

Journal of the  
**GRACE**  
Evangelical Society

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“Faith Alone In Christ Alone”



Journal of the  
**GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY**  
*"Faith Alone in Christ Alone"*

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**VOLUME 11**

**SPRING 1998**

**NUMBER 20**

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**Journal of the  
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY**

Published Semiannually by GES

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**Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address** should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, 4851 S. I-35 E Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210. You may call us at 940.270.8827 or email [ges@faithalone.org](mailto:ges@faithalone.org). Subscription Rates: single copy, \$9.25 (U.S.); 1 year, \$18.50; 2 years, \$35.00; 3 years, \$49.50; 4 years, \$62.00; \$13.50 per year for active full-time students. Please add \$4.50 per year for shipping to Mexico and Canada and \$8.50 per year for all other international shipping.

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Third-class postage has been paid at Dallas, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, 4851 S. I-35 E Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210.

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

©1997 Grace Evangelical Society

Reprinted 2012

ISBN-10: 0977227448

ISBN-13: 978-0-9772274-4-0

JOHN CADDOCK

Winchester, OR

## The Never-Ending Review

# REPENTANCE IS FOR ALL MEN

DAVID R. ANDERSON

The Woodlands, TX

In his book *I Call It Heresy!* A. W. Tozer makes his position of Lordship salvation clear when he says, "...true obedience is one of the toughest requirements of the Christian life. Apart from obedience, there can be no salvation, for salvation without obedience is a self-contradictory impossibility...we need to preach again...a Christ who will either be Lord of all or he will not be Lord at all!"<sup>1</sup> In the same chapter he reveals his understanding of the repentance in the Luke 15 parable of the "Prodigal Son" when he writes:

...the first thing the returning sinner does is to confess: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight, and I am no more worthy to be called Thy son. Make me as one of Thy hired servants."

Thus, in *repentance*, we...fully submit to the Word of God and the will of God, as obedient children...and if we do not give Him that obedience, I have reason to wonder if we are really converted!"<sup>2</sup>

Tozer is not alone in his convictions concerning repentance and its role in salvation.<sup>3</sup> In John MacArthur's classic "line in the sand" development of the salvation message in *The Gospel According to Jesus*, he states in no uncertain terms:

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy!* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1974), 11, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 19 (italics mine).

<sup>3</sup> By "salvation process" we refer to the *ordo salutis*, a term first suggested by the Lutheran theologians Franz Buddeus and Jacob Carpov in the first half of the eighteenth century. The components usually discussed in Protestant circles include: calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, sanctification, perseverance, glorification, and election. The order of these has been debated for centuries. See B. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 36-44.

"From His first message to His last, the Savior's theme was calling sinners to repentance—and this meant not only that they gained a new perspective on who He was, but also that they turned from sin and self to follow Him."<sup>4</sup>

Another who sees repentance as an essential part of the salvation process is D. L. Bock, who says that "repentance...is an appropriate summary for the offer of the gospel today."<sup>5</sup> He

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<sup>4</sup> J. F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1988), 161-62. He tries to show that L. S. Chafer, T. Constable, M. Cocoris, and C. C. Ryrie have all strayed from the true meaning of repentance by making it more or less synonymous with believing or simply changing one's mind about Jesus. He takes note of Chafer's arguments that the Gospel of John never mentions repentance, Romans uses the word only once, and Paul does not include it in his witness to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31). But, according to MacArthur, these are all worthless arguments from silence.

<sup>5</sup> D. L. Bock, "A Theology of Luke-Acts," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, eds. R. B. Zuck and D. L. Bock (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 131. He understands the terms *repentance*, *turning*, and *faith* as different ways to say the same thing (*ibid.*, 129, n. 33). He does acknowledge that turning differs from repentance in that the latter is a "change of perspective," while the former is the "change of direction" which follows the change in perspective (*ibid.*, 132). But for Bock faith and repentance are interchangeable, since a comparison of Acts 3:19 and Acts 11:21 shows that Luke substituted one term for the other in these parallel verses. In both instances the *turning* followed the *believing* or the *repenting*. But he goes on to make the *turning* a necessary part of the "single act" that saves. In Acts 14:15 he claims that we see the "reversal of direction necessary for salvation of unbelievers estranged from God...Gentiles are said to be 'turning to God' in Acts 15:19, where the term alone is sufficient to describe the response that saves."

Bock develops his understanding of repentance from Luke-Acts and calls Luke the "theologian of repentance," since he uses the noun eleven times in Luke-Acts out of the twenty-two uses in the NT and uses the verb fourteen times out of the thirty-four uses in the NT. At first Bock appears to distinguish between repentance and the deeds which should follow it (*ibid.*, 130-31). He claims the NT meaning only gets *close* to the meaning of *šûb* from the OT ("to turn or turn around") in some contexts (Luke 24:44-47). He describes repentance as a "change of perspective involving the total person's point of view." And "part of the change of perspective in repentance is to see sin differently and to recognize it is deadly when left untreated."

But as Bock's discussion proceeds, terms become muddled quickly. He claims that repentance is the change of *perspective* and turning is the change of *direction* which follows repentance. He then distinguishes between the root and fruit of a tree. But when he speaks of the root, it can be "planted by faith, repentance, or *turning* [emphasis mine]. Each of these three terms points to approaching God and resting in His provision and mercy." But the repenting is first in the *ordo salutis* (as one looks at life, sin, and God in a new way); then comes the turning (which alludes to a person's

comes to this conclusion largely from Jesus' use of the term in Luke 24:47, which is Luke's version of the Great Commission.

Clearly these men understand repentance to be a requirement for justification. In other words, in their discussions, repentance is for unbelievers. But others think repentance is for believers. John Calvin wrote: "Now it ought to be a fact beyond controversy that repentance not only constantly follows faith but is also born of faith."<sup>6</sup> And C. H. Spurgeon said, "All the fruits meet for repentance are contained in faith itself. You shall never find that a man who trusts Christ remains an enemy to God, or a lover of sin."<sup>7</sup>

And so it is fair to say that some Christian teachers believe that repentance is for unbelievers, while others think repentance is for believers. Which view is correct?<sup>8</sup> Both are right. In other words, repentance is for all men, unbelievers and believers alike. However, we will try to demonstrate that repentance is not a prior condition for unbelievers to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The procedure for this study will be to review in more detail the positions taken on repentance throughout church history while categorizing those who thought repentance was for unbelievers and those who thought it was for

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*taking up a new direction*); finally faith arrives on the scene (the focus on God where one's attention ends up after his new orientation). And *all three* of these are described as the *root* of the tree which surely must grow before the *fruit* of the tree can be realized.

But in Bock's discussion it appears as though there is *fruit within the root*. One's direction in life (turning) is produced by the repentance (change of perspective). And both of these (repentance and turning) occur before one believes (an act which is still part of the root as defined by Bock). Hence, when the dust of these definitions has settled, one must both repent (get a new perspective) and turn (get a new life direction) before one can believe (get a new focus). Therefore, salvation = repentance + turning + faith, according to Bock. Does this sound a bit confusing?

<sup>6</sup>J. Calvin, *Institutes of Religion*, III.3.1.

<sup>7</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, "Faith and Regeneration," *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 7:141. Editor's note: Spurgeon clearly believed that all regenerate people necessarily persevere in godliness and good works. That position is not debated here since the author was merely establishing that for some repentance is for believers, not unbelievers.

<sup>8</sup>Editor's note: Of course, there are other views, one of which the author now begins to develop. Another view, not discussed in this article, is that unbelievers need to repent to be saved and believers need to keep on repenting, either to stay saved or to prove they are true believers and not false professors who were never saved in the first place.

believers. Then from scriptural examples we will try to show that repentance is for all men.

## Post-Apostolic Fathers Through Augustine

A completely heretical but very influential document in the early church was *The Shepherd of Hermas*. The writer claims to have been a contemporary of Clement, presbyter-bishop of Rome (AD 92-101). Hermas is instructed by the "angel of repentance" dressed up as a shepherd. The call is for a lackadaisical church to repent. The writing is thoroughly legalistic and never mentions the gospel or grace. He speaks of the meritorious system of good works and the atonement of sin through martyrdom. There is no mention of justification by faith, but water baptism is indispensable for salvation.<sup>9</sup> And water baptism is the seal of repentance which "makes Christians into Christians... Asceticism and penal suffering are the school of conversion."<sup>10</sup> Faith is the fruit of repentance and the baptism which seals it.<sup>11</sup>

Justin Martyr followed on the heels of Hermas and also saw water baptism as the work of regeneration. He said:

"Those who are convinced of the truth of our doctrine... are exhorted to prayer, fasting and repentance for past sins;...Then they are led by us to a place where there is water, and in this way they are regenerated, as we also have been regenerated;...For Christ says: 'Except you are born again, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.'"<sup>12</sup>

The importance of water baptism for Justin Martyr is underscored when he says "the laver of repentance...is baptism, the only thing which is able to cleanse those who have repented."<sup>13</sup>

In the post-apostolic period repentance almost immediately reflected the Judaizing influence against which Paul labored long and hard. Like almsgiving, repentance was considered a good work (2 Cl., 16.4). Repentance is the achievement by which

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<sup>9</sup> P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5th ed. (N.P.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), vol. 2, *Ante-Nicene Christianity*, 684-87.

<sup>10</sup> J. Behm, "metanoē," in *TDNT*, 1967 ed., 4:1008.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:1007.

<sup>12</sup> J. Martyr, *Apol. I.*, c. 61.

<sup>13</sup> J. Martyr, *Dial.*, 14.1.

one secures salvation and life (2 Cl., 9, 8). Penitence with weeping and wailing could win God's forgiveness (Just. *Dial.*, 141, 3). And so even in the early second century repentance becomes connected with winning God's acceptance,<sup>14</sup> and repentance was linked to baptismal regeneration.<sup>15</sup>

By the time of Augustine (d. 430) infant baptism was in full vogue. And at the baptismal font, "We are justified, but righteousness itself grows as we go forward" (Augustine, *Sermon*, 158.5). In the *ordo salutis* Augustine saw predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. But justification was the umbrella over everything from regeneration through sanctification.<sup>16</sup> And regeneration began at baptism. He actually called it "the saving laver of regeneration" (Augustine, *Sermon*, 213.8). Here the elect receive the external sign (the water of baptism) and the spiritual reality (regeneration and union with Christ). For Augustine "the sacrament of baptism is undoubtedly the sacrament of regeneration" (Augustine, *On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism*, II. 43).

But unlike Hermas and other predecessors, Augustine did not view repentance as a work of man. It was the unmerited gift of grace which wrought regeneration, faith, and repentance in the sinner.<sup>17</sup> But even little children could be regenerated through baptism, which "cleanses even the tiny infant, although itself unable as yet with the heart to believe unto righteousness and to make confession with the mouth unto salvation" (Augustine, *On the Gospel of St. John*, 80.3). Nevertheless, elect children who had been baptized would inevitably go on to faith and repentance and growth in grace. All of these were elements of his understanding of justification. Since he was not familiar with Greek, he misunderstood *dikaioō* to mean "to make righteous" instead of "to declare righteous" (Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 45). This misunderstanding also led to the Catholic belief that justification is a life-long process. Of course, with this approach one could not know whether or not he was elect until he died.

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<sup>14</sup> Behm, 4:1008.

<sup>15</sup> Baptismal regeneration was taught by not just Hermas (d. 140) and Justin Martyr (d. 165), but Irenaeus (d. 200) and Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), which brings us to Augustine.

<sup>16</sup> Demarest, *Salvation*, 351.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

Apparently the church fathers and their successors believed in a "linear view of conversion."<sup>18</sup> Though conversion began at baptism, it was not considered complete until death. At baptism only the pre-baptismal sins were forgiven. The post-baptismal sins were a big problem. For this reason, many early Christians waited for baptism until their death beds. But surely there must be some way for those baptized as infants to have their personal sins forgiven. *Voila!* Repentance or penance was the answer. Whereas the earlier church fathers were divided over how many times a person could repent after baptism, by the time of Augustine the number was unlimited (Augustine, *On the Creed*, 15-16).

The Latin Fathers made their understanding of repentance clear by their Latin translations of the Greek terms (*metanoieō* and *metanoia*): *poenitentiam agite* ("to do [acts of] penance" and *poenitentia* ("[acts of] penance").<sup>19</sup> And this translation was preserved in Jerome's Vulgate.

So by the time of Augustine penance for post-baptismal sins was the *modus operandi* for reinstatement to the Church. The acts of penance varied according to the nature of the sin and the temperament of the Father Confessor. The acts included fasting, prayers, weeping, begging, abstinence for those married, shaving one's head, prostration, and the like. And penance could last a few days or many years.<sup>20</sup>

To summarize, repentance was primarily pre-baptismal in the post-apostolic fathers until infant baptism became the practice. As such it was viewed as a work of man which helped him gain his salvation. Though not clearly defined, it certainly included some sort of contrition for sin and a renouncing of the same, specifically at the point of water baptism. By the time of Augustine infant baptism was the norm. Post-baptismal repentance became the focus since regeneration took place and justification *began* at water baptism. This repentance became practically synonymous with not only contrition and confession, but also doing acts of penance. This understanding of repentance

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<sup>18</sup> R. N. Wilkin, "Repentance as a Condition for Salvation" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985), 19.

<sup>19</sup> W. D. Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943), 27-28.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkin, 22.

held sway right through the Dark Ages and the Renaissance until the Reformers.

## The Reformers and Repentance

Both Calvin and Luther rejected the notion that post-baptismal sins could be atoned for by contrition, confession, and acts of penance. It was their belief that all sins (past, present, and future) were covered by the blood of Christ when the sinner was baptized. Hence, acts of penance were unnecessary. For Calvin repentance continued throughout the life of the Christian, but it is the fruit of faith, as noted previously. And faith cannot come in Calvin's thinking without regeneration. So after the regenerating work of the Spirit, the gift of faith is implanted in the elect, and out of this faith comes repentance, which was defined as the mortification of the old nature (the flesh) and the quickening of the new nature (the spirit) unto holiness.<sup>21</sup> Demarest correctly notes that "Calvin understood by repentance what most later divines called sanctification."<sup>22</sup>

For M. Luther repentance began at the point of faith. It involved genuine sorrow for sins committed and renunciation of all vice. He wrote, "Repentance is not penitence alone but also faith, which apprehends the promise of forgiveness, lest the penitent sinners perish."<sup>23</sup> Like Calvin he connected repentance with faith and saw it as a lifelong process in Christians: "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent,' He called for the entire life of *believers* to be one of penitence."<sup>24</sup> Unlike Calvin he did think conversion was linear and incomplete until the end of one's life. One could fall away from the faith and lose his salvation. He could also return to the faith, but this return was not through acts of penance.

