dispensational, premillennial commentators have held that this personage in the book of Isaiah looks beyond the historical king of Babylon and refers ultimately to Satan. (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 2:44-50; Arno C. Gabelein, *The Annotated Bible* (N.p.: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1970), 2:120-21; William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Old Testament Edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 951-52; Alfred and John Martin, *Isaiah: The Glory of the Messiah* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 72-74; and *The New Scofield Study Bible*, New King James Version, edited by C. I. Scofield; editorial revision committee, E. Schuyler English *et al.*, 1967; consulting editor, Arthur L. Farstad, 1989 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 795. Geoffrey W. Grogan's comments are helpful in a balanced presentation of this view: "When Satan works his malign through rulers of this world, he reproduces his own wicked qualities in them, so that they become virtual shadows of which he is the substance." See "Isaiah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 6:105.

Skies. Their journey took what to some would seem ages, but to others no time at all.

When they reached their destination, all felt a sense of awe—even Lucifer, now jaded by sin's deleterious effects. There in the north sky, a giant triple star—the only one of its kind in the Universe—ruled the greatest of all solar systems. Here was the heart and mind and soul of the Universe, the political, economic, commercial, cultural, artistic, social, and most of all, spiritual center of the Cosmos. The third planet of this system was called Heaven.¹⁵

Seeing the effect of this place on his guests, Lucifer quickly began. "Now that we've arrived, I must ask a favor of all of you. Try to control your feelings about this place. Do your best to think clearly. We're going to visit some locations where most of you have never been before and you mustn't let a mere emotional response rob you of your objectivity."

Gaia spoke up. "What Lucifer is saying is that when you're overwhelmed by the magnificence of Heaven, stifle your impulse to worship the One who created it!"

The thirteen flew to the largest continent on the planet, then to the largest region on that land mass, and finally to its largest city. They soared in formation above a long boulevard lined on either side with trees of knowledge, one of which would one day be planted in the earthly garden of Eden.

At last they arrived at the public library, a building so cavernous that all the planets ruled by these angels could be chopped into blocks and stacked inside with room to spare. The doors were always open, since this library never closed.

Inside, Lucifer escorted the twelve past the check-out desk and catalog files while a rather frazzle-haired angel looked at them over his spectacles. As they flew up to "the stacks," Lucifer commented, "Of course, the whole thing is virtually empty now. Someday, it will be filled with many volumes, things all of you will surely desire to look into."¹⁶ What I propose today is to give you a preview of what those shelves will contain.

¹⁵ For this unique idea of Heaven as "a real and a material planet like the earth—not an invisible, intangible place or some spiritual state, into which men go," see Finis Jennings Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (Atlanta: Dake Bible Sales, Inc., 1963), 211.

For a refreshing and thought-provoking study of C.S. Lewis's argument for the existence of God based on Heaven, see Peter Kreeft's *Heaven: the Heart's Deepest Longing* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 174.

¹⁶1 Pet 1:12.

"You understand that our vantage point, both now and forever, is that of outsiders looking in. This place will house knowledge mostly about a different order of beings than us angels."

The group began to fly up the shaft of the library's central tower. The catalog labels clearly indicated that most of this tower was devoted to those who would one day inhabit Gaia's world.

In wonder, as they passed trillions of empty shelves, Gaia muttered, "No wonder John will say someday that my world couldn't contain the books that would be written about the Son!"¹⁷

The group flew past huge "video" viewing rooms—amphitheaters actually—where all events from earth's future history would one day be available for viewing. Someday, visitors to this library would be able to see actual events, like the Flood, or Babel, or Sodom, just as they happened, not in simulation, but in real-time four-dimensional performances using the very light and sound waves of the original occurrence.

Up, up, ever upward the thirteen rocketed, passing shelves devoted to the life of each individual who would ever walk the face of the earth. The complete genealogy of every family, clan, tribe, and nation was ready to be plotted and graphed as it would occur. Volumes were reserved to record every prayer that would ever be prayed. Statistical information, such as the number of hairs on every head and the number of days in every life, would one day be found in the reference section.

There was even a section which must be left for perusal to some other eon, but can briefly be described as the "what-ifs." Here, in countless sets of books yet to be compiled from divine omniscience, would be the specifications of what *might* have happened, not only to each individual, but to each of their actions and decisions—tracing the logical ramifications and natural outworkings of each alternative course, plan, and pathway into eternity.

The librarians claimed that in eternity future, any visitor, taking even a casual glance at one volume of his or her own life would fall prostrate in adoration before the Almighty, seeing what *might* have happened or what *would* have happened apart from the grace of God.

The angels in Lucifer's group felt this weight of glory and knowledge pressing them from all sides—yet the library was almost empty. What would be the effect someday when the library was full?

¹⁷ John 21:25.

Sensing the tide, or better, the tidal wave of reverence and worship that could engulf them from too much exposure to these surroundings, Lucifer spoke hastily. "We're here to see one Book only—let's hurry."

At last, they arrived at the pinnacle of the tower, the summit of the "non-fiction" area, the place to which all other roads in this fund of knowledge, both angelic and human, would ever lead. There in front of them, etched on clear gold prisms, rainbows of light streaming from every word, was the greatest of all books by the greatest of all authors—the written Word of God by the Living Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The best-loved, most-read book, that many would live and die for in future history—the Holy Bible.

Lucifer desecrated the beauty of the scene. "Happily, our tedious visit here will be brief. I present for your study and dissection exhibit A in my case against the *almost* Almighty. I realize most of you have never read or even seen this thing before . . ."

"I have . . ." interrupted Gaia.

"And so have I," added Apollo.

Lucifer resumed his speech, "As I was saying, this Book is the foundation of my case. Let me remind you of the contents of this uneven literary work. In reality, it is a loose compendium of conflicting literary genres from poetry and prose to that most detestable of all inartistic diatribes, "prophecy"—especially the apocalyptic ones, Daniel and Revelation!"

"Now that you mention them," asked Gaia, "why don't we read from some of those very prophecies in Daniel and Revelation that predict what's going to happen to you and your followers?"

Fortunately for Lucifer, Gaia was interrupted by a fallen angel who had just walked up. There was an annoying pitch to his voice, "Sir, may I explain to them my higher-critical technique of demythologization? It really puts the whole patchwork quilt in an enlightening and educated frame of reference."

"Not now, Bultmann. Go work with Tillich some more!"

"Oh, all right." The demon stomped off sulkily.

Lucifer continued. "Let me remind you that this book pre-records everything I'm about to show you. This is not slander or false accusation. It is a matter of public record for all to see. Remember, I didn't say all this. Your Master has said it: 'Forever . . . Your word is settled in Heaven'."

As the angels filed out in bewildered silence, Lucifer murmured to himself, "Black king takes white king's pawn."¹⁸

III

The second stop on this most unusual excursion was to visit the Museum of Universal History. This was not a typical museum. None of the usual *objets d'art*, antiques, or relics could be found here.¹⁹

Like the library, this vast complex of galleries, exhibits, and dioramas was virtually empty now, awaiting a day when it would be filled with the most priceless treasures in the Cosmos. Those valuables were not there yet, nor would they be for countless millennia, but so sure was their fulfillment that each had a display case reserved in the museum, its copy plaque already written in *past* tense. A few of those priceless museum artifacts included:

- A shepherd's rod that changed into a snake, devouring other "rod snakes," and then changed back into a rod again.
- Two stone tablets, written on both sides, broken in pieces, but reassembled with angelic glue.
- An almond rod—budded, blossomed, and burdened with ripe fruit.
- A bronze pot filled with manna, as fresh as the day it fell from Heaven like dewdrops.
- A wooden ark, overlaid with gold, and a mercy seat lid with two golden cherubim (along with six other pieces of the original Tabernacle furniture).
- A blood-stained, seamless robe without a rip or tear.
- A simple, but elegant chalice—the Holy Grail.
- The original, wooden, blood-stained cross from Calvary, no splinters missing!

¹⁸ Let no reader suppose that this writer is unaware of the history and development of chess. Only the simplest descriptions are used here for those unfamiliar with the game. The pieces are mere "conventions," or standardized symbols, like those used in any literature. See C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1972), 123.