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<sup>21</sup> Calvin., III.3.2, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Demarest, *Salvation*, 248.

<sup>23</sup> M. Luther, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1210.

<sup>24</sup> B. L. Woolf, *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 32 (*italics mine*).

## Post-Reformation Repentance<sup>25</sup>

After the Reformation the understanding of repentance went off in four directions, according to R. Wilkin:<sup>26</sup> 1) a willingness or resolution to stop sinning and a concomitant commitment to the Lordship of Christ;<sup>27</sup> 2) a change of thinking;<sup>28</sup> 3) contrition, confession, and doing acts of penance;<sup>29</sup> and 4) turning away from sin.<sup>30</sup>

Among the reformed thinkers there is the bedrock position that regeneration must precede both faith and repentance. This follows both Augustine and Calvin. Faith and repentance are understood to be "conversion." But an unregenerate person cannot believe, and repentance is the fruit of faith. In all reformed theology of the last two centuries read by this author justification follows repentance. C. H. Spurgeon (d. 1892) said, "Faith in the living God and his Son Jesus Christ is always the result of the new birth, and can never exist except in the regenerate."<sup>31</sup> So out of regeneration comes faith, and faith is the mother of repentance, which includes sorrow for sins and a forsaking of the same.<sup>32</sup>

A. H. Strong (d. 1921) saw three simultaneous events: regeneration, repentance, and faith (in that order logically if not simultaneously). The latter two had three elements, which corresponded to the mind, emotions, and will of man. For repentance

<sup>25</sup> Editor's note: It was not the author's purpose to attempt to resolve the issue of the order of salvation which he touches on in this section. He merely wishes to show that some see repentance as occurring before regeneration, and some after. However, as he makes clear later in the article, repentance is not a condition of regeneration but faith in Christ is.

<sup>26</sup> Wilkin, 7-10.

<sup>27</sup> According to Wilkin, 7, the adherents include: J. Anderson, W. Barclay, H. Conzelmann, J. D. G. Dunn, D. Fuller, K. Gentry, J. Gerstner, L. Goppelt, W. Graham, G. Ladd, I. H. Marshall, J. I. Packer, J. R. W. Stott, and L. Strauss.

<sup>28</sup> Adherents are: L. S. Chafer, G. M. Cocoris, H. A. Ironside, and C. C. Ryrie (*ibid.*, 8).

<sup>29</sup> The view of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather than a condition for obtaining salvation, repentance is viewed as a requirement for maintaining it.

<sup>30</sup> Among those holding this view are J. Graham, G. Peters, A. H. Strong, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith Shorter Catechism* (*ibid.*, 10).

<sup>31</sup> Spurgeon, *SEE*, 7:139.

<sup>32</sup> Demarest, *Salvation*, 248.

there was: 1) mind—recognition of sin; 2) emotions—sorrow for sin; 3) will—abandonment of sin. Faith too had three elements: 1) mind—knowledge of the Gospel; 2) emotions—feeling the sufficiency of Christ's grace; 3) will—trusting Christ as Savior and Lord. So repentance was a determination to turn from all known sin, and faith was a determination to turn to Christ.<sup>33</sup> Thus for both Spurgeon and Strong, repentance is not a requirement for regeneration because regeneration precedes repentance and faith.

M. J. Erickson and B. Demarest reverse the order. That is, regeneration follows repentance and faith. Like Strong, they understand conversion to consist of repentance (the negative side) and faith (the positive side). For Erickson repentance consists in the sorrow for sin and the determination to turn from it. Faith equals the intellectual assent to the truth of the Gospel plus the emotional element of trust in the person of Christ. From a logical standpoint, repentance and faith (the two of which equal conversion) are conditions for regeneration, but from a temporal standpoint these three occur simultaneously.<sup>34</sup> Demarest holds the same position.<sup>35</sup>

It seems apparent from the previous discussion that theologians cannot agree on whether or not repentance precedes regeneration. For some, repentance is a condition for regeneration, while others say it is the fruit of regeneration. So we are right back where we started. Some say repentance is for the unregenerate, and some say it is for the regenerate. Perhaps now is the time to look at the Scriptures themselves to see what they say. Are there examples of repentance for unbelievers: Are there examples of repentance for believers?

## Repentance Is for Unbelievers

Can it be clearly demonstrated that repentance is for unbelievers? Of course it can. Much of John the Baptist's ministry was to unbelievers. We know this from John 1:7 where we are told that John came as a testimony concerning the Light (Jesus) that through him all men might *believe*. It could be argued that

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

many of the OT saints had already exercised faith in God's promises seen through the shadow of the Law, and now these "believers" needed to believe in God's highest revelation, His Son. Even so, they needed to believe after repentance. And most of these more than likely had not believed the first time, for John 5:35 implies that many Jews responded to the message of John and rejoiced in his light, but when the Messiah came on the scene, they did not believe in Him (John 5:36-47), nor were they saved (John 5:34). The point is that for most of John's listeners, repentance came before regenerating faith. Hence, repentance was for unbelievers.

Jesus Himself had the same ministry. We see this in Mark 1:15 where He went into the regions of Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom and telling them to *repent* and to *believe* in the gospel. Of course, this gospel is the good news of the King and His Kingdom, but the believing still comes after the repenting.<sup>36</sup> The parallel passages in Matt 9:13, Mark 2:17, and Luke 5:32 should also be clear examples of sinners who have yet to believe. It is not the just/righteous (*dikaioi*) who need repentance, but tax collectors and sinners. Nevertheless, if one went way out on a limb and said these tax collectors and sinners were simply Jews in covenant relationship with Yahweh but out of fellowship with Him, that could not be said of Luke 24:47 where repentance and forgiveness of sins is preached to *all nations*. Surely these nations were not in covenant relationship with Yahweh. Of course, the individuals in these nations needed to *believe* in order to be saved (Mark 16:16), but it is very likely that the call to repentance preceded the invitation to believe.

If the previous passages have not made it clear that repentance is for unbelievers, then surely Luke makes it obvious in Acts 17:30 where Paul speaks to Greek philosophers and other men of Athens. He says that God commands *all men everywhere to repent*. The reason for repentance is the impending judgment which will take place through Christ whom He raised from the dead. After hearing this message concerning the resurrection of Christ *some men...believed*. Is this not similar to

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<sup>36</sup> Editor's note: This temporal progression is not the only way to understand Mark 1:15. Other options are that the two could occur simultaneously or that Jesus is merely commanding both and the order is not restrictive. One could believe first and repent second as the author himself states in the conclusion of his article.

the implications of 2 Pet 3:9 where God has not predetermined (*boulomai*) that any men should perish, but that *all men* might have room (*chōrēsai*) for *repentance*? Surely the “all men” refers to unbelievers.

Paul’s testimony before the Ephesian elders should also be understood as an example of his preaching (Acts 20:21), which included *repentance* toward (*eis to*) God and *faith* toward (*eis to*) our Lord Jesus Christ. Again it seems obvious the repentance preceded the faith. This is the same order of events implied by the listing in Heb 6:1ff. The writer starts with repentance and chronologically works his way through to judgment: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection from the dead, and eternal judgment. Could an objective person not admit that the first step here is repentance?

In the passages referenced above repentance is for unbelievers. But repentance is also for believers.

## Repentance Is for Believers

The call for Israel to repent as a nation is a unique example which will be taken up in detail in our next study.<sup>37</sup> But the Ninevites are an interesting case in point. Both Matt 12:41 and Luke 11:32 tell us that the people of Ninevah *repented* at the preaching of Jonah. But when we read Jonah, it says “the people of Ninevah *believed* [*italics mine*] God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them” (Jonah 3:5). The gospel accounts may be using the term *metanoēsan* (repented) as a summary for the entire response of the Ninevites to Jonah’s message (belief + repentance + fruit),<sup>38</sup> but the first recorded response on the part of the Ninevites was their faith.

If the example of the Ninevites is not perfectly clear, then what about the call to repentance in Revelation 2 and 3? Five of the seven churches are challenged to repent (Smyrna and Philadelphia being the exceptions). Surely the people addressed

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<sup>37</sup> This is the first of a two-part series on repentance. Part two concerns the national repentance of Israel and will appear in the next issue of the journal.

<sup>38</sup> Since these people initially were unbelievers, the order here could be argued to be repentance + faith + fruit, but the first recorded response was their faith.

in these five letters were believers. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that false brethren may have slipped into one or more of these churches (e.g., Gal 2:4; 2 Cor 11:26). The point is, even if they did, the Lord was writing to the Church and the true Church contains only believers. The church at Ephesus is not accused of apostasy. Rather the accusation is dead, cold orthodoxy. They had the right faith, but their devotion had waned; they had lost their first love. Now they needed repentance. They needed to go back and do the first works, which would be a fruit of their repentance. Is this not a call to believers to repent? Of course, it is. Even in the case of the church at Laodicea, many scholars agree that the issue here is not relationship; it is fellowship. Revelation 3:19 says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten (*paideuō*)."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, be zealous and repent." But the promise to those who repent is simply this: "I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me." The promise is not relationship; it is fellowship. The picture is one of intimacy, of dining together, of enjoying one another's company.

Luke 15 with its three parables about repentance issues out of the same setting. Jesus is eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees and scribes cannot understand how He can do this. The passage has long been a favorite passage of evangelists in their appeal to sinners to "come home." But what makes us so sure the lost sheep in Luke 15:4-7 is not a sheep? And what makes us so sure the coin of the next parable is not a coin which used to be on the necklace? And in the parable of the prodigal son, are we prepared to say he was not already a son with a father and part of the family before he took off? The call may well be to come home, but it is to people who already had a home, who were already part of the family, already part of the flock.

As Z. C. Hodges writes,<sup>40</sup> the examples in Luke 15 could go either way. If an unbeliever is in view, the call is to repentance; if a believer is in view the call is to repentance. The entire series

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<sup>39</sup> A word consistently used in the NT for child-training.

<sup>40</sup> Z. C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas and Grand Rapids: Redención Viva and Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 148-52. Hodges understands repentance to be a call to a *harmonious* relationship with God, which he calls *fellowship*. To believe is the call to a permanent saving relationship with God. While belief for the permanent saving relationship is required only once, the need of repentance in order to establish fellowship with the Lord for the first time or to restore

of parables is in response to the Lord's practices regarding table fellowship. He is eating with tax collectors and sinners. What is necessary for a holy, righteous person to have table fellowship with sinful people? Those sinful people need to make a decision to repent, whether they are justified or unjustified. With this in mind, Jesus is more comfortable eating with tax collectors and sinners who have repented than with Pharisees and scribes who have not repented.

Perhaps this will make the issues more clear. We have *relationship* truth, which we will call "A" truth. Then we have *fellowship* truth, which we will call "B" truth. If someone asks a question about "B" truth, they get a "B" truth answer. If they ask a question about "A" truth, they get an "A" truth answer. Take the rich young ruler as a case in point. He asked how he could "inherit" eternal life. Jesus pointed him to the law. Jesus told him to go sell everything he had and give it to the poor. If we understand the question as one about "A" truth, then the answer about how to get into heaven or how to establish a relationship with God is through works of self-denial. Most Protestant interpreters squirm at this point and are forced into explaining the passage from some sort of "evidence of faith" answer. But even if that is the correct interpretation, how many professing believers have gone out and sold all their possessions and given them to the poor as evidence of their faith? But what if the rich young ruler was asking a "B" question and Jesus gave him a "B" answer? What if *reception* of eternal life ("A" truth) is by *faith*, and *possession*<sup>41</sup> of eternal life ("B" truth) is by *works* (in

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fellowship with Him will be repeated over and over again in the life of a believer.

<sup>41</sup> In the OT *nhl* and *yrsh* are used interchangeably, the one meaning "to inherit," the other meaning "to possess," respectively. A quick check of the concordance reveals that each word is translated both ways. Of course, the primary use of *yrsh* was in Deuteronomy. The people were to go in and possess the land. But there was a big difference between being in the land and possessing the land. In order to possess the land, very clear instructions were given to the people. When they failed to follow those instructions (such as with the Philistines), it was a failure in faith to possess the land. Now the Jews are in the land again, but they still have not possessed the land. They will not experience the full inheritance which belongs to them by virtue of the grant given to Abraham until Christ returns to win the land for them.

But it must be observed that this inheritance was a reward for faithfulness. So also in the Christian life every child of God is an heir (Gal 4:7) of many blessings which will be shared by all His children. But for the mature

the good sense, that is, empowered and motivated by the Holy Spirit—Eph 2:10; Gal 2:20)? If the rich young ruler had asked an “A” question, Jesus would have given him an “A” answer. Instead the man asked a “B” question and got a “B” answer. Of course, Jesus knew that to get “B” one must pass through “A.” In order to *possess* eternal life one must *have* eternal life. In order to *possess* the land, one must *be in* the land.

So it is with repentance. It deals with “B” truth: fellowship. That is why Luke 17:3 and 4 are so illustrative. The discussion concerns a fractured fellowship between two brothers. In order for their fellowship to be restored, the offender must go to his brother and repent, while the offended brother must forgive the repenting brother. Then the two, who already have a permanent relationship (brother—brother), can begin to “enjoy their relationship” (= fellowship) once again. The offense had not ended their relationship; it had broken their fellowship.

From the above passages it should be clear that repentance is not simply a challenge to unbelievers. It is also an appeal to

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sons (Heb 2:10), there is a special inheritance/possession reserved in heaven ready to be revealed when Christ comes (1 Pet 1:4-5, 9). In fact, to drive this point home to the Hebrew Christians the author uses the word *peripoïēsin* (possession) in Heb 10:39. By faith these Christians can possess their life (*psychēs*—their time on earth) for eternity.

And eternal life is viewed in Scripture as both a gift and a reward. It is a gift to be shared by every believer in Christ. But it is not a static concept; it is dynamic. It does not deal with length of existence. All people, believers and unbelievers alike, exist forever. The question is not one of quantity, but quality. Believers will enjoy a quality of life that is described as “eternal life.” But the quality of this life can also increase in accordance with one’s faithfulness. That is the message to Peter and the disciples in Matt 19:27-30, who are encouraged to give up everything in order to inherit eternal life. It is the message to the Galatians believers in Gal 6:8, who are encouraged to sow after the spirit instead of the flesh that they might reap eternal life. And it is the same message given by Timothy to his readers when he encouraged them to do good by sharing their wealth so they might lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:18-19).

This does not mean these faithful believers earn their way to heaven by keeping the law and self-sacrifice. But eternal life is portrayed as a dynamic, expanding concept. It is the same message we offer a new Christian who has received the free gift of eternal life and begins to enjoy his new life in Christ. He might ask, “Is this as good as it gets?” Our answer would be, “No, good as it is, it can get even better.” “How?” he might wonder. Answer: Unreserved giving reaps unmeasured living—to give is to live. We all received our initial installment of eternal life as a completely free gift. But future installments are in proportion to our faith. As we believe, so shall it be done unto us.

believers. Repentance is for all men. But just what is repentance? Does it mean “to change the mind,” as many suggest? Or does it mean one must turn completely away from his sins, as others teach? The suggestion of this study is that repentance means more than simply a change of mind, but less than a complete turning away from one’s sins which can be externally observed. What, then, does repentance mean?

## The Meaning of Repentance

We will not try to establish the meaning of this word from the comparisons to *šūb* (“to turn or turn around”) and *niḥam* (“to be sorry or to comfort oneself”) in the OT, although these words will be discussed in our next study. The truth is that there is no term directly equivalent to *metanoēō* or *metanoia* in the OT. That is why the LXX never translates *šūb* as *metanoēō*. In the LXX *šūb* is translated as *epistrephō*, a fact which has led many to either equate *epistrephō* and *metanoēō* or to include *epistrephō* in the meaning of *metanoēō*.<sup>42</sup> Is this valid? Before discussing *epistrephō* in its relationship to *metanoēō*, we need to examine the root meaning of *metanoēō* to see if that meaning is sufficient in its NT contexts.

It has already been pointed out that both Luther and Calvin wished to remove the concept of penance from the meaning of repentance. An easy way to do that was to go to the root meaning of the word: *meta* = after; *noēō* = to think. When the two were put together, the effect of the *meta* was “after the fact” or “afterwards.” It was to think about something later on and to have a reversal of opinion. So, repentance meant “to change the mind.” But is this meaning sufficient in its NT contexts, or are we guilty of the “root fallacy” when we assign this meaning to the word?<sup>43</sup>

Both John and Jesus preached, “Repent because the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17). If we substitute the root meaning of *metanoēō* into this passage, does it make sense: “Change your mind because the kingdom of heaven is at hand”? Not really. Even if we start substituting items about which they

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<sup>42</sup> See Behm, 4:990-91.

<sup>43</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 28-33.

were to change their mind (their own sinfulness, God's righteousness), something seems lacking. The exhortation would make more sense if we substituted "get right with God" as a meaning for repentance. "Get right with God because the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But "getting right with God" seems to involve more than just "changing one's mind."

If we look at Rev 9:20-21, repent certainly carries more weight than "change your mind:"

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear, nor wool, and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Surely if there were a passage where "turning from one's sins" appears to be involved in the meaning of repentance, this one is it. To simply say that God continued to wipe these people out because they did not "change their minds" about their murders, et cetera, takes all the punch out of the passage. But does it mean "to turn away from" as B. Demarest claims: "Repentance is a change of mind, ultimate loyalty, and behavior whereby pre-Christians turn from sin unto God"?<sup>44</sup>

The use of *epistrephō* in the NT reveals that of its thirty-nine occurrences, in all but five the turning can be externally observed by other people. James 5:19-20 is a case in point. In that passage a believer<sup>45</sup> has strayed from the straight and narrow

<sup>44</sup> Demarest, *Salvation*, 252.

<sup>45</sup> There are two lines of argument offered to suggest the one who strays in this passage is not a believer. One is to say a brother is not a brother. Clearly the passage addresses brothers, and it hypothesizes that one of the brothers strays from the truth. It looks like James refers to a believer, unless, of course, a brother is not a brother.

The argument which says a brother is not a brother usually goes something like this. In every congregation we have professing Christians and possessing Christians. Only the latter are born again. Every church is a congregation mixed with sheep and goats, wheat and tares, believers and unbelievers, true brethren and false brethren. So just because James is addressing the brethren here does not mean all the brethren are believers.

Though that argument may work in certain contexts (Matthew 10; 14), it definitely falls short in James. In Jas 1:16-18 the beloved brethren are identified as the "us" and "we" of v 18, which includes James, the author. And the passage says that "we" have been "brought forth" (*apekuēsen*—a birthing term) by the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits

("the truth"), and another brother *turns him back*. This turn about is clearly observable with the naked eye. It is not an *internal* turning or part of the root as suggested by D. L. Bock.<sup>46</sup>

And in the five instances where *epistrephō* might have been construed to mean something internal (Matt 13:15; Mark 4:12; John 12:40; Acts 28:27; 2 Cor 3:16), let it be observed that all five are a reference to the nation of Israel as a whole, a subject to be treated in the next study. Even so, the first four refer to Isa 6:9-10, which have an interesting chiasmic arrangement: "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed." Notice the message goes full circle: heart, ears, eyes::eyes, ears, heart. Of course, the physical senses are used metaphorically, but the message has gone round the horn, so to speak. If there were some sort of internal processing involved in their "turning," it would seem that the turning would have been in the chiasm. As it is not, and as the turning stands outside the chiasm, it

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of His creatures. Could there be a more clear statement of spiritual birth? These beloved brethren have been "born again."

But v 19 immediately addresses these "beloved brethren" again. Surely it is the same group he just addressed in vv 16-18. And will you notice that these beloved brethren are encouraged to receive the implanted Word with meekness, which is able to save their souls (*sōsai tas psychas*), the same Greek words we find in Jas 5:20 in reference to the straying believer whose life has been turned around? No, the brother-is-not-a-brother argument is specious indeed.

The only other way out of the obvious is to say the person who strays from the truth in Jas 5:19 is not identified as a brother, but as *tis* (anyone), meaning a member of the congregation but not one of the brethren. Again, the suggestion is completely out of context. All one has to do is to look in the immediate context at vv 13-18 to see that *tis* has been used three other times to refer to believers in the congregation who have a certain need. Instructions are given as to how that need should be met. The sick person should call for the elders of the church, who will anoint him/her with oil and pray for that sick person. The prayer of faith will heal (*sōzō*) the sick. Surely no one will argue that this passage refers to an unbeliever. Neither should they argue based on the use of *tis* that Jas 5:19 refers to an unbeliever who strays from the truth.

One should also note the Greek word *planeō* (strayed) is certainly picturesque in that it portrays a believer in proper orbit around the Son of God, but he strays out of his appointed place in the heavens. Here is a believer who was reflecting the light of the Son for His glory, but some sort of black hole of temptation has sucked him out of orbit.

<sup>46</sup> See n. 5.

appears that the turning is not part of the internalizing of the message, but rather deals with an external action.

Whether the above analysis of turning in Isa 6:10 bears any weight or not, the vast majority of the uses of the term *epistrephō* in the NT certainly deal with something externally observable. We conclude, therefore, that turning from one's sins in an observable manner may well be the *fruit* of repentance and/or believing (cp. Acts 3:19 and 11:21), but the turning is not part of the *root*.

Yet if repentance is more than a "change of mind" but less than an observable turning from sins, what is it? We suggest this meaning: *an internal resolve to turn from one's sins*. We think this meaning will make good sense in every NT use.

## Conclusion

Once again, we ask the question, if repentance is the internal resolve to turn from one's sins, is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? And once again, we conclude, no. Repentance is not a condition for receiving eternal life, but it is a condition for possessing eternal life. By possessing eternal life we refer to enjoying a quality of life that only the believer in fellowship with God can have. Repentance is not about relationship, but it is about fellowship. In order to "get right with God," one must repent. If an unbeliever is in view, he must believe to receive the free gift of eternal life. He might repent before he believes or after he believes. It is his faith that saves him eternally, but it is his repentance which allows him to enjoy his faith. Repentance concerns fellowship.

So, who is right? Is repentance for believers or for unbelievers? Both parties are right in that repentance is for both believers and unbelievers. Repentance is for all men. But repentance is not a condition for salvation; it is a condition for sanctification. It is not a condition for relationship, but it is a condition for fellowship. To establish an eternal relationship with God, one must believe only once. But to enjoy ongoing fellowship with God, one needs to live a life punctuated by repentance.

# MAKING YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE: AN EXPOSITION OF 2 PETER 1:5-11<sup>1</sup>

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Perseverance is one of the major battlegrounds in the debate over the gospel. Many suggest that those believers who fail to persevere either lose their salvation, or else prove that they were never genuinely saved in the first place. One of the major prooftexts for this supposed doctrine is found in the first chapter of 2 Peter. There Peter commands believers to add Christian character qualities to their faith so that they might make their calling and election sure, so that they might not stumble, and so that they might be supplied with an abundant entrance to the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There can be little doubt that Peter here conditions this abundant kingdom entrance upon making our calling and election sure by persevering in the development and maintenance of Christian character qualities. Faith alone will not be effective in securing this abundant entrance.

A careful consideration of the context of these remarks shows that they are *not* supporting the Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. Indeed, they actually support the opposite conclusion, that believers in Christ are secure forever, whether they add Christian character qualities to their faith or not. What is at stake, here, as we shall see, is not kingdom entrance, but *abundant* kingdom entrance.

In vv 3-4 of 2 Peter the Christian readers are reminded that when they came to know Christ at salvation, God imparted to them everything they needed to live a godly life, to share experientially in God's nature, and to escape the sinful corruption of the world in which they lived. This sets the stage for vv 5-11. We begin by considering vv 5-7 and the character qualities that believers are to add to their faith.

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<sup>1</sup>This article, originally published in three parts in *The Kerugma Message* (Nov-Dec 1991, and Spring and Winter 1992), has been slightly edited and revised and is used by permission of *Kerugma, Inc.*

## Adding Character to Your Faith

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love (2 Pet 1:5-7).

With the opening words of v 5, "But also for this very reason," Peter turns to the responsibility of his Christian readers. It is precisely because God has "given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (v 3) that Christians are now responsible to draw upon these provisions in order to build a godly character in an ungodly world.

To put it another way, because of what *God* has done (vv 3-4), there is now something *we* should do (vv 5-7). It is true, of course, that we cannot develop real Christian character apart from the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. But obviously, the gift of the Spirit Himself is one of the necessary provisions God has made for us as mentioned in v 3. Our responsibility is real, however, for in order for Christian character to develop, we must cooperate with the Spirit's work in us and draw upon the spiritual resources God has provided.

Spirituality, then, is a choice. It does not come automatically or inevitably. Those who think it does are not looking closely enough at the Scriptures.

Thus in vv 5-7 Peter tells us something we are to do and to do with "all diligence." And what is that? To begin with, we are to add virtue to our *faith*. The Greek word used for "virtue" here (*aretē*) is a general word for moral excellence. In the ethical teaching of the Hellenistic world of Peter's day, the word seems often to have indicated mastery over one's baser passions and lusts. Thus the translation "virtue" is more or less on target. Even our word "morality" is not too wide of the mark.

Every Christian starts out his Christian experience with "faith." After all, we are saved by grace through *faith*. But one of our first responsibilities is to begin to build on that faith a life that is "virtuous"—that is, a life that can be characterized as highly moral and ethical. Indeed, if the Christian fails to add "virtue" to his faith, his faith will soon become what James described as "dead faith" (Jas 2:14-26). Its vitality and productivity

will disappear. In fact, Peter says this same thing in his own way in vv 8-9!

But the Christian disciple is not to be satisfied with "morality" alone, as important as that is. To "virtue" he should also add "knowledge." Morality, we must remember, is not simply a rigid adherence to a set of rules. If virtue becomes nothing more than conformity to commands (though it *is* that in a real sense), it is in danger of degenerating into legalism. Morality must be constantly informed and guided by knowledge.

Indeed, the writer of Hebrews defined spiritual maturity as belonging to "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to *discern* good and evil" (Heb 5:14). The believer is not to remain a babe in Christ who does things simply because he is told to do them—though that is the proper place to start our obedience to God. But God wants us to grow in spiritual understanding so that we not only *do* what is right but also understand *why* it is right!

In other words, in Christian living God wants us not only to *do* but to *discern*. For that we need the ever-deepening "knowledge" of God's Word.

To "knowledge," however, the believer is also to add "self-control." The Greek word translated "self-control" (*enkrateia*) is hard to define precisely here. It could, of course, refer to control of our physical drives. But in the ethical thought of Peter's day it could apparently indicate that personal prudence which avoided extremes and led to moderation rather than self-indulgence.

A meaning like "disciplined moderation" would probably come close to the mark here. Out of "knowledge" there should arise that down-to-earth restraint which leads to a balanced life free from harmful extremes. We might describe this as "balanced self-discipline" in all that we do.

But further, to "self-control" Peter urges us to add "perseverance." Clearly the person who cultivates a virtuous life, which is reinforced by knowledge and self-discipline, is well prepared for the worst of times. But in the midst of trial and disappointment he will find his virtue, knowledge, and self-discipline all put to the test. Can he maintain his own standards and self-control? What he needs, therefore, is to develop "perseverance" so that neither Christian character nor conduct is marred or damaged by even the hardest of personal trials.

Here we should recall Paul's statement that "tribulation produces perseverance" (Rom 5:3). James also declared that "the testing of your faith produces patience" (= perseverance; the same word as is found here in 2 Peter and in Rom 5:3). Every difficulty of life can become an opportunity to develop the very quality of which Peter speaks.

It may also be suggested that this quality cannot become a really solid trait in us until God has sent us through some hard experiences. This is one reason we should "count it all joy when we fall into various trials" (Jas 1:2).

But to "perseverance" we should also add "godliness." In everyday use, the word here (*eusebeia*) suggested "piety, godliness, religion"<sup>2</sup> and *reverence, loyalty, and fear of God*. In the NT, it seems to have definite overtones of the awe in which God should be held.

The writer of Hebrews uses this word when he writes that our Lord, in praying for deliverance from death, "was heard because of His *godly fear*" (Heb 2:7). He uses it again at the end of the main section of his book where he says "...let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (= *eusebeia*; Heb 12:28, italics added).

Out of the trials of life can come not only the quality of "perseverance," but also a deepening of our reverence and awe for the living God. Not only can we come to acknowledge His sovereign control over our lives—including His right to send us hard times—but we can also learn to praise Him for the mercies He grants in our deepest times of need. Such attitudes are a part of the humble reverence for our Maker which is an indispensable ingredient in true "godliness."

It is in v 7 that we now meet the two crowning pinnacles of fully-developed Christian character. They are first, "brotherly kindness" (= *philadelphia*, that is "brotherly love"); and second, love itself (= *agapē*).