¹⁹ The idea for this museum is from a charming piece by A. E. Whitham in *The Discipline and Culture of the Spiritual Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 40.

- And in one of the grand galleries of the museum, an entire diorama was waiting for the ark of gopher wood, the best loved boat in human history by children of all ages. This space was reserved for the ark that would stand the test of torrential rains, Mount Araratian glaciers, and caustic critics—all three hundred cubits of it!

A thought came back to Gaia, words someone said long ago, "In the economy of God, nothing will ever be lost. Nothing, except men and angels."

The centerpiece of the museum and the focal point of its displays was a series of cases reserved for the original manuscripts of all the inspired Scriptures, including the original cut and burned copy of Jeremiah's scroll that would be painstakingly restored by angelic museum curators through a method of "unburning"—changing the ashes, smoke, and dissipated energy back into matter.²⁰

And of course, admission to this museum would always be *absolutely free*.

Lucifer broke the spell as the other angels once again were overwhelmed by a mere building on this planet built by God. "I bring you here to make one point only. According to this museum, everything is supposedly fixed. He has decreed that whatever is to happen will happen.

"His own Word says, 'Who has resisted His will?' Now I ask you, is that justice? Fairness? Where is freedom? Dignity? Self-actualization?"

Gaia raised her hand politely. "May I speak? Unless, of course, you feel threatened by me."

"I fear no one!"

Gaia continued. "May I point out that our Sovereign Lord has determined that such things as freedom, choices, decisions, and prayers are also part of that decree."

"Dear lady, don't mire us down in this old debate. Let's put the options simply. First, God has predestined all things; therefore, we *aren't* free or responsible for our actions; and thus He is a tyrant.

"Or else, second, God hasn't determined all things; and we *are* truly free. This seems to be confirmed every time I say 'no.' Thus He is a liar and really isn't the omni-good being His state-controlled press spins in its PR packages."

Gaia waited patiently to speak. "May I point out there's a *third* position? It's possible that God both decrees all things and yet we are still free. His decree is not dependent on our actions, but neither is it

²⁰ This is the scroll burned by Jehoiakim (Jer 36:20-32).

oblivious to them. Both are co-extensive from eternity.”²¹

“I grant you, lady, your right to a third option—which, though comforting, is nonetheless nonsense. Yes, people are always entitled to opinions that make no sense at all!”

Zeus roared with laughter and Gaia blushed.

Lucifer continued. “And, if your position is true, then it makes our situation all the more dire. If He is neither a despot nor a demon, then He is demented and the Universe needs to be turned over to someone who can govern it sanely.”

“A dilemma I’m sure you’d be more than happy to solve for us!”

Lucifer bowed. “Let’s go. We have more places to go. Black king takes white king’s bishop.”

IV

The thirteen angelic companions took public transportation—celestial metros are always fast, safe, and free—to a site far from the Arts District of the library and museum. After exiting their metro car, the angels walked through an industrial district and came to the edge of a canyon so wide and deep that it would make the “Grand Canyon” of Earth’s North American continent look like a hairline crack in the pavement.

Here were quarries where great slabs of crystal-clear gold were carved by chisels of pure light from mountains that resembled translucent ice. Precious gems of twelve varieties—jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst—were mined from the bedrock below.²² And in the depths of the sea at the bottom of this gorge were giant oysters producing translucent pearls the size of boulders.²³

The end product of all this industry was the stockpiling of building materials for the day when the Son of God Himself would supervise the construction of dwelling places for those who had been called His own from eternity past. Here among the blueprints for the Tabernacle of Moses, the Temple of Solomon, and the Temple of Ezekiel was the greatest blueprint of all—detailed sketches and layouts for the city to be made without hands. Here was the construction site of the New Jerusalem itself!

²¹ See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 230-35, and Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 310-17.

²² See Rev 21:18-20.

²³ See Rev 21:21.

Lucifer spoke with mock admiration. "Here we see a side to the divine nature that is rarely glimpsed. Note the lavishness of the preparations to build one city for one group of feeble folk exceedingly small in number—the future Earth-dwellers!

"But alas, this city will not even be for all of them. Citizenship will be granted only to those who will *agree* with Him. Cost estimates I've seen are off the charts. Even the streets of this city will be paved with transparent gold!

"The saddest part of this tragic waste is that His whole plan hinges on them—not us. In a short while, I'll take you to the place He's prepared for us."

Gaia motioned and Lucifer nodded to her. "What you say is simply not true. We angels *are* included in His plans, from beginning to end."

"O yes, as loyal watchdogs, faithful nursemaids, and back-breaking slaves of this race who will inherit the earth. Isn't it true that though He makes them only a little lower than us, their eventual rank will far outstrip us?"

"And if He does, is that any of our business?"

"Say no more. His own words say it better: 'Shall the thing formed say to him who made it, "Why did you make me thus?"' Not only are we reduced to subhuman dimensions, we are on an equal with pottery as well!"

Aphrodite spoke up, her voice uncharacteristically shrill. "I never knew these things!"

Lucifer smiled. "Follow me, my dear, and you will learn many more!"

As the group left the building site, Lucifer said quietly, "Black king takes another white pawn."

V

This time the angels flew to the sacred Mount of Election. None but Gaia had ever seen it. Not even she could have described it adequately. How could anyone?

Here was an entire mountain, clear as crystal, devoted to one thing—the name of every person elected by sovereign grace was etched in this great monument.

Lucifer began: "Of all the things on this planet beyond my comprehension it is this mountain. First, let me explain to you that all of this election business is tied up with His system of government: a rule by grace, where everyone is equally a beggar, reduced to groveling in the dirt and reaching up in childlike faith to receive a crust of dry bread from His magnanimous hand!

"Who ever heard of running a Universe on such things as grace and love? It's weak, absurdly impractical, and unworkable! It breeds ingratitude, insubordination, and presumption. And worst of all, it's unfair.

"My system is the one with true justice. I see everything as a business contract—none of this covenant nonsense. What we need is a system of total merit, based on individual achievement, social progress, and self-realization that encourages internal motivation—not this predestination stuff!²⁴

"My servants Marx and Jefferson have said it better: 'From each according to his ability; to each according to his need' and 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' I say, treat others like they treat you, while His system gives all to those who least deserve it and gives nothing to those who merit it most!

"I propose a Universe of true equality. Equal rights for all. Freedom to do whatever you want. Each person does what is right in his own eyes. The individual is supreme. None of His 'corporate good' stuff—how dreary to always put 'His kingdom' first.

"His universe is such a waste—trillions of angels maintaining worlds—custodians in a museum of lifeless art, undertakers in a mausoleum filled with dead worshipers, all for His eternal glory! No thanks!"

Lucifer's eyes flashed violet fire even as his mouth poured out venom. "Wait and hear me out! He loves them more than He loves us and they don't even *exist* yet! And what will they do when He *does* create them?

"Those wretched creatures will join me. Someday, they'll become rebels like me. They will disobey Him. Hate Him. Betray Him. Blaspheme Him. And He knows all this, yet He loves them *anyway*, has chosen them in spite of all this, planned to create them, prepared to redeem them, forgive them, and hold them to His bosom forever! That's His *grace* for you!"

Zeus charged forward to Lucifer's side. "We are His friends and yet He treats us like enemies."

Lucifer continued, "Now you understand. They will be His enemies and He will treat them like friends, like family, like His only begotten Son!"

²⁴ The irony of Lucifer's speech is matched only by the tragedy of all those down through the centuries who have bought into any system of works. If Lucifer (or any of us) was treated by God solely on the basis of merit, then God would have justly sent us to hell from the utterance of our first rebellious word. That Lucifer or any scoffer can even utter such a complaint is a compliment to God's grace extended to the sinning creature.

Zeus looked around at the other angels with hatred in his eyes. "I think we should vote now to join Lucifer's side."

Ares joined Zeus. "I agree. I've heard enough."

Gaia rushed forward too, looking up fearlessly at the towering Zeus and the taunting Ares. "And I'd heard enough of his pompous lies before he even opened his mouth! May I remind you, Zeus, that we agreed only to travel with this scoundrel. You've changed the rules because you've *already* joined him!"