Experience among the Lord's people shows only too plainly how often "brotherly love" fails or is absent altogether in Christian-to-Christian relationships. This should not surprise us since "brotherly love" is here presented as one of the two final additions to developed Christian character. And although babes in Christ may experience it intermittently and in

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<sup>2</sup> BGD, 326.

measure, consistent, ongoing “brotherly love” is the product of the qualities that precede it in Peter’s list. For in constructing a Christian character marked by virtue, knowledge, balanced self-discipline, perseverance, and a God-fearing behavior, the Christian lays down exactly the right kind of supporting platform for a life marked also by “love toward the brethren” and “love toward all men.”

In the process of Christian living, few things must endure heavier blows than do “brotherly love” and “love.” People are in so many ways hard to love and even fellow believers are frequently a source of disappointment and trial. No one can crown his Christian experience with consistent displays of love apart from laying the groundwork suggested by the preceding qualities in Peter’s list.

It should also be noted that “brotherly love” precedes “love.” This implies that “love” is not only the capstone of the list but is also wider than our circle of fellow believers. Like God Himself (John 3:16), we are to love the unsaved. If and when we do, evangelistic efforts will be far more than obedience to the Great Commission. They will also be the outflow—through us—of the God-like love which caused the Father to send the Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Or to put it another way, the character Peter describes in this list turns out to be, in the last analysis, the character manifested here on earth by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## The Short-Term Results of Character-Building

For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins (2 Pet 1:8-9).

In v 8 Peter now calls attention to the positive results of the character-building process he has just described in vv 5-7.

The Christian man or woman who has the qualities mentioned, and who has them in increasing measure, will be a fruitful person. The English word “abound” represents a Greek participle (*pleonazonta*) that could easily be rendered “are abounding” or “are increasing.” It is not merely that the apostle wants these

qualities to be *possessed* ("are yours") by his readers. He also wants the qualities to be steadily increasing in them as well. Only then can fruitfulness in Christian living be assured.

It has often been said that in Christian experience we can never really remain "static." Instead, we are either continuing to grow or we have begun to slip backward. None of the admirable spiritual qualities mentioned in vv 5-7 can ever be said (in this life) to have reached a level beyond which no progress is possible. No matter how much I love, for example, I can always love more—and more and more! But equally, I must not suppose that I can never love less than I currently do (cf. Matt 24:12). None of the qualities of vv 5-7 are permanently mine while I live in my sinful body. Deterioration in our Christian character is a danger we must all guard against.

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12). It is not enough for a believer simply to have these qualities in some measure. If they are not "increasing" in him, this is a clear danger sign that his fundamental fruitfulness for God has been impaired.

"But," says Peter, "if 'these things' are both yours and increasing in you, I can guarantee that they will protect you from being barren or unfruitful." The Greek word translated "barren" here (*argos*) might better be translated "idle, lazy," or "useless, unproductive."<sup>3</sup> The concept suggested by this word is crucial. A Christian who is "inactive" in his Christian faith is also going to be "unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Conversely, a vigorous, active believer who serves God will most assuredly be "fruitful."

So the key to vigor and productivity in the Christian life is to be found in the character qualities of vv 5-7. If the transforming power of God is at work *in me*, changing me, it will also be at work *through me*! Or as Paul would say, "It is God who works *in you* both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

The correlation Peter makes between Christian character and fruitful Christian activity is not stressed nearly enough in the modern church. Churches are often divided and damaged by "active" members who lack many of the qualities (including "brotherly kindness!") which Peter talked about. "Activity" can

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 104.

occur without character development, but ongoing “fruitfulness” cannot!

Suppose, then, that a Christian lacks these spiritual qualities. What is true of him? Peter points out three things (short-sighted, blind, and forgetful) in v 9.

First, the character-deficient Christian can be said to be “shortsighted.” The Greek verb *myōpazō* seems to suggest the sort of “squinting” which is so noticeable in near-sighted people. Such people cannot see very far in front of them.

What does Peter have in mind? Since the epistle as a whole lays heavy stress on the reality and certainty of the Lord’s coming (see vv 11, 16, 19, and 3:4-14), the apostle is probably thinking of believers who no longer look ahead to the Rapture. Instead, their vision is severely limited to the here and now. People who live simply for the present time, or for the present world, are tragically “shortsighted.”

But that is not all. Second, a Christian who lacks the qualities mentioned in vv 5-7, is also “blind.” Commentators have wrestled needlessly with the supposed tension between calling a person both “shortsighted” and “blind.” Even the NKJV attempts to harmonize with the translation “shortsighted, even to blindness.” But the Greek text does not say this.

In fact, the word order of the original text actually calls for a translation like this:

For he who lacks these things is blind, short sighted,  
and has forgotten...

Thus the term “blind” is actually the first-mentioned trait of the character-poor believer, while “shortsighted” is the second.

We may say, therefore, that a person without the vital qualities of vv 5-7 suffers from spiritual “blindness” since he does not see reality, life, or Christian experience as God sees them. He is blind to the spiritual truths which he needs to grasp in order to function properly in this present world. Like a blind man, lacking either cane or guide-dog, he trips and stumbles constantly (see v 10!).

But a person who is blind to the spiritual realities of life from God’s viewpoint is also “shortsighted” about the future. He is not challenged by the Second Advent to be a better person than he is (see 3:11-14). There is no need to twist these concepts into a formal and physiological harmony. Metaphors need not

be physically compatible to be clear and comprehensible. On a spiritual level, a person can be both "blind" and "shortsighted."

Third, he can also be "forgetful." So Peter charges that the Christian who lacks the proper character "has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins."

But note! This individual *is* a Christian! He has been "*cleansed* from his old sins." This statement by the apostle makes it unmistakable that he can conceive of a "cleansed" believer lacking the qualities found in vv 5-7. He deplores the spiritual condition of such a person, but he in no way raises questions about that person's salvation.

Peter was certainly a spiritual realist even if many modern theologians are not. He does not take it for granted that spiritual growth will occur automatically or inevitably. Indeed, the character development he thinks of cannot occur apart from the believer "giving all diligence" toward that end (v 5). This does not mean, of course, that the believer does this all on his own. God supplies the basic resources and provides help along the way. But Christian growth *will not occur* apart from our diligent participation in the process. If we learn nothing else from this passage, we must learn this. We do not passively experience Christian growth, but actively pursue it!

In what sense, then, does the non-growing Christian "forget" his past cleansing? It is doubtful that Peter means that he simply cannot recall the fact. (Though in extreme cases that might be true.) However, both in Greek and in English, the word "forget" can also mean "to lack concern for," "to neglect." New Testament examples of this significance, with a Greek verb meaning "to forget," are Phil 3:13 and Heb 6:10; 13:2, 16.

The expression used here by Peter (*lēthēn labōn*, literally, "receiving forgetfulness") no doubt contains a similar connotation. The blind and shortsighted believer is disregarding and neglecting his past experience of God's forgiveness.

This implies, of course, a lack of appreciation for God's mercy in the past. But it also shows an unconcern about new sins which will also require forgiveness from God. Naturally this does not mean that such a Christian is in danger of losing eternal life. That is not at all the issue. Yet the fact remains that sinning believers must seek their Father's forgiveness in order to renew their fellowship with him (see 1 John 1:7-9). One who

has already tasted God's forgiving grace—and who keeps that experience in mind—cannot lightly accumulate new failures that need forgiveness as well. The proper kind of remembrance of our past cleansing ought to galvanize us to pursue holiness and growth.

Even when we remember that we are forgiven people, we have “forgotten” what that means if our lives do not reflect true growth in grace (see 2 Pet 3:17-18).

In summary, then, Peter declares that character-deficient Christians are “blind” at the present moment, “shortsighted” about the future, and “forgetful” of God's grace in the past.

## The Long-Term Results of Character-Building

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:10-11).

In view of these facts, diligence is all the more desirable in developing such a lifestyle. The NKJV's rendering of v 10, *be even more diligent*, implies that their diligence should increase. But another rendering (favored by the position of the Greek words) would be: “All the more, therefore, brethren, be diligent...” This can then mean something like: “After what I have just said about these qualities [in vv 8-9], you have all the more reason to be diligent.” Peter has thus far argued for the moral development presented in vv 5-7 on the basis of (1) God's gracious provisions for Christian living (vv 3-4) and on the basis of (2) the personal results, both positive and negative, that the presence or absence of these traits produce (vv 8-9). The first reason was quite adequate to motivate diligence in spiritual growth. But the second reason gave his readers *even more* incentive to be diligent.

But the *personal* results affecting our present quality of life (vv 8-9) carry with them other results of broader scope. These include verification of our election and a magnificent entrance into the coming kingdom of God.

Thus, in v 10, Peter does not simply repeat his earlier command to diligently add the qualities of vv 5-7. Instead he enjoins

his readers *to make their calling and election sure*. But this statement has often been misinterpreted and misapplied. It deserves our careful attention.

The Greek word translated "sure" is the adjective *bebaios*. Moulton and Milligan give us helpful insight into this word. They write:

Deissmann (*BS*, p. 104 ff.) has shown very fully how much force the technical use of this word and its cognates to denote legally guaranteed security adds to their occurrence in the NT.<sup>4</sup>

A particular example is drawn from a Greek papyrus which is translated, "and I will further guarantee [*parexomai...bebaia*] the property always against all claims with every guarantee [*bebaiōsei*]." J. B. Mayor writes of the Greek phrase for "make sure" in 2 Pet 1:10 that it equals the simple verb *bebaioun* and means "to certify, 'confirm,' 'attest'."<sup>5</sup>

This should make it clear that we are in no way required to conclude, as does the standard Greek lexicon, that the meaning here is "*to confirm the call*, i.e., so that it does not lapse."<sup>6</sup> As Paul has told us, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).

Still less can this text mean that Christians are to confirm their call and election (to eternal salvation) *to themselves*. Such an idea is completely foreign to this passage (and to the NT!). Peter has just finished addressing his readers as "those who have obtained like precious faith with us" (1:1). Moreover, in vv 3-4 he unmistakably treats them as Christians whom God has richly endowed. To suggest that despite these direct statements by the apostle, his readers are still uncertain about their "call and election" to eternal life, is to force on the text an alien theological presupposition. This idea is not the product of exegesis at all, but the torturing of the text into conformity with a preconceived opinion.

In light of the comments of Moulton and Milligan and of Mayor (quoted above), the meaning of this verse should be obvious. Given its legal usage, the phrase *bebaion...poieisthai* can

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<sup>4</sup> Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> Mayor, J. B., *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of Saint Peter*, 98.

<sup>6</sup> BGD, 138.

mean “to certify,” “to offer valid confirmation”—i.e., *to others*. That is, when a Christian develops the character qualities of vv 5-7, he is producing valid evidence for others to observe that God has indeed “called” and “chosen” him. This is similar to James’s doctrine of justification by works before men.<sup>7</sup> The unsaved are not likely to believe that we are in God’s favor on our own say-so alone. But a life filled with moral virtue and capped with love (v 7) can be very persuasive. As the Lord Jesus put it: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

If we understand the text this way, we can look again at the words *your call and election*. If the word election (*eklogē* = selection, choosing) referred to our being chosen before time (as in Eph 1:4), it is surprising that the phrase is not reversed: “your election and calling.” That sequence would conform, for example, to Rom 8:30 where we read “whom He predestined, these He also called.”

It seems probable, therefore, that we have here one of the many verbal allusions in the Petrine epistles to the teaching Peter had heard from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The sequence call–choose brings to mind the famous statement by our Lord that “many are *called*, but few are *chosen* (*eklektoi*, italics added). These words, however, occur only twice in the Gospels, both instances being in Matthew (20:16; 22:14). But there is little reason to doubt that Peter must have heard them many times. In the Gospels, we only have a fragment of our Lord’s spoken words (see John 21:25).

In any case, this statement by Jesus occurs in eschatological contexts both times it is used in Matthew. In one of these places, it concludes the parable of the workers in the vineyard (20:1-16) and follows the vineyard owner’s decisive pronouncement about the wages of the workers (vv 13-15). In the other place, it follows the parable of the wedding supper (22:1-14) and follows the host’s decisive command to expel the improperly dressed man (vv 12-13). It is beyond the scope of this article to expound these parables here. Suffice it to say this, clearly the parable about the vineyard workers refers to Christian service up to our Lord’s return, while the man in the parable of the wedding feast

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<sup>7</sup> Hodges, Zane C., *The Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd ed., 32-36.

has not prepared himself for the host's review and represents a believer unprepared for the Judgment Seat of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

From both parables it is plain that the "choice" is made *after* the "call"! The vineyard workers are all "called" to labor (i.e., "invited;" the Greek verb is of the same root as "calling" in 2 Pet 1:10), but the "choice" about their wages is made when the vineyard owner appears in the evening. Some are "chosen" to receive pay equal to those who have worked longer. In the wedding feast situation, many are "invited" and many turn down the invitation. But even one who came poorly dressed is not "chosen" to participate, although he *had* been "called" (invited).

What does all this mean for our text here? Clearly Peter encourages the building of Christian character (vv 5-7) which, in turn, leads to Christian activity and fruitfulness (v 8). This kind of lifestyle leads to *pay*, as it did for the vineyard workers in Matthew 20. (The common Greek word in the NT for "reward" [*misthos*] basically means *pay*.) Unlike the poorly dressed man who appeared at the wedding feast, the lifestyle Peter commands will prepare his readership to be properly "clothed" when they meet their Lord. Indeed, he states just such a desire for them at the end of the epistle:

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things,  
be diligent *to be found by Him*, without spot and  
blameless...(3:14, italics added).

We propose, therefore, that Peter's words do not refer here to a pre-temporal election to eternal salvation, which by its very nature would precede the call to salvation. Instead, all Christians have been given a "royal" summons by God Himself, "who calls [us] into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12). And a supremely significant part of that glory is the privilege of co-reigning with Christ (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-27; 3:21). But not all Christians are *chosen* to co-reign! Paul writes: "*If* we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim 2:12, italics added); and he also wrote, "and joint heirs with Christ, *if* indeed we suffer

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<sup>8</sup> For very helpful discussions of Matt 22:1-14, see the article by Gregory Sapaugh, "A Call to the Wedding Celebration: An Exposition of Matthew 22:1-14," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 5 (Spring, 1992): 11-34; and the article by Michael G. Huber on "The 'Outer Darkness' in Matthew and Its Relationship to Grace," in the Autumn 1992 issue of this same journal. See also the chapter, "The Darkness Outside," in my book *Grace in Eclipse*.

with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom 8:17b, italics added).

Peter, therefore, wishes his readership to produce in their lifestyle appropriate verification that they are "royal" people, destined for high honor in the coming kingdom of God. By doing *these things* (i.e., the things Peter is talking about), their road into the glories of that kingdom will be smooth. They will not *stumble* on that path and thus run the risk of losing the rewards they are "called" to obtain (see 1 Cor 9:27). Instead, they shall prove themselves "chosen" for the divine reward.

This understanding of v 10 finds immediate support in v 11. All born-again Christians will *enter* the kingdom of Christ, but those who develop the Christian character described in this chapter will have a *special kind of entrance*. For so, says Peter, *an entrance will be supplied to you ABUNDANTLY!* The word "abundantly" translates the Greek adverb *plousiōs*, which more precisely means *richly*. (The adjective/noun *plousiōs* is the usual word in the NT for "rich" or "rich man.") This idea recalls the Lord's teaching in Luke 12 where He censures the life of the rich fool with these words:

So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not *rich [ploutōn]* toward God (Luke 12:21, italics added).

This important statement in Luke is followed by an exhortation from Jesus to His disciples (see Luke 12:1) not to be concerned by their daily needs, but to rely on God for them (12:22-31). Verse 31 concludes the exhortation by urging that God's kingdom be given priority: "But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."

The very next statement by our Lord also relates to this kingdom ("It is the Father's good pleasure to *give you* the kingdom," v 32, italics added) and is followed by an exhortation to lay up heavenly treasure (12:33-34). Clearly, the seeking and gaining of the kingdom and of heavenly treasure are interwoven themes in the teaching of our Lord. The doctrine they pertain to is the doctrine of *rewards*.

This is equally true of 2 Pet 1:10-11. Salvation from hell is not in view. Heavenly reward is the real theme. The holy and fruitful lifestyle of vv 3-8 can be a demonstration—a verification—that an individual Christian has not only been "called," but actually "chosen," for great reward in God's future kingdom. As he or

she diligently pursues this pathway, doing the things that Peter has enjoined, he will be able to avoid any serious spiritual fall (*you will never stumble*). Thus his pathway can climax in a rich entrance into *the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. Everlasting wealth, or treasure, can be his in an everlasting kingdom.

The study of this important passage, in the light of its relationship to future reward, can be appropriately concluded with the words of Michael Green who writes on v 11 as follows:

This passage agrees with several in the Gospels and Epistles in suggesting that while heaven is entirely a gift of grace, it admits of degrees of felicity, and that these are dependent upon how faithfully we have built a structure of character and service upon the foundation of Christ. Bengel likens the unholy Christian in the judgment to a sailor who just manages to make shore after shipwreck, or to a man who barely escapes with his life from a burning house, while all his possessions are lost. In contrast, the Christian who has allowed his Lord to influence his conduct will have abundant entrance into the heavenly city, and be welcomed like a triumphant athlete victorious in the Games. This whole paragraph of exhortation is thus set between two poles: what we already are in Christ and what we are to become. The truly Christian reader, unlike the scoffers, will look back to the privileges conferred on him, of partaking in the divine nature, and will seek to live worthily of it. He will also look forward to the day of assessment, and strive to live in light of it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Green, Michael, *The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, Tyndale Bible Commentaries, 76-77.

# DOES YOUR MIND NEED CHANGING? REPENTANCE RECONSIDERED

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*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*  
Irving, TX

*Editor's note: The following is a revised form of a paper delivered at the March 30–April 1 GES Conference on repentance, held in Grapevine, TX.*

## I. My Testimony: Many Changes of Mind Concerning Repentance

While growing up in Southern California, I was heavily influenced by a religious boys' club that taught an extreme form of Lordship Salvation. Repentance was a key part of my instruction. I was taught and believed that to be saved a person had to turn from his sins and progress in holiness.<sup>1</sup> And, if he were fortunate enough to obtain salvation, then he had to maintain a sinless life to *stay* saved. One sin and salvation was lost, never to be regained.<sup>2</sup>

Then one day a friend from the club, John Carlson, challenged me with a pointed question: "Is it possible, Bob, that your view of the gospel might not be correct?" I accepted his invitation to go to a Campus Crusade for Christ meeting at the University of Southern California. After the meeting there were people using profanity and smoking. Because of my past association with the

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<sup>1</sup> The club taught that each person could only be saved during a short time period, his "window of opportunity," typically one to two weeks, which only God knew. If the person didn't gain eternal life during that time, he would likely never get another chance. Thus there was tremendous pressure to clean up your life and keep it clean. Failing to be ready for that opportunity would be disastrous.

<sup>2</sup> In this way of thinking neither confession of sins nor repentance was for believers. Those were things one did to prepare for salvation. Once saved, absolute sinlessness was required.

boys' club, it was unthinkable to me that these people could be Christians!

When I told John about my reservations concerning the spiritual condition of these people, he said, "Well, maybe there is such a thing as Christian growth." As odd as it might seem, this was a revolutionary thought to me. I thought one had to be good to get saved and perfect to stay saved. To think that a person had to be bad to get saved and then stayed saved even after sinning was mind boggling to me.

Shortly after this I came to believe in Christ for eternal salvation, knowing that I was saved once and for all. I had learned from the Bible that eternal salvation was "not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast."<sup>3</sup>

As best as I can recall, I didn't even think about the issue of repentance when I came to faith—other than the wonderfully insightful comment by my friend John. I imagine if someone had asked me at the time, I would have said, "Paul said we're saved by grace through faith and that it is not of works lest anyone should boast. If I had to repent to be saved, then I'd be able to boast. Repentance is a part of the Christian life, not something we must do to be saved." I had changed my mind about repentance. I now believed that the sole condition of eternal salvation was faith in Christ.

However, when I was discipled and learned to share my faith, I changed my mind about repentance again. I came to believe, and to tell people to whom I witnessed, that in order to be saved a person had to turn from self to God. By this I meant that a person had to be willing to give up any sin in his or her life.

When I got to seminary I changed my mind about repentance yet again, adopting the change-of-mind view of Lewis Sperry

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<sup>3</sup> A staff member with a college ministry, Warren Wilke, met with me many times, repeatedly going over Eph 2:8-9, and ultimately leading me to faith in Christ. Warren and I became fast friends, and have maintained our friendship all these years.

Chafer<sup>4</sup> and Charles Ryrie.<sup>5</sup> I ultimately wrote my doctoral dissertation on the subject.<sup>6</sup> I would never tell people they had to repent to have eternal life, but if asked about repentance, I would say that it was changing one's mind about Christ. In other words, I now believed that repentance was another name for faith.

Zane Hodges's book *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*<sup>7</sup> was published in 1989. In Chapter 12, he states that repentance is not a condition of eternal life at all. Although I didn't completely agree with Zane at the time (I still thought there were a few passages that conditioned eternal life upon repentance), I was intrigued by his view and resolved to think about it more. I have since become convinced that repentance is not a condition of eternal life. That is, I have undergone my fourth change of mind about repentance.

What about you? To modify John Carlson's question, "Is it possible that you too need to change your mind about repentance?" Is it possible that you are not being as clear as you could be when you share the gospel? Are you willing to change your mind about repentance if the evidence of Scripture shows that your view is not biblical?

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), III: 373–78. Though he argues for the change-of-mind view, note this comment: "From this overwhelming mass of irrefutable evidence [the absence of repentance in John, only one occurrence in Romans, its absence in Paul's reply of Acts 16:31], it is clear that the New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation" (p. 376).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 175–76 ("The content of repentance which brings eternal life, and that which Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, is a change of mind about Jesus Christ," p. 176); *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 139; and *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 91–100.

<sup>6</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, "Repentance as a Condition for Salvation in the New Testament," An Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1985. A condensed version of the dissertation appears in the first six issues of this Journal.

<sup>7</sup> It was co-published by Redención Viva (Dallas, TX) and Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, MI). In a clever marketing twist, Zondervan placed it in displays in bookstores all over America alongside John MacArthur's, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988). It challenged the bookstore patrons to decide who was correct.

## II. What Must I Do to Be Saved? The Place of Repentance in Eternal Salvation

Paul's answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" was simple, straightforward, and clear: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). The Lord Jesus and His apostles were united on this point. There is but one condition of eternal salvation—faith in Christ (see John 3:16-18; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-27; 20:31; Acts 10:43; Eph 2:8-9). Another way of saying this is that there is but one condition of justification before God—faith in Christ (see Rom 3:28; 4:1-8; Gal 2:16; 3:6-16). Justification is by faith alone—*sola fide* as the Reformers put it so succinctly in Latin.

Since eternal salvation is by faith alone, there are only three possibilities regarding the role of repentance in eternal salvation. The options are:

1. Repentance is a condition of eternal salvation since it is a synonym for faith in Christ. Thus "he who believes in Me has everlasting life" is identical to "he who repents has everlasting life."
2. Repentance is a condition of eternal salvation since it is a necessary precursor to faith in Christ. Thus one cannot believe in Christ until he first repents, that is, until he first recognizes his sinfulness and need of a Savior.
3. Repentance is not a condition of eternal salvation since repentance is neither a synonym for faith in Christ nor a necessary precursor to faith in Christ.

If we can determine what repentance is, then it will be clear which of these three possibilities is indeed correct. Let's turn now to the meaning of repentance.

## III. What Is Repentance?

The meaning of words is determined by examining their usage. Thus to determine the meaning of repentance, we need to look at the fifty-five NT uses of the words *repent* and *repentance*. Having done that, I have chosen three passages that clearly illustrate its meaning in all of its uses.

Jesus said to a Jewish audience,

“The men of Ninevah will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here” (Matt 12:41).

Jesus was here rebuking the people of Israel, most of whom failed to repent even at the preaching of the Son of God! The men of Ninevah repented centuries earlier under the preaching of a much lesser prophet than Jesus. Jonah was a reluctant prophet. He didn't want the Ninevites to repent.

What the Lord Jesus means by repentance here is evident when we look at the repentance of the Ninevites in Jonah Chapter 3. In response to Jonah's proclamation of coming judgment, all of the people of Ninevah fasted and put on sackcloth (Jonah 3:5) and “turned from their evil way” (Jonah 3:10). The repentance of the Ninevites was not faith in Christ and it was not a necessary precursor to faith in Christ. They decided to turn from their sins because they hoped to escape the destruction of their city and the widespread loss of lives that Jonah had proclaimed (“who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?”—Jonah 3:9).

The apostle John wrote prophetically about what will happen in the coming Tribulation: “And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Rev 9:21). Once again, repentance is not faith in Christ or a necessary precursor to that, but it is a decision to turn from one's sinful ways, which the people in question did not do in spite of the terrible Tribulation judgments that they were experiencing from God.

Jesus taught the apostles about repentance when He said, “If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (Luke 17:4). Again, repentance here is neither faith in Christ, nor a necessary precursor to faith in Christ. It is a decision to turn from one's sins.

All fifty-five NT references to repentance bear this out. In each case repentance is a decision to turn from one's sins. It is never a synonym for faith in Christ or a necessary precursor to faith.

## IV. Further Evidence That Repentance Isn't a Condition of Eternal Life

There are other compelling reasons to give up the belief that repentance is a condition of eternal life.

### A. Repentance "Strikingly Absent" from Paul

One NT scholar wrote that whereas the Judaism of Paul's day emphasized the need to repent to get into the kingdom, the idea of repentance is "a category strikingly absent from Paul."<sup>8</sup>

Consider for example Gal 3:6-9:

Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Ten times in those four verses we find the words *believe* and *faith*. Not once do we find the words *repent* or *repentance*. In fact, those words are not to be found anywhere in the entire Epistle to the Galatians.

The Book of Galatians is a defense of the gospel against the attacks of the Judaizers. Paul argues that the gospel of Jesus Christ is foundational to the Christian life. There is no other gospel. It is indeed significant that repentance is absent in a book where Paul is presenting and defending the gospel message he received directly from the Lord. Surely if repentance were a part of Paul's gospel, he would have said so in his defense of his gospel in Galatians.

### B. Repentance "Completely Absent" from John's Gospel

While repentance is "strikingly absent" from Paul's writings, it is "completely absent" from John's Gospel. But how can this be in a book whose primary stated purpose is evangelistic (John 20:31)?

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<sup>8</sup>James D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 43 (April 1992): 7.

It is not that John was unfamiliar with repentance. He was almost certainly a disciple of John the Baptist (see John 1:35-40) whom he had heard preach about repentance. He had seen John baptize people with his baptism of repentance. Later as a disciple of Jesus he no doubt heard Him call people to repentance many times. And John himself had much to say about repentance in the Book of Revelation, using the verb *metanoēō* twelve times. Yet there is not a word about repentance in John's Gospel.

The obvious reason for John's omission is that repentance is not a condition of eternal life. Because of that, John took great care not to mention it.

That the only evangelistic book in the Bible fails to mention repentance is a smoking gun. It is a piece of evidence so clear and powerful that the prosecution can rest its case on this alone. Repentance is not a condition of eternal life.<sup>9</sup>

## V. Various Questions about Repentance

### A. But Isn't the Change-of-Mind View Clear on the Gospel?

As one who held the change-of-mind view for a long time, I certainly agree that one can be clear on the gospel and hold that view. Many Free Grace people hold that view and find great comfort in it.

However, as I reflected on the way I presented the gospel when I held that view, I realized that I didn't bring up repentance. I told people that in order to have eternal life they simply had to believe in Christ. The only time I would discuss repentance with someone when witnessing would be when they brought it up. And I am far from alone in this. Many, if not most, who hold the change-of-mind view of repentance rarely mention repentance when sharing the gospel. Since believing in Christ is the sole condition of eternal salvation, it makes sense to tell people to believe.

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<sup>9</sup> At the conference some objected that this is an argument from silence and that arguments from silence prove nothing. However, as Zane Hodges has since pointed out in a newsletter article (*Grace in Focus*, May-June, 1998), this is really an argument *about* silence and it proves much.

I realized even when I held the change-of-mind view that there was a risk in even admitting to someone that they had to repent to have eternal life. Most people think of repentance as a decision to reform one's life. Thus if I would say that repentance is indeed a condition, they could quite easily reject my definition of repentance (as being clearly contradicted by the NT uses) and yet accept my conclusion that repentance is required for eternal salvation.

Therefore, while people holding the change-of-mind view may share the gospel quite clearly, often by not mentioning repentance at all, this does not mean that the change-of-mind view is correct. If it is incorrect, we should not continue to promote it, even if we find it easy to explain.<sup>10</sup>

### **B. But Didn't Jesus Say That Those Who Don't Repent Will Perish?**

Yes, He did. In Luke 13:3, 5 He said, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." However, the word *perish* does not always refer to eternal condemnation (though it does, for example, in John 3:16). In many contexts it refers to temporal judgment and death.<sup>11</sup> That is surely the case here, as the context makes crystal clear. Notice the word *likewise* in the statement by the Lord. The occasion for Jesus' remark was that some "told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (Luke 13:1). In other words, Pilate killed some worshipers. *Perishing* in Luke 13:3, 5 refers to physical destruction and death. And, in fact, Israel did not repent and experienced destruction and death during the Jewish Wars of 66–70 A.D.