"Listen," Gaia continued, "if Lucifer's cause is so just and right, then he doesn't need your help. Let him sway our brothers and sisters himself. What did he just say—'freedom to do whatever you want'? If you're going to join him, fine. Just give the rest of us a chance to hear him out and decide for ourselves!"

Zeus sniffed loudly. "Very well."

Apollo raised his bow. "Lucifer, how many more of these stops must we make with you before this infernal excursion is over?"

Lucifer nodded graciously. "Only one more here in Heaven and two more on Earth. Then I will never bother you again."

Gaia asked, "May I call for a break?"

Lucifer nodded. "Very well. Let's reconvene outside the Royal Palace in one hour."

As Gaia and the others left, Zeus stayed behind with his new master. Lucifer said triumphantly, "Black king takes white king's rook!"

VI

Gaia flew past the temple to the pinnacle of the Mount of Glory in Heaven. She landed outside the throne room and fell prostrate on the clear marble steps leading up to the entryway.

Gaia could not speak, but her mind cried out in anguish. She extended her hand upward in a plaintive gesture of appeal. Gently, another hand took hers and a voice said gently: "Don't be afraid, for you are loved."

Instantly, Gaia knew who it was. "Gabriel, I'm so glad you're here. I don't know what to do. Lucifer is slowly winning the planets of our system to his side. He already has Zeus and Ares."

Gabriel's voice was firm, but kind: "Resist him, but when he attacks, you must submit, whatever the cost."

"Even if he ruins the plans of our Sovereign Lord and King?"

Gabriel smiled. "My dear, Lucifer will do his worst to defy that plan, but the more he resists, the more he locks himself into it."

Gabriel helped Gaia to her feet.

He continued: "Fear God. Don't fear what the evil one can do to you."

Gaia straightened her dress and held her head high. "Then, so be it. If my world must perish, it must perish."

Gabriel stepped back and turned to go. Then he added, "Remember the principle that the Son will one day give: 'If you hold on to your life, you'll never keep it. If you let go of your life, you'll never lose it.' Farewell!"

Before she could answer, Gabriel had disappeared into the throngs within the throne room. Before returning to join the others, Gaia lingered just a moment to listen. Inside she could hear the booming voices of the four living creatures, who never rest day or night, saying,

"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"²⁵

In perfect harmony, but clearly distinguishable, was the chorus of the twenty-four elders who fall down and worship Him who sits on the throne and who cast their crowns before Him, calling:

"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were
created."²⁶

And in astounding unison, as though one voice, reverberated into eternity, were the voices of many angels, their number being ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, shouting:

"Blessing and honor and glory and power be
To Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"²⁷

VII

Alone with Lucifer, Zeus changed his tone to that of an inferior. "Master, there's something I don't understand."

His new master replied. "I already know what you're going to ask. What's the use of rebelling if He's going to win?"

Zeus seemed embarrassed. "Isn't it a good question?"

"Yes, but I can only answer with an illustration. Have you ever played multi-dimensional chess with a real master?"

"I've played the game with you, sir."

²⁵ Rev 4:8.

²⁶ Rev 4:11.

²⁷ Rev 5:13.

"Quite true. How do you play if all the odds are against you, if you know your opponent will inevitably beat you?"

"I do my best."

"What if your best isn't good enough?"

"I resign or try for a stalemate."

"No! You're giving up too easily. Does the Almighty still intimidate you so much? You're going to have to come out of that way of thinking quickly!"

"If you're against a pro, then you keep playing to the end game, no matter how slim your chances, no matter what His advantages are, on the chance, however remote, that the 'Master' will make a tiny mistake that gives you the advantage and enables you to win."

"But God doesn't make mistakes. He doesn't have any disadvantages."

"Oh no? That's another piece of PR you've been duped into believing. The Universe is no longer operating as a perpetual motion machine. By the time I'm through, I'll have saved at least one third of His slave labor force. With them free to do my commands, the Universe will someday degenerate and run down to nothing."

"And more important, I have jeopardized His reputation. Without His glory, He's as good as finished right now. The battle is always won or lost in the mind and in the opinions of others. Therefore, the real contest is who can wage the best public relations campaign."

"Yes, I have a chance of winning. He's already made some pretty big blunders. For one, He's put us all in this game and then subjected Himself to the very same rules. His deliberate self-limitation means that we can beat Him if we're smart enough."

"And He made His biggest error of all when He made *me*." There was a note of sadness in Lucifer's voice that Zeus couldn't comprehend. "The moment He made me, His defeat became a reality."

"Don't you have any doubts?" Zeus asked. "He *is* omnipotent! How can you be so sure of this whole stratagem of yours? What will you do if He wins anyway?"

"I'll do the only thing possible—get even."

"How?"

"By killing Him."

"Decide?"²⁸

"Yes, my student Altizer²⁹ is working on a pseudo-clever theological

²⁸ What implications from eternity past are captured in Jesus' cryptic words about Satan in John 8:44—"He was a murderer from the beginning . . .?"

²⁹ Thomas Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966).

fad that will one day be called 'Death of God Theology.' Too bad it'll be short-lived! But I speak of far more.

"There is only one answer to the universal problem that we find ourselves in. He's insane and I must do away with Him in order to save the Universe. Indeed, *I* am its savior and *He* will be the sacrificial Lamb—the King of Glory Himself!

"Only by such a supreme sacrifice can the Cosmos ever be cleansed. Fitting, isn't it, that He who created the Universe, He who permitted it to become the chaos that it is, should die to save it! What supreme irony! What poetic justice on an Olympian scale! A cosmic dilemma demands a cosmic sacrifice. Better for one God to die than the whole Universe perish!

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, read His Word. He will send his Son to Gaia's sphere—to Earth. When He does, I'll be waiting. I'll already be there with Herod's swords, with stones, with storms, with scourges, and with pain that will break all of nature's laws. I'll be there holding death in one hand and the grave in the other!

"He is the Master of this game, but I will play my stratagem. He'll lose a third of His pawns. Soon He'll lose Gaia, His queen. All He'll have left will be His beloved Son, His King."

And then for the first and only time, Lucifer addressed God Himself.

"Check. Your move!"³⁰

To Be Concluded in the Next Issue

³⁰ Of the purposes of God in the permission of evil in eternity past and the solution to that problem through the cross of Christ, few have written as eloquently as Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 371-73:

"The Scriptures thus predict a glorious, universal divine triumph which is yet to be—a triumph on the plane of infinity and including the disposition of sin as a *principle*. Even a feeble analysis, such as a finite mind might undertake, must disclose the fact that, concealed in this aspect of the sin question, is the most important reason the human mind has ever discovered why sin was permitted to enter this universe with its injury to creation and its measureless imposition of sacrifice upon the Son of God. It is true that the grace of God cannot be manifested except as there are fallen creatures in existence who, because of the

corruption of sin, are objects of grace, and that the demonstration of divine grace, the inestimable glory of which is observable not in time but in eternity (Eph 2:7), constitutes an obvious reason for the permission of sin; but more far-reaching and all-inclusive is the fact that the principle of evil, as opposed to good, is brought out of that abstract form in which it existed before creation, and, upon the ground of its concrete fruitage in and through creation, is subject to divine judgment and to be dismissed forever. Incomprehensible, indeed, is the triumph of God when, through the cross of Christ, one lost soul is redeemed and by His saving power is so transformed as to appear in heaven conformed to the image of His Son; and every victory over sin in any of its forms must redound to His everlasting praise. Yet how exceeding in its infinite glory is the judgment and banishment of sin itself! . . . Of all the marvels of divine achievement, none could surpass in glory the on-coming, sin-free universe in which righteousness is seen, not *contending* and *suffering* as now, nor even *reigning* as in the yet future earthly kingdom, but *dwelling* throughout the whole vast field of God's creation . . .

"A key to the understanding of God's ways in the ages of time is the fact that He is pleased to put every challenge to an experimental test . . . It is reasonable to believe that evil in its abstract form and as an opposing principle, at whatever time it began to exist, was itself a challenge to God and that, on the largest conceivable scale, its claims are being subjected to a demonstration which will not only set forth the holy character of God—a revelation of surpassing import—and the exceeding grace of God. To this end it was necessary to permit sin to assume concrete form and run its course to its end. Under the permissive will of God, sin has wrought measureless injury within angelic spheres. It has wrought the complete ruin of the human race, apart from redeeming grace. But sin's incomputable cost is the blood of the Son of God which alone could provide a righteous ground for the judgments of God against evil in all its aspects, establish forever His holy character, and secure an accomplished redemption for those whom He had chosen before the foundation of the world, through whom, also, He might show forth the unsearchable riches of His grace. Little, indeed, did the eyewitnesses of the death of Christ realize the stupendous thing that was transpiring before their vision. The cross was the complete verdict against sin for the individual believer; it reaches to Israel, to the Gentiles, to creation, to things in heaven, to angelic spheres, and to the very root of evil itself in its unlikeness to God. The triumph of God will be perfect and eternal.

'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.'

BOOK REVIEWS

The Forgotten Command: Be Holy. By William MacDonald. Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie, 1993. 239 pp. Paper, \$7.99.

In this issue of *JOTGES* our founder and director presents a practical article on *our* part in sanctification. This book would be a good follow-up with its 31 short chapters of practical suggestions on how to obey the “forgotten command” in such areas as purity, gossip, temper, substance abuse, gambling, self-occupation, and many more. A few of the chapters (such as on politics) won’t please every Christian, nor is every insight “GES-approved,” though most would be. But the need for such a book is clear.

Just this week I heard of a large eastern U.S. Bible Church with a grace-oriented pastor who found out to his dismay that the singles were ending up their Bible studies by going to bars and dances.

Closer to home, in my own city, which is famed for its many big evangelical churches, a similar large church has a singles’ group that a former (non-gossiping) male member could only characterize as resembling a singles’ bar in its “dating” techniques.

We’re not surprised when apostate denominations whose idea of religion is promoting “gay/lesbian rights,” militant feminism, and left-wing political agendas have morals to match. But when churches that actually teach God’s Word allow unholy lifestyles to go unchecked, we should be alarmed.

The author of *Be Holy* is the former President of Emmaus Bible College, author of 60 books, and a widely traveled preacher. He writes clearly with plenty of modern and compelling illustrations, a MacDonald hallmark.

They say you can’t judge a book by its cover, but this one, in its two editions, summarizes the thrust of the book. The German translation, *Der vergessene Befehl*, which was published before the English original, has a color photo of a jogger whizzing by a neon-lit modern street. This may suggest: Run the race and don’t stop to sniff the garbage! The Scottish edition has a beautiful photo of three white doves perched at various angles against a black background. Clear message: Christians should stand out in purity against a dark and sinful world.

The author says he has written this book to help those who have had a serious moral fall to get back on track. But it is also written to steer believers away from ever getting into that position in the first place. "Experience is a costly school . . . Why should we learn through shame and disgrace what is so obvious to anyone who takes time to study the Bible?" (pp. vii-viii).

I definitely recommend this book, but would like to see a U.S. edition with American spelling preferences (including capitalizing *Christian* even when it's only an adjective). In the meantime, the British edition can be ordered from D & K Press by calling 1-800-77-S-T-U-D-Y.

Arthur L. Farstad

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Dallas, TX

Maximum Security. By Steven Linscott with Randall Frame. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994. 216 pp. Cloth, \$12.99.

We don't often associate murder cases with grace, but *Maximum Security*, a well-named (spiritual meaning) and well-written true story, shows the triumph of grace in the life of a young Bible school student and his wife when he was wrongfully accused, convicted, and imprisoned for a brutal murder.

This notorious case, which was featured on such network TV shows as "20-20," concerns Steven Linscott, who had a most disturbing dream of a murder with a blunt instrument. That very night, two doors away, a pretty brunette nursing student in Oak Park, Illinois, was bludgeoned to death. Linscott told his dream to the police, and though many facets of the dream didn't match the evidence in the case, the Oak Park police started the machinery for what was a virtual "frame-up" of the would-be missionary candidate. The fact that the victim belonged to a Hindu-type cult and the accused was an active evangelical may have been significant.

The stress of the book is not revenge or even the murder. Rather, it shows how God—using a super-supportive wife, Lois, their kids, the prayers and help of churches, friends, and thousands, perhaps millions (after their TV exposure), of praying Christians, and Steve's submission

to His will even when his life was threatened in prison—provided *maximum security*.

After twelve years of litigation, the scientific evidence of DNA, superior legal work, and God's answer to myriads of petitions for this devout young family, Steve was completely cleared of any charges.

Near the end of his account Steve writes: "Good news—in fact, the very best news—is ours in Christ. At times in my prison experience that news gave rise to joy more exuberant than can be contained by any prison walls. Because of that, no one need feel sorry for me. I certainly do not feel sorry for myself. Instead, my heart goes out to those who have not discovered this freedom, the security of the power and love found in Jesus Christ. Without that, nothing else matters" (p. 206).

This is a tremendously upbeat book against a very tough and dark background. It's a good picture of God's grace at work in the nitty-gritty of a Christian life under fire, behind bars, and all the while edged with glory. Read it.

Arthur L. Farstad

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Dallas, TX

Lordship Salvation: The Only Kind There Is! An Evaluation of Jody Dillow's The Reign of the Servant Kings and Other Antinomian Arguments. Curtis I. Crenshaw. Memphis, TN: Footstool Publications, 1994. 170 pp. Paper, \$9.95.

Crenshaw was a contemporary of Jody Dillow at Dallas Theological Seminary. By his own testimony, the author converted to the Reformed Lordship Salvation position early in his seminary career: "While sick at home with the flu and a kidney stone, I read Warfield's *Perfectionism*, Van Til's *Defense of the Faith*, and Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, which completely changed me. From this point forward, I fought continual battles in seminary over the lordship issue and the carnal Christian theory" (p. ix). His story saddens me. He recovered from one of the most painful maladies one can have (kidney stones) only to succumb to something even worse (Lordship Salvation).

The book is poorly crafted if, as the subtitle suggests, its primary purpose is to respond to Dillow's book. We do not find extended quotations from Dillow followed by explanations of why his reasoning is

flawed. What we do find instead are paraphrases of what Dillow wrote, sometimes without any documentation, or mere snippets from his work. It seems odd to this reviewer that the author can devote large portions of the book to quote Reformed writers and Reformed councils, yet can't find room to give extended quotations from the person whose book he is ostensibly reviewing.

By the author's own admission, at most 28 pages of his book (101-128) are entirely new material written in response to Dillow's book. Crenshaw notes, "The present book is an expansion of a series of articles I did in the *Herald of the Covenant* about eight years ago, and each chapter now (except chapter 5) was an article then" (p. ix). This explains why the book looks very little like a review of *The Reign of the Servant Kings*.

In an effort to convince his readers that his view is correct, the author discusses regeneration, repentance, faith, the relationship of faith to works, justification and sanctification, and assurance of salvation.

Occasionally Crenshaw does point up areas that need attention in Dillow's argumentation. For example, he is right (see pp. 17-18) that Dillow probably needs to clarify his positions on perseverance and on repentance. (See pp. 10, 21 in *The Reign of the Servant Kings*.)

Crenshaw appears to point out another inconsistency in Dillow's argument. On p. 118 Crenshaw says that Dillow takes 1 John 5:13 as the verse which states the purpose of 1 John. He then points out that this is a difficult position to maintain for one who holds that good works are not essential for assurance.

Interestingly, Crenshaw fails to cite the place in which Dillow says that 1 John 5:13 is the purpose of 1 John. For good reason. Dillow does not say what Crenshaw maintains. Instead, Dillow clearly states that *1 John 1:3* is the purpose statement: "[The purpose statement] is found where one would expect to find a purpose statement in a book or letter, in the opening paragraph (1 John 1:3) . . . His purpose in writing to these regenerate people is so that they may walk in fellowship with God . . . He is not writing to test their salvation" (p. 162).

Crenshaw's book is not exegetical; he rarely attempts to explain a passage. Obviously he is writing to people who agree with him and who won't question his interpretations.