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<sup>10</sup> As one who has held both views, I now see that the idea that the change-of-mind view is easy to explain is not quite right. It is hard to convince someone that repentance is a change of mind about Christ when so many (actually all) NT passages clearly contradict that definition. Actually the view of repentance advocated here is much easier to explain and is much simpler.

<sup>11</sup> This is true as well in 2 Pet 3:9, "God wishes that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance." That isn't talking about eternal condemnation. The only other use of the word *perish* in 2 Peter occurs three verses earlier and there it unequivocally refers to the physical death that occurred when God sent a worldwide flood upon Noah's generation: "by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water."

### **C. Doesn't the Parable of the Prodigal Son Teach That Repentance Is Necessary for Eternal Salvation?**

While many understand it in precisely that way, the context suggests a completely different interpretation. A fact most fail to take into account is that the prodigal was a *son* of his father *before* he went to the far country, while he was *in* the far country, and when he *returned from* the far country. He didn't become a son when he repented. Rather, by repenting this son came back into fellowship with his father.

Since the father in the parable surely represents God, the prodigal son illustrates a child of God who has strayed and who needs to repent to get back in fellowship with God.<sup>12</sup> Whenever a believer is out of fellowship, God waits with open arms to take him back, if he comes to his senses.

### **D. But Doesn't the Great Commission in Luke Include the Preaching of Repentance?**

Yes. In Luke 24:47 the Lord said "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." However, we must remember the Great Commission was not merely a commission to evangelize. It was also a commission to disciple those who believe. In fact, in some expressions of the Great Commission the Lord only spoke of discipleship.

In Matt 28:18-20 the Lord told the disciples *to make disciples* by baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that He had taught them. We don't conclude from that, do we, that baptism and discipleship instruction are conditions of eternal life? In the same way, the Great Commission in Luke concerns discipleship. Repentance is indeed a condition of fellowship with God and of the forgiveness associated with that fellowship (e.g., Luke 5:32; 15:4-32). We know from 1 John 1:9 as well that all believers need ongoing fellowship forgiveness from God. While we are completely forgiven at the moment of regeneration positionally (Acts 10:43), we need ongoing forgiveness in our experience.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>The older brother thus also represents a believer, since he too is a son. However, he represents a legalistic (Pharisaic) believer who takes offense at God rejoicing in the return of an errant son.

<sup>13</sup>Acts 2:38 and 22:16 are both best understood in this way as well. For example, Peter's audience at Pentecost believed in Jesus as the Messiah as

### **E. But Didn't Paul Say That Repentance Leads to Salvation?**

Yes, he did. In 2 Cor 7:10 Paul wrote, "godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation." However, we must observe the context to see what type of "salvation" or deliverance is in view. Paul was speaking of the deliverance of *believers* from temporal judgment, not of the deliverance of unbelievers from eternal judgment. Those whom Paul was addressing were "beloved" (v 1). He wrote them a previous letter rebuking them for tolerating blatant sin in their midst. Paul said, "even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it." Why? "Because your sorrow led to repentance...that you might not suffer loss in anything. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

Paul's point is that if a person is sorry for his sins, but doesn't repent, then he is on the path of death. God judges unrepentant sin. Sorrow for sin won't win any release from the punishment. However, the person who is both sorry for his sin and repents is on the path of life. God delivers him from ongoing temporal judgment, just as He delivered the Ninevites from judgment when they repented.

### **F. But Didn't Both John the Baptist and Jesus Say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"?**

Yes, they did. Compare Matt 3:2 and 4:17. However, it is wrong to conclude that what they meant was that in order for an individual to enter God's kingdom, he or she must repent.

John the Baptist and Jesus were preaching to national Israel. They were calling the entire nation to repent in light of the nearness of the kingdom.

God has given only one condition for individuals to enter God's kingdom—faith in Christ. However, He has given *two conditions* for the kingdom to come to the nation of Israel: faith

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indicated in v 37, "they were cut to the heart." When they asked "What shall we do?" they were not asking how they could be saved *eternally*; they were asking how they could be saved *temporally* from God's wrath which should have fallen upon those who said, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt 27:25). For further information on this interpretation, see Lanny Tanton's articles on Acts 2:38 (*JOTGES*, Spring 1990: 27-52) and Acts 22:16 (*JOTGES*, Spring 1991: 23-40).

in Christ and repentance. Jesus stated both of these conditions in Mark 1:15, "Repent and believe in the gospel."

Someday national Israel will indeed respond properly to the commands to repent and believe in the gospel. At the end of the Tribulation the nation of Israel will be made up of believers who are in fellowship with God. If Israel had responded by believing in the Messiah and by repenting of its sins when it heard the preaching of Jesus and John the Baptist, then the kingdom could have come to national Israel then, rather than later.

## **VI. What Are the Benefits of Repentance?**

The passages we have considered show that repentance has a number of benefits to the believer, and to the unbeliever as well.

First, both the believer and the unbeliever may escape temporal judgment if they repent. Second, gaining fellowship with God, and the attendant blessings that come with it, is something that only a believer can experience. However, a repentant unbeliever may be more likely to come to faith in Christ and then he too can gain fellowship with God and the attendant blessings.

For example, suppose a person is lost and decides that he wants to turn to God. He stops going to bars and disassociates from his drinking buddies. He buys a Bible and begins reading it daily. He starts visiting churches in his area, looking for one that teaches the Bible. He asks friends whom he knows are churchgoers to give him some pointers on how to get closer to God.

While none of these things are necessary to be saved, they may well lead to the person hearing and believing the gospel.

Now admittedly a well-intentioned person might start looking in all the wrong places. He may visit cults. He may listen to those who proclaim a false gospel, and he may think his decision to turn from his sins to God is necessary to go to heaven. However, if the person is truly seeking God, God will eventually show him that what he is listening to is false and will lead him to the true gospel (Acts 10; Heb 11:6).

Third, the national repentance of Israel is a condition of the kingdom coming. While an individual is guaranteed kingdom entrance by faith in Christ alone, the kingdom will not come for Israel until the nation as a whole believes in Jesus Christ

*and* repents. That is why both John the Baptist and Jesus were calling the nation to repentance *and* faith.

In summary, repentance is for believers and unbelievers. It can occur before or after regeneration. It can even aid a person in coming to faith in Christ. However, repentance is not a condition of eternal life.

## VII. Conclusion

If one tells a person that in order to be saved he needs to believe in Christ and to repent, no matter how one defines repentance, a fuzz factor is introduced in the gospel presentation. The person will have difficulty understanding and believing the gospel. A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew. If some lack of clarity exists in a gospel presentation, the listener may well be in a fog.

The solution is simple: tell unbelievers to believe in Christ for eternal life, and tell believers to repent of their sins in order to be in fellowship with God. Don't confuse the two. The former is justification. The latter is progressive sanctification.

When you are talking with unbelievers, don't be afraid to ask them to read the Bible, pray, or go to church. Don't be afraid to ask them to decide to turn from their sinful ways. While those things are not conditions of eternal life, they are ways in which a person might come to understand and believe the gospel.

When telling someone what they must do to be saved, why not give the biblical answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved"? If it was good enough for the apostles and the Lord Jesus, it should be good enough for us as well.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I have received a number of letters and calls from people who are upset that I have abandoned the change-of-mind view. To all such people I wish to say that I personally understand their angst. I held the change-of-mind view for years, even writing a doctoral dissertation defending it. When confronted with the view that I now advocate, I was skeptical. However, I have always considered Acts 17:11 to be a vitally important attitude to have: "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." After following that admonition, I changed my thinking about repentance.

# A Voice from the Past:

## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?<sup>1</sup>

H. A. IRONSIDE<sup>2</sup>

“Moreover brethren I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:1-4).

It might seem almost a work of supererogation to answer a question like this. We hear the word gospel used so many times. People talk of this and of that as being “as true as the gospel,”<sup>3</sup> and I often wonder what they really mean by it. What is the gospel? First I should like to indicate what it is not.

### I. What the Gospel Is Not<sup>4</sup>

#### A. Not the Bible

In the first place, the gospel is not the Bible. Often when I inquire, “What do you think the gospel is?” people reply, “Why,

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<sup>1</sup>This article is the second chapter of Ironside's book *God's Unspeakable Gift* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1908). He makes many excellent points, often with wit and humor. Get ready to enjoy a feast that is just as relevant today as it was 90 years ago. Ed.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Allen (known as H. A. or Harry) Ironside lived from 1876 to 1951. Pastor of Moody Memorial Church and Professor at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, he preached all over the country, averaging over five hundred sermons a year. He wrote numerous books and articles and was a tireless proponent of the Free Grace gospel. For further information see the *Twentieth-Century Dictionary of Christian Biography*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Vaker Vooks, 1995), 187.

<sup>3</sup>Today this expression would be rendered “It's the gospel truth!” Ed.

<sup>4</sup>To adapt this book chapter to a journal article, this heading was added. All headings and subheadings have been given Roman numerals and letters,

it is the Bible, and the Bible is the Word of God." Undoubtedly the Bible is the Word of God, but there is a great deal in that Book that is not gospel.

"The wicked shall be turned into Hell with all the nations that forget God."<sup>5</sup> That is in the Bible, and it is terribly true; but it is not gospel.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."<sup>6</sup> That is in the Bible, but it is not gospel.

Our English word *gospel* just means the *good spell* and the word *spell* is the old Anglo-Saxon word for "tidings," the good tidings, the good news. The original word translated *gospel*, which we have taken over into the English with little alteration is the word, "evangel,"<sup>7</sup> and it has the same meaning, the good news. The gospel is God's good news for sinners. The Bible contains the gospel, but there is a great deal in the Bible which is not gospel.

## B. Not the Commandments

The gospel is not just any message from God telling man how he should behave. "What is the gospel?" I asked a man this question some time ago, and he answered, "Why I should say it is the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, and I think if a man lives up to them he is all right." Well, I fancy he would be; but did you ever know anybody who lived up to them? The Ten Commandments ask of sinful man an obedience that no fallen creature has ever given. The Sermon on the Mount demands a righteousness which no unregenerate man has been able to produce. The law is not the gospel; it is the very antithesis of the gospel. In fact, *the law was given by God to show men their need for the gospel*.

"The law," says the Apostle Paul, speaking as a Jewish convert, "was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. But after that Christ is come we are no longer under the schoolmaster."

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respectively. In a few places transition words such as "it is called" were removed since the outline form eliminates their need. Ed.

<sup>5</sup> Ps 9:17. All Scripture in this article is taken from the King James Version.

<sup>6</sup> Heb 10:31.

<sup>7</sup> Greek *euangelion*. Ed.

### C. Not Repentance

The gospel is not a call to repentance, or to amendment of one's ways, to make restitution for his past sins, or to promise to do better in the future. These things are all perfectly right and perfectly proper in their place, but they do not constitute the gospel; for the gospel is not good advice to be obeyed, it is good news to be believed. Do not make the mistake then of thinking that the gospel is a call to duty or a call to reformation, a call to better your condition, to behave yourself in a more perfect way than you have been doing in the past.

### D. Not Giving Up the World

Nor is the gospel a demand that you give up the world, that you give up your sins, that you break off bad habits and try to cultivate good ones. You may do all these things and yet never believe the gospel, and consequently never be saved at all.

There are seven designations of the gospel in the NT, but over and above all these, let me draw your attention to the fact that when this blessed message is mentioned, it is invariably accompanied by the definite article. Over and over and over again in the NT we read of *the* gospel. It is *the* gospel; not *a* gospel. People tell us there are a great many different gospels; but there is only one! When certain teachers came to the Galatians and tried to turn them away from the simplicity that was in Christ Jesus by teaching "*another* gospel," the apostle said that it was a different gospel, but not another, for there is none other than *the* gospel. It is down-right exclusive; it is God's revelation to sinful man.

### E. Not Comparative Religion

The scholars of this world talk of the "Science of Comparative Religions," and it is very popular nowadays to say, "We cannot any longer go to heathen nations and preach to them as in the days gone by, because we are learning that their religions are just as good as ours and the thing to do now is to share with them, to study the different religions, take the good out of them all, and in this way lead the world into a sense of brotherhood and unity."

So in our great universities and colleges men study this Science of Comparative Religions, and they compare all these different religious systems one with another. There is a Science of Comparative Religions, but the gospel is not one of them. All the different religions in the world may well be studied comparatively, for at rock-bottom they are all alike; they all set man at trying to earn his own salvation. They may be called by different names, and the things that men are called to *do* may be different in each case, but they all set men trying to save their own souls and earn their way into the favor of God. In this they stand in vivid contrast with *the* gospel, for *the* gospel does not come to men to tell them to do anything, but *the* gospel is that glorious message that tells us what God has *done* for us in order that guilty sinners may be saved.

## II. The Seven Designations of This Gospel

### A. The Gospel of the Kingdom<sup>8</sup>

When I use that term I am not thinking particularly of any dispensational<sup>9</sup> application, but of this blessed truth that it is only through believing the gospel that men are born into the Kingdom of God. We sing:

“A ruler once came to Jesus by night,  
To ask Him the way of salvation and light;  
The Master made answer in words true and plain,  
*‘ye must be born again.’*”

But neither Nicodemus, nor you, nor I, could ever bring this about ourselves. We had nothing to do with our first birth, and can have nothing to do with our second birth. It must be the work of God, and it is wrought through the gospel. That is why the gospel is called the gospel of the Kingdom, for, “Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”<sup>10</sup> “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the

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<sup>8</sup> Literally “the good news of the kingdom.” While Ironside fails to cite a single place where this expression occurs, he is making the point that the believer is guaranteed kingdom entrance. Ed.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Ironside was a keen dispensationalist, but he is not talking about that here.

<sup>10</sup> John 3:3, 7.

Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever...And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”<sup>11</sup>

Everywhere that Paul and his companion apostles went they preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and they showed that the only way to get into that Kingdom was by a second birth, and that the only way whereby the second birth could be brought about was through believing the gospel. It is the gospel of the Kingdom.

## **B. The Gospel of God**

God is the source of it, and it is altogether of Himself. No man ever thought of a

gospel like this. The very fact that all the religions of the world set man to try to work for his own salvation indicates the fact that no man would ever have dreamed of such a gospel as that which is revealed in this Book. It came from the heart of God; it was God who “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>12</sup> “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”<sup>13</sup> And because it is the gospel of God, God is very jealous of it. He wants it kept pure. He does not want it mixed with any of man’s theories or laws; He does not want it mixed up with religious ordinances or anything of that kind. The gospel is God’s own pure message to sinful man. God grant that you and I may receive it as in very truth the gospel of God.