For example, he contends that 2 Cor 13:5 teaches that we must examine our lives to see if we are saved (pp. 115-16). What is the evidence from the text in favor of that interpretation? Crenshaw cites two things. First, the phrase *in the faith* refers to being saved because of Col 2:7 ("continue in the faith" and "established in the faith"), 1 Tim 3:13 ("bold-

ness in the faith"), Titus 1:13 ("sound in the faith"), and 1 Pet 5:9 ("steadfast in the faith"). We are not told *why* the expression *in the faith* has to refer to salvation in the passages cited. The author merely quotes the relevant portions of these verses and assumes that this proves his point. Second, Crenshaw argues that Paul used the word *approved* in 2 Cor 13:5 "to relieve all doubt that [he] speaks of questioning their justification" (p. 115). He then prints ten verses in Paul (including 2 Cor 13:5-7) where the words *approved* or *disapproved* are used—without comment—and then concludes, "So much for Dillow's argument" (p. 116). This is exceedingly poor. Simply printing verses does not prove one's point.

Over and over again we find the author referring to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Synod of Dort, Reformed writers, the Reformed interpretation, etc. At one point (pp. 11-12) he even lists 12 men and four confessions from church history and scoffs at the idea that they could all be wrong and Dillow right. He makes no secret that he is defending a tradition. Is this not the technique Rome uses? If tradition is crucial, why isn't Rome right, since her views are older and more widely held? If the Bible alone is not our authority, then why doesn't Crenshaw consider all of the church fathers, all Catholic theologians and exegetes, the Council of Trent, and Vatican II, for example?

The author's tone is neither gracious nor irenic. At times it borders on arrogance: "There is nothing new in Dillow's book that I did not hear for four years in seminary. I have read every book the 'carnal Christian' men have written, studied under their best theologians, evaluated their most detailed arguments, dialogued with them in person, debated fellow students and pastors for over twenty years, and they are essentially say [sic] the same" (pp. 1-2). The pejorative language he uses for the Free Grace view is far from fair or high-minded: "anti-lordship salvation" (p. ix), "license theology" (p. 3), "the license position" (p. 3), "the license view" (p. 42), "antinomianism" (p. 2), "this radical view" (p. 4), and "a monstrosity" (p. 85).

I recommend this book for the well-grounded person who is seeking more insight into the Lordship Salvation position. However, if you are looking for a serious review of Dillow's book, you must look elsewhere (e.g., *JOTGES*, Autumn 1992, pp. 67-69).

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, Texas

The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-up, and Burnt Out. By Brennan Manning. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1990. 227 pp. Paper, \$7.95.

As the subtitle suggests, this book is about the good news of the Gospel for those who feel unworthy. It is neither a theological nor an exegetical book. Scripture is not mentioned very often, and when it is, it is not explained. Instead, this book looks at what the author *perceives* to be the Gospel through the lens of reason, common sense, and human experience (see, esp. p. 42).

This book promotes salvation as an absolutely free gift—and yet it is not clear on the Gospel! Here is someone who clearly believes that grace is absolutely free and yet who gives very little evidence of believing the Gospel!

How can this be? It's because a person can understand and believe that salvation is free and yet fail to understand and believe that the condition of obtaining that free salvation is simple faith in Jesus Christ.

For example, Manning suggests that Rock Hudson (a homosexual film star who died of AIDS and who never to my knowledge professed to believe in Christ) was a believer and is now with the Lord. Why? Because "he called a priest to his deathbed, confessed his sins, and cried out for forgiveness" (p. 20).

He also speaks of active male and female prostitutes whom he believes are saved (p. 29). While I certainly admit this is possible, it could only be because they had come to faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone for eternal life. However, Manning does not report that as the reason he feels they are saved. Rather he says it is because they are those who "wanted to be faithful, who at times got defeated, soiled by life, and bested by trials, wearing the bloodied garments of life's tribulations, but through it all clung to faith" (p. 29). What does the fact that they wanted to be faithful and that they "clung to faith" have to do with eternal salvation? And what does "clung to faith" mean? Faith in what? Manning does not say.

One gets the impression from Manning that *most* Catholics and *most* Protestants are born again (cf. pp. 17, 20, 29, 40-42, 46, 208, 211-13). One wonders if he would even say that Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and people from all religions could be saved without believing in Jesus if they, like Rock Hudson, confessed their sins and cried out to God for forgiveness. Manning does not make it clear that belief in Jesus Christ is required for eternal life!

Let the reader beware. Manning strongly proclaims the *freeness* of the Gospel, and yet he does not proclaim the Gospel itself clearly. In fact,

he muddles the Gospel and gives the impression that the condition of salvation is brokenness, and not faith alone in Christ alone. While some broken people have come to faith in Christ, many, many have not. Assurance is only legitimately based on the promises of God in the Gospel. To base assurance on one's brokenness and pain is misguided and misdirected.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

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What the Bible Says About a Saving Faith. Bernard Koerselman. Chandler, AZ: Berean Publishers, 1992. 304 pp. Paper, \$11.95.

The author is a lawyer who gave up his practice in mid life to go into full-time Christian work. Rather than attend seminary, he chose to study the Bible intensively on his own. He did so without the use of the commentaries because, like his decision against formal education, he felt God had told him to do it that way (p. 1).

Koerselman holds to a very strong form of Lordship Salvation. In this book he advances most of the common Lordship Salvation arguments (e.g., we must buy salvation by giving up everything, all true believers persevere, good works are indispensable for assurance).

On the positive side, the author clearly has a zeal for holiness and a love for God's Word. This lends a charm and appeal to the book for anyone who shares his zeal and love, even for Free Grace people who strongly disagree with his theology.

In addition, he repeatedly evidences a lack of theological sophistication that is actually somewhat refreshing. We don't find him quoting the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Synod of Dort. He doesn't quote Reformed writers. And, he is unafraid to make statements which are the logical result of the Lordship Salvation position and yet which more sophisticated writers would never make.

Commenting on Rom 10:9-10, for example, Koerselman actually says, "Note two things we must do to be saved. We must confess that Jesus is *Lord*, and believe that God raised him from the dead" (p. 107). A few paragraphs later on the same page he continues, "God requires us to make public the fact that Jesus is *our Lord*. To confess Jesus is *Lord* is not simply to repeat those words. It is a personal confession, not only that Jesus truly *is Lord* and that he *is Lord* of all, but that he is *my per-*

sonal *Lord*." Two sentences later, he comments on the present tense, "He must be and *continue* to be our *Lord*. That's exactly what Paul told the Colossians: we are reconciled to God if we *continue* in the faith."

Two things a person must do to be saved? Believing is not enough? Public confession must be made? And this confession must continue throughout one's life? While those things are clearly what Lordship Salvation teaches, rarely have I seen it stated so baldly.

For Koerselman, obedience (not assurance!) is of the essence of saving faith. He cannot conceive of a disobedient Christian. He actually entitles one section, "No Continuing Sin in the Life of One with a Saving Faith" (p. 137). Of course, he does admit that Christians do sin (see p. 138); yet he fails to explain what the difference is between sinning and continuing in sin.

It is difficult to determine if the author believes that those who fail to persevere were never saved in the first place or if they lost their salvation. In a section entitled "Trust Him As Lord," he begins by quoting Rom 8:38-39 and saying that the early church "knew they were secure in the power of their Lord and that no force or power in heaven or on earth could pry them out of the hand of God" (p. 41). That sounds like an affirmation of *eternal security* (though I could find no place where the author used that expression, and it does not appear in the index). Yet he immediately goes on to cite Matt 6:25-34 and then to say, "Jesus gave us a conditional promise. The condition is that we are to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness first. If we do that, Jesus promised, our food, clothing, and shelter will be given to us *as well as God's kingdom and his righteousness*" (p. 42, italics added). Note that the italicized material makes it clear that the author believes that continually seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness is an ongoing condition of eternal salvation! (See also p. 184, where he says, "our only requirement to remain in his love is to *obey* what Jesus has taught us.")

I get the feeling from reading the book that the author lacks a thorough understanding of the Free Grace views of many of the various passages and issues which he discusses. I would not be totally surprised to some day see another book by him renouncing his former views and adopting a Free Grace view of the Gospel. I certainly hope and pray that this is the case.