## **C. The Gospel of His Son**

It is the gospel of God’s Son not merely because the Son went everywhere preaching the gospel, but because He is the theme of it. “When it pleased God,” says the apostle, “who called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the nations; immediately I conferred not with flesh and

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Pet 23-25.

<sup>12</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>13</sup> 1 John 4:9-10.

blood.”<sup>14</sup> “We preach Christ crucified...the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”<sup>15</sup> No man preaches the gospel who is not exalting the Lord Jesus. It is God’s wonderful message about His Son. How often I have gone to meetings where they told me I would hear the gospel, and instead of that I have heard some bewildered preacher talk to a bewildered audience about everything and anything, but the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel has to do with nothing else but Christ. It is the gospel of God’s Son.

#### **D. The Gospel of Christ**

The Apostle Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost of the risen Savior, says, “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”<sup>16</sup> and he speaks of Him as the anointed one, exalted at God’s right hand.

The gospel is the gospel of the Risen Christ. There would be no gospel for sinners if Christ had not been raised. So the apostle says, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.”<sup>17</sup>

A great New York preacher—great in his impertinence, at least—said some years ago, preaching a so-called Easter sermon, “The body of Jesus still sleeps in a Syrian tomb, but His soul goes marching on.”

That is not the gospel of Christ. We are not preaching the gospel of a dead Christ, but of a living Christ who sits exalted at the Father’s right hand, and is living to save all who put their trust in Him. That is why those of us who really know the gospel never have any crucifixes around our churches or in our homes. The crucifix represents a dead Christ hanging languid on a cross of shame. But we are not preaching a dead Christ; we are not pointing men to a dead Christ; we are preaching a living Christ. He lives exalted at God’s right hand, and He “saves to the uttermost all who come to God by Him.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gal 1:15-16.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor 1:23-24.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 2:36.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Cor 15:17.

<sup>18</sup> Heb 7:25.

## **E. The Gospel of the Grace of God**

It leaves no room whatever for human merit. It just brushes away all man's pretension to any goodness, to any desert excepting judgment. It is the gospel of Grace, and grace is God's free unmerited favor to those who have merited the very opposite. It is as opposite to works as oil is to water. "If by grace," says the Spirit of God, "then it is no more works...but if it be of works, then is it no more grace."<sup>19</sup>

People say, "But you must have both." I have heard it put like this: There was a boatman and two theologians in a boat, and one was arguing that salvation was by faith and the other by works. The boatman listened, and then said, "Let me tell you how it looks to me. Suppose I call this oar Faith and this one Works. If I pull on this one, the boat goes around; if I pull on this other one, it goes around the other way, but if I pull on both oars, I get you across the river."

I have heard many preachers use that illustration to prove that we are saved by faith and works. That might do if we were going to heaven in a rowboat, but we are not. We are carried on the shoulders of the Shepherd, who came seeking lost sheep. When He finds them He carries them home on His shoulders.

## **F. The Gospel of the Glory of God**

I love that name. It is the gospel of the Glory of God because it comes from the place where our Lord Jesus has entered. The veil has been rent, and now the glory shines out; and whenever this gospel is proclaimed, it tells of a way into the glory for sinful man, a way to come before the Mercy Seat purged from every stain. It is the gospel of the Glory of God, because, until Christ had entered into the Glory, it could not be preached in its fullness, but, after the glory received Him, then the message went out to a lost world.

## **G. Everlasting Gospel**

It will never be superseded by another. No other ever went before it, and no other shall ever come after it.

One of the professors of the University of Chicago wrote a book a few years ago in which he tried to point out that some of

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<sup>19</sup> Rom 11:6.

these days Jesus would be superseded by a greater teacher; then He and the gospel that He taught would have to give way to a message which would be more suited to the intelligence of the cultivated men of the later centuries.

No, no, were it possible for this world to go on a million years, it would never need any other gospel than this preached by the Apostle Paul and confirmed by the Holy Ghost with signs following; the gospel which throughout the centuries has been saving guilty sinners.

### III. The Gospel Declared

What then is the content of this gospel? We are told right here. "I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain."<sup>20</sup> There is such a thing as merely believing with the intelligence and crediting some doctrine with the mind when the heart has not been reached. But wherever men believe this gospel in real faith, they are saved through the message. What is it that brings this wonderful result? It is a simple story, and yet how rich, how full.

"I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received." I think his heart must have been stirred as he wrote those words, for he went back in memory to nearly 30 years before, and thought of that day when hurrying down the Damascus turnpike, with his heart filled with hatred toward the Lord Jesus Christ and His people, he was thrown to the ground, and a light shone, and he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul why persecutest thou Me?"<sup>21</sup> And he cried, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And the voice said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." And that day Saul learned the gospel; he learned that He who died on the Cross had been raised from the dead, and that He was living in the Glory. At that moment his soul was saved, and Saul of Tarsus was changed to Paul the Apostle. And now he says, "I am going to tell you what I have received; it is a real thing with me, and I know it will work the same wonderful change in you, if you will believe it."

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Cor 15:2.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 9:4.

First of all, "That Christ *died* for our sins according to the Scriptures." Then, "that He was *buried*;" then, "that He *rose again* the third day according to the Scriptures." Notice that phrase, "According to the Scriptures." The gospel was no new thing in God's mind. It had been predicted throughout the OT times. Every time the coming Savior was mentioned, there was proclamation of the gospel. It began in Eden when the Lord said, "The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head."<sup>22</sup> It was typified in every sacrifice that was offered. It was portrayed in the wonderful Tabernacle, and later in the Temple.

We have it in the proclamation of Isaiah, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."<sup>23</sup> It was preached by Jeremiah when he said, "This is His Name whereby He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness" (Jer 23:6). It was declared by Zechariah when he exclaimed, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is my fellow...smite the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones" (Zech 13:7).

All through those OT dispensations, the gospel was predicted, and when Jesus came, the gospel came with Him. When He died, when He was buried, and when He rose again, the gospel could be fully told out to a poor lost world. Observe, it says, "that Christ *died for our sins*." No man preaches the gospel, no matter what nice things he may say about Jesus, if he leaves out His vicarious death on Calvary's Cross.

### A. Christ's Death—Not His Life

I was preaching in a church in Virginia, and a minister prayed, "Lord, grant Thy blessing as the Word is preached tonight. May it be the means of causing people to fall in love with the Christ-life, that they may begin to live the Christ-life." I felt like saying, "Brother, sit down; don't insult God like that;" but then I felt I had to be courteous, and I knew that my turn would come when I could get up and give them the truth.

The gospel is not asking men to live the Christ-life. If your salvation depends upon your doing that, you are just as good as

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<sup>22</sup> Gen 3:15.

<sup>23</sup> Isa 53:5.

checked in for hell, for you never can live it in yourself. It is utterly impossible. But the very first message of the gospel is the story of the vicarious atonement of Christ. Jesus did not come to tell men how to live in order that they might save themselves; He did not come to save men by living His beautiful life. That, apart from His death, would never have saved one poor sinner. *He came to die*; He "was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death."<sup>24</sup> Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all. When He instituted the Lord's Supper He said, "Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me...This cup is the new covenant in My Blood."<sup>25</sup> There is no gospel if the vicarious death of Jesus is left out, and there is no other way whereby you can be saved than through the death of the blessed spotless Son of God.

Someone says, "But I do not understand it." That is a terrible confession to make, for "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."<sup>26</sup> If you do not understand this, if you do not see that there is no other way of salvation for you, save through the death of the Lord Jesus, then that just tells the sad story that you are among the lost. You are not merely in danger of being lost in the Day of Judgment; but you are lost *now*. But, thank God, "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost,"<sup>27</sup> and seeking the lost He went to the Cross.

"None of the ransomed ever knew  
How deep were the waters crossed;  
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through,  
Ere He found the sheep that was lost."

## **B. The Necessity of Death**

He had to die, to go down into the dark waters of death, that you might be saved. Can you think of any ingratitude more base than that of a man or woman who passes by the life offered by the Savior who died on the Cross for them? Jesus died for you, and can it be that you have never even trusted Him, never even come to Him and told Him you were a poor, lost, ruined, guilty

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<sup>24</sup> Heb 2:9.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor 11:24-25.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Cor 4:3.

<sup>27</sup> Luke 19:10.

sinner; but since He died for you, you would take Him as your Savior?

His death was real. He was buried three days in the tomb. He died, He was buried, and that was God's witness that it was not a merely pretended death, but He, the Lord of life, had to go down into death. He was held by the bars of death for those three days and nights, until God's appointed time had come. Then, "Death could not keep its prey, He tore the bars away." And so the third point of the gospel is this, "He was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures." That is the gospel, and nothing can be added to that.

Some people say, "Well, but must I not repent?" Yes, you may well repent, but that is not the gospel. "Must I not be baptized?" If you are a Christian, you ought to be baptized, but baptism is not the gospel. Paul said, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel."<sup>28</sup> He did baptize people, but he did not consider that was the gospel, and the gospel was the great message that he was sent to carry to the world. This is all there is to it. "Christ *died* for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was *buried*, and *rose again* the third day according to the Scriptures."

## IV. The Gospel Accepted

Look at the result of believing the gospel. Go back to verse two, "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain."<sup>29</sup> That is, if you believe the gospel, you are saved; if you believe that Christ died for your sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again, God says you are saved. Do you believe it? No man ever believed that except by the Holy Ghost.

It is the Spirit of God that overcomes the natural unbelief of the human heart and enables a man to put his trust in that message. And this is not mere intellectual credence,<sup>30</sup> but it is that one comes to the place where he is ready to stake his whole

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<sup>28</sup> 1 Cor 1:17.

<sup>29</sup> If Christ is not risen, the point of 1 Corinthians 15, then believers have believed in Him in vain. Only a risen Savior, as Ironside earlier pointed out, can give eternal life to those who believe in Him. Ed.

<sup>30</sup> It is not clear what Ironside means by this. He may mean understanding, but not accepting the gospel. Ed.

eternity on the fact that Christ died, and was buried, and rose again. When Jesus said, "It is finished,"<sup>31</sup> the work of salvation was completed.

A dear saint was dying, and looking up he said, "It is finished; on that I can cast my eternity."

"Upon a life I did not live,  
Upon a death I did not die;  
Another's life, another's death,  
I stake my whole eternity."

Can you say that, and say it in faith?

## V. The Gospel Rejected

What about the man who does not believe the gospel? The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."<sup>32</sup> He that believeth not shall be devoted to judgment, condemned, lost. So you see, God has shut us up to the gospel. Have you believed it? Have you put your trust in it; is it the confidence of your soul? Or have you been trusting in something else? If you have been resting in anything short of the Christ who died, who was buried, who rose again, I plead with you, turn from every other fancied refuge, and flee to Christ today. Repent ye, and believe the gospel.<sup>33</sup>

"Oh, do not let the word depart,  
And close thine eyes against the light;  
Poor sinner, harden not thy heart,  
Thou wouldst be saved—why not tonight?"

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<sup>31</sup> John 19:30.

<sup>32</sup> Mark 16:15-16.

<sup>33</sup> Mark 1:15. In light of his earlier assertion that repentance isn't the gospel, Ironside's reason for quoting Mark 1:15 here is a bit puzzling. However, his immediately preceding words, "trun from every other fancied refuge," evidently explains his interpretation of "repent ye." This is essentially the change-of-mind view of repentance. Thus he understands Mark 1:15 to mean something like this, "stop trusting in anything else to get you to heaven and believe in Christ." Ed.

# Grace in the Arts:

## THE THEOLOGY OF LEO TOLSTOY

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### I. Literary Tribute

F. W. Boreham asserted that “no other author has ever attained during his own lifetime such universal fame as Tolstoy.”<sup>1</sup> William Lyon Phelps, a Christian professor of literature at Yale University, claimed: “During the last ten years of his life [Tolstoy] held an absolutely unchallenged position as the greatest living writer in the world...”<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy’s earlier contemporary, Fyodor Dostoevsky, declared that Tolstoy was “unquestionably...the most beloved writer among the Russian public of all shades.”<sup>3</sup> The great composer Tchaikovsky stated: “Tolstoy in my opinion is the greatest of all the writers the world has ever known.”<sup>4</sup> Tolstoy was also Lenin’s favorite writer. Biographer Ernest Simmons observed that Tolstoy “probably had the largest personal mail of any man in the world” of that time.<sup>5</sup> Many specialists in the field of literature would place Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina* (or both) on the list of the top ten world’s greatest novels.

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<sup>1</sup> F. W. Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1926), 212.

<sup>2</sup> William Lyon Phelps, *Essays on Russian Novelists* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911), 171.

<sup>3</sup> George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 325. For further information on Dostoevsky see “Dostoevsky and His Theology” in *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn, 1997): 49-68, by this writer.

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered by His Son* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), 227.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1946), 689.

Professor Phelps, a Christian, claimed that “the Christian religion is the dominating force in the works of [the Russian writers] Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky.”<sup>6</sup> While no one would deny that *religious* themes are certainly operative in Tolstoy’s novels, the brunt of this article will show that Tolstoy was not really a Christian at all—as is bountifully evidenced by his antisupernaturalistic theology.

Precisely because the bulk of this theological critique will be negative, at the outset a few of Tolstoy’s noteworthy personal features should be listed. First, on more than one occasion Tolstoy got personally involved in famine relief for Russian peasants. He donated sizable amounts of his own funds, traveled, organized, and solicited help from others on behalf of the starving peasants. In Gal 2:10, the apostle Paul encouraged Christians to “remember the poor,” which he was “eager to do”—and often some modern Evangelicals seem reluctant to do. Second, the world-famous author was an educational innovator in launching and teaching at a free school for peasant children. He also grieved over his own family’s wealth when so many around them were living at the barest minimum. Furthermore, he vehemently indicted legalized oppression of the poor. Consistent with his own theology, he practiced Matt 25:42-43.