On a personal note, I was disappointed to see Dr. Joe Aldrich's glowing endorsement of the book (p. iii). When I taught at Multnomah School of the Bible, he told me personally that he didn't believe in Lordship Salvation.

I recommend this book for the well-grounded person who would like

to see Lordship Salvation presented in a less sophisticated and more open fashion. Pastors will find a lot of material here for sermon illustrations!

Robert N. Wilkin

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Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Selling Jesus. What's Wrong with Marketing the Church? Douglas D. Webster. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992. 165 pp. Paper, \$9.99.

One of the fastest growing trends in evangelical circles is the art of marketing the church. This is the concept popularized by Bill Hybels, George Barna, Lyle Schaller and others. In his book, *Selling Jesus*, Douglas Webster critiques, often harshly, this movement. To a large degree, Webster focuses his attack on George Barna, the leading proponent and chief guru of the "user-friendly church" mentality. (Webster quotes Barna over thirty times in the book.) While Barna must be commended for providing churches and pastors with invaluable research, Webster's criticism is right on target and needs to be heard.

According to Webster, what the church marketing movement fails to remember is that "from beginning to end, the work of the church is God's work" (p. 140). He agrees that the traditional model of church growth is lacking in many areas. But what he recommends is a "Christ-centered household of faith" that is "Spirit-guided rather than market-driven" (p. 140). Too many churches within American Christianity are tolerating "any and all methods (of evangelization), as long as they bring numerical results," says Webster. But the ministry of the local church must be determined by "careful biblical conviction and thoughtful theological reflection" rather than on the basis of taste and preference (p. 29). As a pastor struggling to resist the temptation to soft-pedal the ministries of my church in order to make them more appealing to the unchurched, I sound a hearty "Amen!"

One criticism of the "user-friendly church" that is lacking in this book is the failure of this movement to adhere to the biblical standard of separation. Most who advocate marketing as an effective means of church growth are willing to accept anyone and everyone regardless of their doctrinal beliefs. The Bible teaches, however, that some doctrines are

non-negotiable. Churches and pastors must resist the urge to fill their pews at a cost of compromising biblical standards. Of course, one key doctrine worthy of separation is the doctrine of salvation. If a church is presenting a false gospel, it doesn't matter how "innovative, efficient, hyperactive, and high-energy" it is—don't go!

Speaking of a false gospel, this reviewer was discouraged with Webster's view on the Gospel. He seems to include the elements of "commitment" and "following Christ" as prerequisites for salvation (p. 28). Indeed, one of his criticisms of the church-marketing concept is that unbelievers are being converted without first counting the cost. What a shame that such an insightful book is sullied by a presentation of a false gospel!

J. B. Hixson

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Tremont Baptist Church

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And the Angels Were Silent. Max Lucado. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1992. 261 pp. Cloth, \$16.99.

The prolific and immensely popular Max Lucado is a masterful author, gifted communicator, accomplished speaker, and sadly—a propagator of a false gospel. In his book, *And the Angels Were Silent*, Lucado beautifully presents the events of the final week of Jesus as related in Matthew's Gospel. As is typical of his style, the author's applications are powerful and his anecdotes poignant.

His exposition of the two blind men who were healed (Matt 20:34) is particularly insightful. Concerning living the Christian life, he rightly concludes: "The right heart with the wrong ritual is better than the wrong heart with the right ritual" (p. 36). His cleverly titled chapter dealing with the Sabbath ("Don't just do something, stand there!") was a bit of a stretch, since he seems to indicate that the Sabbath laws of the Old Testament are still in force today.

Notwithstanding his hazy teaching on the Sabbath, it is not until the final chapter that the keen reader finds anything blatantly objectionable in the book. But it is the final chapter that is the most important. For there, after 26 chapters of compelling and heart-wrenching narrative, Lucado presents his captive readers with "the gospel." And the gospel he presents is at best confusing and at worst heretical. Lucado writes,

"When the Father comes to deliver you from bondage, you don't ask questions, you *obey instructions*" (p. 191, emphasis added). Elsewhere he speaks of the salvation experience as "following Jesus" and "giving your life to God."

At one point in the book, the author says of the disciples' reaction to the blind men who approached Jesus, "Despite their sincerity, the disciples were wrong" (p. 34). The same can be said of Lucado when it comes to his view of the Gospel: Despite his sincerity, he is wrong. Dead wrong. What a tragedy that such a talented author fails to present the Gospel accurately in a manner as clear and creative as the rest of his teachings. For in so doing, his giftedness becomes a powerful weapon of confusion and doubt rather than a convincing means of advancing the good news of salvation by grace through faith alone!

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Embraced by the Light. By Betty J. Eadie. Placerville, CA: Gold Leaf Press, 1992. 147 pp. Cloth, \$16.95.

This book, subtitled on the dust cover "The Most Profound and Complete Near-Death Experience Ever," has been widely read and was for several weeks the number-one best seller on the New York Times Bestseller List. The book details the story of Mrs. Eadie's near-death experience after a hysterectomy in November 1973.

According to Mrs. Eadie she "died" and left her body behind in the hospital, traveled to her home and observed her family, journeyed with certain spiritual companions through a mystical tunnel, met and spoke with the Lord Jesus Christ, and visited among other places, a beatific garden, a heavenly workroom (filled with spirit beings and looms busily manufacturing clothing for new arrivals), and a library of the mind in which her "understanding was complete" (p. 76). Alas, just as she was settling in, a council of twelve men notified her that her death had been premature and that she must return to earth. Her first reaction to this surprise news was to throw a small temper tantrum, and she then "appealed" the decision to the Lord Jesus Himself, but after a brief negotiation, He was able to convince her to return to her body in the hospital.

As exciting as the story might be to certain people, biblical thinkers will be concerned not only by the broad narrative itself, but also by the multitude of theological errors and heresies that the author relates as she tells her story. For example, Mrs. Eadie informs us that all humans preexist as "spirit beings" who choose for themselves when and where they will be born on planet earth! "Coming to earth is much like selecting a college and choosing a course of study" (p. 98).

Further "insights" include the fact that Jesus is only "a God" (p. 44) and while His love and kindness are discussed at length, there is absolutely no reference in the entire book to His atonement for sin on the cross. It is not surprising then that Mrs. Eadie affirms salvation by good works, or, in her case a better phrase might be "salvation by niceness."

The author does warn that some people "who die as atheists, or those who have bonded to the world through greed, bodily appetites, or other earthly commitments . . . become earth-bound. These spirits stay on the earth until they learn to accept the greater power around them and to let go of the world" (p. 84). In another place she sums up a key lesson that she learned from her near-death experience, "We have no right to criticize any church or religion in any way. They are all precious and important in his sight" (p. 46). Interestingly, she feels free to disregard this injunction, herself sharply criticizing her own religious experiences as a child in a Roman Catholic boarding school (pp. 7-9).

This reviewer does believe that some near-death experiences are valid interactions with a spiritual interface ultimately leading to either heaven (for believers) or hell (for unbelievers). However, near-death experiences, like all subjective human experiences in all spheres, must be evaluated and interpreted through the objective lens of biblical truth. Mrs. Eadie's musings are certain to tickle the ears of many modern folk exhausted by the dogmatic materialistic pronouncements of the Isaac Asimov, Carl Sagan crowd. Sad to say, this popular little book, while affirming a spir-itual aspect to reality, including life after death, will only serve to mislead those who are searching for answers, but who do not look to Scripture as their ultimate standard.

For those interested in reading about the topic of near-death experiences from a valid biblical and scientific perspective, I highly recommend the book *Immortality* by Drs. Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland.

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PERIODICAL REVIEWS

"Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism," Ramesh P. Richard, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, January-March 1994, pp. 85-108.

A chapter from the author's soon-to-be-released book on soteriological inclusivism is condensed to form this article. The work offers distinctive dispensational responses to two recent inclusivistic theologians, Clark Pinnock and John Sanders. ("Evangelical" inclusivism holds that salvation is accessible to the unevangelized who express faith in God apart from an explicit knowledge of Christ).

A "wider hope" salvation in the NT era is posited by inclusivists on the grounds that Jews in the OT were saved without explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ. The author reduces the argument to the question, "Can evangelicals validly preserve the explicit messianic content for salvation in the NT era while affirming the authenticity of an OT salvation that is without this explicit content?"

Covenant theology maintains exclusivism but rejects the question. Emphasizing a Christocentric continuity, they see no relevant difference in the content of faith between the Testaments. But dispensationalism preserves salvation in the OT without an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ. Yet it insists on an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ now.

Inclusivists also argue that the dispensations may be concurrent, running simultaneously. But the epochal and global nature of the cross and the discontiguous nature of the Church force us to conclude that the dispensations are successive.

Ecclesiologically, inclusivism implies that the saved are composed of "believers" who are evangelized (i.e., those who believe in God and who have trusted in Christ alone for eternal life) and those who are not (those who believe in God but who have not trusted in Christ alone for eternal life). This leads to two impossible options: "believers" who are not part of the Church, or, "believers" within the Church who still need to be evangelized.

Richard implies in a footnote that inclusivism is an overbalanced reaction to the restrictivism of Reformed/Calvinistic theology (i.e., limited atonement, double predestination, perseverance of the saints, etc.). He correctly points out that many evangelicals are exclusivistic without

being restrictive. Free Grace theology favors a non-restrictive, exclusivistic dispensational theology.

While the article is very helpful, two difficulties surface. First, the author repeatedly conditions salvation on the "confession of Christ." This is not justifiable. Second, it is an overstatement to conclude, as the author does, that the prospect of OT salvation was "immediate and this-worldly" (p. 104). This is not in harmony with the inspired explanation of OT expectation found in such passages as Heb 11:13-16.

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"A Peasant Reading of the Parable of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror?", Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Biblical Theological Bulletin*, Spring 1993, pp. 32-39.

Rejecting the canonical form of the text, this article calls upon the social sciences for the interpretive key to the parable(s) of the talents/pounds (Matt 24:45ff; Luke 19:11ff). In so doing, the parable is turned on its end. According to the author, western (capitalistic) interpreters have assumed that the master in the parable is honorable and the servant who hid his money rather than investing it is foolish. Instead, the so-called foolish servant has honorably protected his master's deposit. The servant rightfully refuses to participate in any evil scheme that would selfishly amass wealth from that which belongs to another. He does so, even though the greedy master will punish him severely for his failure.

Rohrbaugh's line of reasoning follows these steps: The original audience was surely composed of peasants. For the peasant culture, profit-making was evil and destructive. Since the size of the profits reported in the parable are exorbitant for the first-century culture, Jesus' intent was to teach against greed by shocking his audience through hyperbole. Further support is culled from the "Gospel of the Nazoreans" (or Nazarenes). This apocryphal work contains a similar parable in which a servant who hid his master's money is rewarded.

Very few insights commend this article. The author never advances in his understanding of the parable beyond the level of a story about an earthly master with earthly servants. But the master in the parable figu-

ratively portrays the Lord Jesus Himself at His imminent return (Luke 19:12; cf. Matt 24:1-44). Logically therefore, Rohrbaugh's interpretation makes Jesus depict His own greedy character and/or Matthew as approving of it.

False assumptions in the article include: (1) the genuine teachings of Jesus could not include severe warnings; (2) to be rich is to be evil, both for the peasant culture and the Bible; and (3) the parable reflects the relationship of the rich toward peasants. The author's speculations entirely overlook the first century master/slave culture.

Finally, it is an astounding conclusion of historical criticism to determine that a scant parable fragment, extant in only one source (Eusebius), is more reliable and authentic for interpretation than the massive, unified manuscript evidence behind the parables found in the NT books of Matthew and Luke.

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"Seeing and Believing," Michael Madden, *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, February 1993, pp. 48-53.

In this five-page journal article Madden offers a confusing exposition of John chapter 9 (the healing of the blind beggar). Before dealing directly with the text, the author states that the encounter between the blind beggar and Jesus teaches the reader about "Christian faith." The reader learns later that by "Christian faith" Madden means "saving faith." He clearly sees behind the physical healing of the man a "deeper spiritual healing that Christ brings to those who are open to his saving message" (p. 48). Says Madden, "John shows us that the blind beggar's physical healing is *clearly also his salvation*" (p. 51, emphasis added).

Madden is correct in noting that this passage is all about salvation. After all, in the end the formerly blind beggar believes in Jesus and is saved. However, the miraculous healing that precedes the man's conversion serves only as the impetus to his faith. That is, God used the motivation of gratitude for his healing to lead this man to saving faith.

There are a number of errors and inconsistencies in this exposition. First, after clearly stating that the man's physical healing is equal to his

salvation (see quotation above), he later implies that the healing is a "figurative" example of a salvation experience (p. 52). Second, the author sees the salvation experience as being a multi-step process. (He mentions at least three and calls them "step one," "step two," and "step three"!) The blind man is said to have taken a "journey of faith" that leads to his salvation (p. 51). The reality is that there is only *one* step in the salvation process. It is the singular step of faith which the blind beggar took *after* being healed. Third, Madden confuses discipleship and salvation. He implies in several instances that to be a disciple is to be saved. The spiritual conversion of the man, according to Madden, came at "no small cost," as he had to "lose everything" to gain a "personal introduction to God" (pp. 51-52). A fourth example of the author's erroneous interpretation is when he speaks of the man's "commitment in faith." He makes no attempt to explain this apparent contradiction in terms. Yet, from one who sees no distinction between discipleship and salvation, this phraseology is understandable.

To the casual reader, Madden's exposition may seem insightful and even clever at times. Unfortunately, it is steeped in Lordship Salvation theology and in terms of accurate interpretation has little value. I cannot recommend this article as a study aid for John chapter 9.

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"Hey, I'm Terrific!", Jerry Adler with Pat Wingert, Lynda Wright, Patrick Houston, Howard Manly, and Alden D. Cohen, *Newsweek*, February 17, 1992, pp. 46-51.

This article is a well-written, well-researched presentation of the "Positive Thinking" or "High Self-Esteem" movement in America. This movement teaches essentially that there are "no bad people—only people who think badly of themselves" (p. 46). Of particular interest is a discussion of how this movement has affected religious thought. The article states that this trend of happiness as the ultimate goal has caused churches to discover that "*low self-esteem* is a less off-putting phrase to congregants than *sin*" (p. 46).

According to the article, the father of this movement in religious circles is Norman Vincent Peale, and its torch today is being carried by Robert H. Schuller of the so-called Crystal Cathedral. Says Schuller, "People who do not love themselves can't believe in God." The article cites Schuller as an example of how the church today is "shrink(ing) from calling congregants wretches" as it did in the days of the Great Revival preachers. The team of writers seems to agree with the philosophy that low self-esteem is the root of evil. The article states, "Chastising sinners is considered counterproductive: it makes them feel worse about themselves" and therefore leads to more "wrong actions" (p. 50).

The point of this article is not to discuss self-esteem from a bibliocentric viewpoint. However, it does hit on, and to some extent help propagate, a dangerous trend in evangelical circles. The "high self-esteem movement" is *politically correct* and unfortunately it is also becoming *religiously correct*. Many churches today are failing to uphold the biblical standard of separation (2 Cor 6:14-18). This standard says that although it may cause hurt feelings (and therefore cause low self-esteem), it is sometimes necessary to call sin "*SIN*." Furthermore, this movement is in direct opposition to the Gospel of Christ, which calls on men to recognize their inability to save themselves and accept the free gift of eternal life Jesus offers. The *religiously correct* view seems to say the sinner need only ignore his sinful condition and "will himself" to goodness.

Like many false doctrines, this movement has a *grain of truth* in it. Surely, a healthy self image is important. But the source of a positive self image is not a creation of our mind. A healthy self-esteem is obtained by realizing the price God paid to redeem us. Apart from Christ, we *are* lost sinners. But in Christ we are *invaluable* because we are purchased with the highest cost of all—the blood of Jesus (1 Pet 1:18-21). I recommend this article not because it presents the truth about self-esteem, but because it accurately presents an alarming trend within evangelicalism and in society as a whole.

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"Why Be Good? Why Strive to Be Just as God Wants When He Accepts Me Just as I Am?", Philip Yancey, *Christianity Today* 38 (March 7, 1994), pp. 26-29.

Philip Yancey has distinguished himself over the years as a practical theologian who is not afraid to tackle tough issues. In this article, the evangelical community is once again indebted to him.

The problem he addresses concerns the believer's *motivation* for godly living. We are introduced to "Larry," a young man with a hard background who has been converted (the fact is never questioned). However, Larry has not experienced the "victorious Christian life" that some take for granted. In fact, his vices seem to be getting the better of him: he overeats, smokes, battles immoral sexual temptation, and doesn't attend church. Like many Christians, though with different—and perhaps not so obvious—areas of struggle, Larry finds himself "stuck somewhere between 'Just As I Am' and 'Just as God wants me to be'." The problem is a prevalent one, and so is the issue which Yancey puts forward: Since the grace of God enables us through faith to know we are eternally saved, what reason is there for believers like Larry to pursue holiness? In theological terms, "Why strive for sanctification when justification has been guaranteed in advance?"

Yancey finds an answer to this question in Romans 6-8, where Paul uses four illustrations to show that, although God's grace is free and complete, this is no excuse for continuing to sin. Rather, God's free grace is a motivation for godly living.

The first illustration is an analogy of life and death; since sin has the stench of death, who would want to carry that around with them? Yancey calls this "Road-kill Religion." It stinks. We're alive in Christ; we shouldn't live as though we were still dead.

The second illustration is from what Yancey terms "Slave Religion." The Christian who sins is putting himself back under the slave master who once controlled his life. But sin no longer has this power over us. Since we are free to choose the way of life instead of bondage and death, what would possibly motivate us not to?

The third illustration is drawn from marriage, and here Yancey finds the most compelling answer to his title question. The greatest motivation to "be good" is love. Just as it would be unthinkable for a groom to ask his new bride, "How far can I go with other women?", so too it is unthinkable to approach God with a "What-can-I-get-away-with?" attitude.

The final illustration is the apostle Paul. As Yancey writes, "Anyone who has struggled with addiction can recognize the raw reality in Paul's struggle with sin." But the way to overcome such sin is notably found in the very guarantee of God's grace which raised the question "Why Be Good?" in the first place. In the midst of the pressure of sin, it is the knowledge that "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" that comes to the rescue! This is our assurance that, though we struggle now, one day we will be restored—along with all creation—to God's original, perfect design.

In these four illustrations, Yancey finds three motives for being good. Externally, social necessity ("society unravels" without goodness and fear of consequences like a slave master) are cited. While many would (rightly, I think) see the motivations in Romans 6 in different terms, these are only secondary to the greatest motivation, love. Yancey writes, "Although the Christian life may include times of struggle and temptation, we live our groping lives of faith with assurance that we cannot, no matter how hard we try, fall beyond the reach of God's love."

These comments are especially pertinent in light of the contemporary Lordship Salvation debate. Although not addressing that issue directly, Yancey does so indirectly, exposing an area in which lordship theology is extremely destructive. In effect, by stating that faith is "saving faith" only when it issues in good works, and that the lack of a changed life is positive evidence that one is not a Christian, lordship theologians decimate grace, assurance, and the greatest motivation toward godliness in one blow. Works are injected into the meaning of grace, absolute assurance becomes impossible, and instead of love, the only enduring motive for godly living becomes fear of eternal damnation. In this context, Yancey's closing words are instructive: "If we grasped the wonder of God's love, the devious questions that prompted Romans 6-7 would never even occur to us. We would spend our days trying to fathom, not exploit, God's grace." To this we say, Amen!

Yancey is a colorful and incisive writer, which makes this article enjoyable reading. Furthermore, his topic is on the cutting edge. His message needs to be heard by those who are struggling with persistent sin in their lives, as well as those who are fighting spiritual despair and doubt due to their struggle.

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A HYMN OF GRACE

FRANCES A. MOSHER

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ALL HAIL THE POWER

All hail the power of Jesus' name!
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all.

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,
Ye ransomed from the fall,
Hail Him who saves you by His grace,
And crown Him Lord of all.

Let every kindred, every tribe,
On this terrestrial ball,
To Him all majesty ascribe,
And crown Him Lord of all.

O that with yonder sacred throng
We at His feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song,
And crown Him Lord of all.

Edward Perronet (1726-1792)
Alt. by John Rippon (1751-1836)

That "All Hail the Power" is an eloquent hymn of *praise* to our Lord Jesus Christ would be enough to earn it an honored place in hymnody. However, several features of "All Hail the Power" earn it a place, as well, among our hymns of *grace*.

Reminiscent of the fifth chapter of Revelation, the entire focus of the hymn is on the consummate worthiness of Christ to be crowned "Lord of all"; there is no focus at all on our feeble works or resolutions. At the outset the hymnwriter declares that the power is in "Jesus' name," not in our merit. Many Scripture passages support this declaration, but it

seems particularly reflective of Acts 4:12: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The hymn's second verse proclaims that we are "ransomed from the fall" and saved "by His grace." Note here that He is crowned "Lord of all" by those who are *already* ransomed and saved. It was not their crowning Him Lord that saved them. Rather, He is crowned by them in overwhelming gratitude for what He has already accomplished on their behalf.

The fourth verse seems to strengthen the proclamation of grace by acknowledging that at this time we cannot, in fact, fully crown Him Lord as He deserves to be crowned. The poet seems to be looking forward with hope to a future time and place when, in "everlasting song," we will decisively, perfectly, and irrevocably crown as "Lord of all" the One who died to ransom and save us. Then those ransomed by His grace will see the perfect fulfillment of Phil 2:9-11.

The hymn's author, Edward Perronet, was the son of an Anglican clergyman who, according to Ian Bradley in his book, *The Book of Hymns*, "was deeply influenced by the Evangelical Revival in the mid eighteenth century. He was a close friend of the Wesleys and earned the title of the 'Archbishop of Methodism.'" ¹ Edward became an itinerant Methodist preacher, but later parted company with the Wesleys when they disapproved of *The Mitre*, Perronet's scathing satire on the Church of England, published in 1757. He became minister of the Canterbury chapel of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connection, but eventually lost that post due, again, to his violent anti-Anglican feelings. The last years of his life were spent pastoring a small independent congregation in Canterbury. ²

While Perronet wrote a number of hymns, this is the only one still used today. It first appeared in *Gospel Magazine* in April, 1780, under the title "On the Resurrection: The Lord Is King." The original poem had eight verses. The verses which ordinarily appear in hymnals today represent the first, fifth, and eighth verses of the original, with some revisions supplied in 1787 by Dr. John Rippon, a Baptist minister. Rippon, in addition to revising some wording of the original, wrote an additional verse which now appears in most hymnals as the fourth verse. ³

¹ Ian Bradley, *The Book of Hymns* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1989), 19.

² Phil Kerr, *Music in Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 93.

³ Bradley, 19-20.

Three different hymn tunes have been used as settings for "All Hail the Power." The oldest, "Miles Lane" by William Shrubsole (1759-1806), first appeared in *Gospel Magazine* in November, 1779.⁴ Shrubsole, a close friend of Perronet, was organist of Miles Lane Chapel at the time he composed this tune.⁵

In 1792, Oliver Holden (1765-1844) composed a second tune, "Coronation," for the Perronet/Rippon lyrics. Holden, an American, was a man of various interests and occupations. A self-taught musician, religious music was more an avocation than a vocation for him. In American churches, "Coronation" is probably the most frequently used setting for "All Hail the Power."⁶

The third tune, "Diadem," was written in 1838 by James Ellor (1819-1899). At the time of "Diadem's" composition, Ellor was "an eighteen year old hatmaker who ran the Wesleyan chapel choir in the village of Droylsden near Manchester." The tune "Diadem" features a "difficult voice-range which makes difficult its use congregationally, but it is favored by many choirs."⁷

It is not surprising that more than one composer has been inspired to create a musical setting for these lyrics which call upon us to crown as "Lord of all" the One who has saved us "by His grace."

⁴ Ibid, 20.

⁵ Kerr, 93.

⁶ Ibid, 93-94.

⁷ Ibid, 93.

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