## II. Extensive Documentation

There is no need for biographers and critics to scratch around among a dearth of data on Tolstoy! Indeed, one would wonder if there has ever been as much firsthand material on any famous subject accessible for analysis. Tolstoy himself left an extensive diary covering long time periods. His wife Sonya began her diary at age 16. Two of Tolstoy’s daughters (Tatyana and Alexandra), three of his sons (Sergei, Ilya, and Leo), his wife, his sister-in-law, a governess, and other contemporary friends all wrote biographies of Tolstoy (based on reminiscences, diaries, letters, etc.). Phelps remarked that “no author ever told us so much about himself as Tolstoy.”<sup>7</sup>

As of 1987, Aylmer Maude, an English biographer of Tolstoy who knew him personally, said that a Russian edition of over 100

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<sup>6</sup> Phelps, *Essays*, 206.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

volumes of Tolstoy's writings was scheduled to appear!<sup>8</sup> In 1985, R. F. Christian commented: "Tolstoy's diaries and notebooks taken together occupy thirteen volumes of the ninety volume Soviet edition of his words..."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Tolstoy himself quipped: "The diaries are me."<sup>10</sup> In summary, the primary resource documentary material on Tolstoy is massive—though even his own family members give widely diverging interpretations of their controversies on the subject.

### III. His Monumental Novels

Very few novelists could vie with Tolstoy in offering two written works as candidates for the all-time top ten list of world classic novels. *War and Peace* is "commonly designated Russia's national epic."<sup>11</sup> And epic it is, for the books-on-tape reader will discover that the unabridged *War and Peace* consists of over forty recorded tapes! Concerning the fourth section of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy's contemporary and rival, Turgenev, [pronounced *tour-GAIN-yev*] lyricized: "It is doubtful whether anything as good has been written."<sup>12</sup> Thus, William Lyon Phelps summarized: "War and Peace is the greatest romance in the Russian language, perhaps the greatest in any language."<sup>13</sup>

*War and Peace* is an intertwining of the international panorama with individual ingredients. The fortunes of three families—the Rostovs (represented most unforgettably by the pixie-like Natasha), the Bezukofs (presented in Tolstoy's semi-autobiographical style through the awkward Pierre), and the Bolkonskys (embodied in the cold military officer, Prince Andrei)—are traced through the Russian army's battles with Napoleon. *War and Peace* fills a sprawling, spacious terrain—literally and literarily. The book climaxes with (what some would consider an anticlimactic) philosophy of history.

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<sup>8</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 2:524-25.

<sup>9</sup> R. F. Christian, ed., *Tolstoy's Diaries* (New York: The Scribner Press, 1985), I:vii.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I:viii.

<sup>11</sup> Steiner, *Tolstoy*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy* I:311.

<sup>13</sup> Phelps, *Essays*, 195.

Tolstoy's rival, Dostoevsky, paid him the following compliment: "*Anna Karenina* as an artistic production is perfection. It appears...as a thing to which European literature of our epoch offers no equal."<sup>14</sup> William Lyon Phelps was even more laudatory: "It is surely the most powerful novel written by any man of our time, and it would be difficult to name a novel of any period that surpasses it in strength."<sup>15</sup>

*Anna Karenina* is a world-class fictional commentary on the seventh commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." It narrates the story of a charming woman married to a starched, upright civil servant. Anna falls in love with and has an affair with Vronsky. Eventually her life unravels in her social disgrace, separation from her little boy, and her taking of drugs. *Anna Karenina* ends with an ominous outcome already forecast at the beginning of the book—when she commits suicide by throwing herself under a train.

Tolstoy's last major novel certainly possessed a biblical title—*Resurrection* (oddly for a writer who did not actually believe in a bodily resurrection). It is a melodramatic and didactic story of a young nobleman (Count Nekhludov) who seduces a poor girl (Katusha Maslova) only to see the results of his crime when she is later tried for murder and sentenced to Siberia. The novel narrates Nekhludov's struggle with what to do (that is morally right) about the situation in which he had embroiled Maslova.

#### IV. A Brief Biography

Before attempting a formal formulation of Tolstoy's theology, considerable insight can be gleaned by tracing selectively a spiritual slant on our biographical subject. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was born at, and most of his life revolved around, his estate at Yasnaya Polyana, 130 miles southwest of Moscow. His mother died in 1830 and his father in 1837. He entered Kazan University in 1844 and left it three years later with venereal disease. In his diary for March 17, 1847, Tolstoy recounted: "I caught gonorrhea where one usually catches it from..."<sup>16</sup> About that time he inherited Yasnaya Polyana with at least 5,000

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<sup>14</sup> Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, I:437.

<sup>15</sup> Phelps, *Essays*, 198.

<sup>16</sup> Christian, *Tolstoy's Diaries*, I:4.

acres and 330 male serfs and their families. One indicator of their family wealth was that the later Tolstoyes sent all their laundry out once a year from Russia to *Holland* in order to have it done!"<sup>17</sup>

Tolstoy submitted to his diary on June 14, 1850: "The last three years...I have spent so dissolutely..."<sup>18</sup> Reflecting upon his early religious upbringing, Tolstoy penned: "I was baptized in the [Russian] Orthodox Christian faith. I was taught it from childhood and through the whole time of my boyhood and youth. But...I at eighteen years of age...no longer believed any of the things I had been taught."<sup>19</sup> He says that his apostasy began at fifteen. By sixteen he had quit praying and taking communion, yet "I believed in something...I did not deny God, but what kind of a God, I should have been at a loss to say."<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, while his guardian aunt discouraged his gambling (without good success), she ("a pure soul") encouraged him to adultery ("that I should have a liaison with a married woman")!<sup>21</sup>

Tolstoy's first publication came in 1852 before he went as a soldier to the Caucasus. He wrestled frequently with purity and life's purpose. On March 5, 1855, he diaried: "A conversation about divinity has suggested to me a great...idea...the founding of a new religion...:the religion of Christianity, but purged of dogmatism and mysticism; a practical religion not promising future bliss, but giving bliss on earth."<sup>22</sup> Later, after tunneling through a period of severe struggle, Tolstoy attempted to do just that.

In 1861 the Tsar emancipated the serfs. Later in life Tolstoy told a Russian biographer: "When I was young, I led a very evil life...[involving] a liaison with a peasant girl [named Aksinya]...before I was married [resulting in an illegitimate son named Timofei]...and the second was the crime I perpetrated on Gasha, the maid who lived in my aunt's house. She was innocent. I seduced her, they drove her out of the house, and

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<sup>17</sup> Tatyana Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1977), 248.

<sup>18</sup> Christian, *Tolstoy's Diaries*, I:17.

<sup>19</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Confession* (New York: Willey Book Co., 1904), 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Janko Lavrin, *Tolstoy* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1946), 93.

she came to grief”<sup>23</sup> (This latter incident is the basis of the tale behind *Resurrection*.)

When his admired brother Nicholas died in 1860, Tolstoy diaried that the idea had occurred to him to write a materialist (or rationalist) life of Christ. In 1862 he married Sophia (Sonya) Behrs. When he gave his wife his diaries of his bachelor escapades to read, it dealt her a shock from which she never fully recovered. Together they had thirteen children, six of whom died while young.

During 1862-1869 Tolstoy was writing *War and Peace*. During 1870-1873 he was working on *Anna Karenina*. Helen Muchnic wrote concerning Anna's brother in the latter book: “Levin [pronounced LAY-vinn]...is one of Tolstoy's most unmistakable self-portraits” and “Levin's search for faith is a pale outline of Tolstoy's own spiritual autobiography.”<sup>24</sup> Levin inwardly admitted that “he was not a believer.”<sup>25</sup> Through a conversation with a peasant, Levin arrived at a spiritual discovery. He discovered “he had been living rightly, but thinking wrongly.” He believed he had discovered the meaning of life—to live for God and the soul. Thus, by 1873 Tolstoy was formulating a form of faith to live by.

In Sonya's diary for October 12, 1875 she referred to her husband's “gloomy” condition, his “mental death.”<sup>26</sup> In 1876 she could refer to Tolstoy's “religious struggle...over these last two years.”<sup>27</sup> In 1873 to 1876 the Tolstoy's had three of their children die. From 1875 to 1877 Tolstoy once again attended the Russian Orthodox Church in his spiritual quest. Tolstoy's biographer, Aylmer Maude, refers to his “fierce five-year inner struggle with doubt.”<sup>28</sup> During this period the Tolstoy's came into contact with English Evangelicals. (More will be said about this experience later.) In his *Confession* Tolstoy stated: “I felt there was nothing beneath my feet anymore...And I no longer had any prop to

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<sup>23</sup> R. F. Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 218.

<sup>24</sup> Helen Muchnic, *An Introduction to Russian Literature* (Garden City, NY: The Country Life Press, 1947), 205, 207.

<sup>25</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 433.

<sup>26</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II: 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 323.

<sup>28</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, I:360.

help me live..."<sup>29</sup> About age 50 he thought of suicide. His reason found life unreasonable.

In a fable Tolstoy said he felt as if he had fallen into a well, only to discover a dragon was waiting at the bottom. The twig he was holding on to was being eaten by two mice. He tried to lick some honey that he spotted on the twig's leaves, but how could the honey drops (symbolizing family and fame) prove all that sweet when the dragon of death waited to devour him as he hung on?

Tolstoy's wife penned (on March 3, 1877) that he had "said today that he couldn't endure much more of this terrible religious conflict with which he has been struggling these past two years, and hoped that the time was near when he could become a thoroughly religious man..."<sup>30</sup> This spiritual struggle is reflected in Pierre (in *War and Peace*), in Levin (in *Anna Karenina*), and in Prince Nekhludov (in *Resurrection*). Prince Nekhludov had been feeling the need for "cleansing of the soul." As a result, "The discord between the demands of conscience and the life he was leading was greater than it had ever been before."<sup>31</sup> This disequilibrium was experienced right before Nekhludov's "newly awakened spiritual being."<sup>32</sup>

Concerning 1875-77 Tolstoy wrote: "I accepted everything [in the Russian Orthodox Church], attended services, stood up in the morning and in the evening to pray, fasted, prepared myself for the communion, and at first my reason did not revolt against all that."<sup>33</sup> His daughter Tatyana verified this: "I can remember going to mass with him every Sunday."<sup>34</sup> Finally his reason revolted to the breaking point with the Russian Orthodox dogma and ceremony, and Tolstoy abandoned church-going. During the summer of 1877 Tolstoy visited the Optina Monastery with his friend Strakhov.

Aylmer Maude penned concerning the 50 year-old Tolstoy "that from about the year 1878 Tolstoy became sure of himself

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<sup>29</sup> Tatyana Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered*, 186.

<sup>30</sup> Cathy Porter, translator, *The Diaries of Sophia Tolstoy* (New York: Random House, 1985), 850.

<sup>31</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1899), 114.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Tolstoy, *My Confession*, 73.

<sup>34</sup> Tatyana Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered*, 188.

...<sup>35</sup> As one son (Sergei) assessed the situation: "1877 was a year of crisis in my father's life. It was then that the complete change in his outlook described by him in *A Confession* took place."<sup>36</sup> As Tolstoy documented this change in *My Confession*, he summarized: "Thus I lived for about two years, and within me took place a transformation, which had long been working within me, and the germ of which had always been in me."<sup>37</sup> Again, he asserted: "Now everything became clear to me."<sup>38</sup> Sophia Tolstoy specified an 1879 date when she diaried (for June 5, 1891): "He said that twelve years ago [or 1879] he had undergone a great change, and that I too should have changed with him..."<sup>39</sup> Also, in June of 1879 Tolstoy visited the monastery at Kiev and returned dissatisfied.

In 1878 Tolstoy again had begun to write in his diary after desisting from it for thirteen years. *My Confession* was written in 1879 and depicts Tolstoy's 1874-1879 experience. Biographer R. F. Christian declared about this book: "It is the best introduction to the spiritual struggle he was to wage for the remaining years of his life..."<sup>40</sup>

In 1880 Tolstoy wrote his *Critique of Dogmatic Theology*. As the title indicated, Tolstoy subjected the dogmas of the Russian Orthodox Church (including many broader Christian essentials) to rigorous review and rejection. Having taught himself Greek, Tolstoy also published a harmony and translation of the Gospels (1881-1882). He insisted that this publication "was more important than anything he had written."<sup>41</sup> His wife wrote to her brother (February 3, 1881) concerning her husband: "He has become a most sincere and firm Christian [yet he is] more depressed."<sup>42</sup> His son Sergei said of that same year: "Father... acted on the basis that he had been one kind of man up to 1881 when that man had died leaving his property to his family and a new man was born who had different ideas about the whole

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<sup>35</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, I: 443.

<sup>36</sup> Sergei Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered by His Son*, 161.

<sup>37</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Confession*, 60.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>39</sup> Cathy Porter, translator, *The Diaries of Sophia Tolstoy*, 146.

<sup>40</sup> R. F. Christian, ed., *Tolstoy's Diaries*, I:172.

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 333.

<sup>42</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II:59.

thing.”<sup>43</sup> The wealthy Tolstoy had come to believe that property ownership was evil, so he willed his estate to his family members. Ernest Simmons spoke of “Tolstoy’s distraught state of mind from September 1881 to the end of 1883...”<sup>44</sup>

In 1883 and 1884 Tolstoy wrote *What I Believe* (also called *My Religion*). This book was followed in turn by *What Then Must We Do?* in 1884 and 1885. Along the way Tolstoy gradually renounced meat-eating, hunting, smoking, and alcohol. In 1886 he wrote *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, in 1889 *The Kreutzer Sonata*, in 1894 *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, in 1897 *What Is Art?*, in 1898-1899 *Resurrection*, and in 1902 a scathing indictment of the church called *Appeal to the Clergy*. In 1901 Tolstoy was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church. The latter end of the life of the author who wrote *Family Happiness* was family unhappiness. When he could no longer put up with the dissension at home (chiefly over his wife’s quarrels with his first lieutenant [Chertkov] over Tolstoy’s future book rights), he left home and died shortly thereafter in 1910.

## V. Tolstoy’s Theology

### A. The Bible and Supernaturalism

R. Poggioli remarked that Tolstoy was inclined to treat Christianity “neither as a divine revelation nor as a historical phenomenon, but as a teaching which gives us the meaning of life.”<sup>45</sup> Dean F. W. Farrar asserted that Tolstoy “rejects the divine inspiration of the Old Testament and of the epistles...”<sup>46</sup> Tolstoy placed the words of Jesus on a higher plane than any of those in the Epistles.

When Tolstoy read S. G. Verus’s volume on the Gospels, which denied that Jesus was even a historical person, he asserted that such an approach was valuable “for it makes it unnecessary to wrangle any further over refuting the authenticity of the Gospel

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<sup>43</sup> Sergei Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered by His Son*, 130.

<sup>44</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 374.

<sup>45</sup> George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 286.

<sup>46</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (Boston, MA: L. C. Page and Co., 1893), 43.

stories about miracles..."<sup>47</sup> His own translation took the same approach as Thomas Jefferson's—simply to omit anything miraculous he so chose to disregard.

In Russian usage of that time the expression "the Bible" referred only to the OT.<sup>48</sup> Tolstoy preferred the reading of the OT stories verbatim to peasant children above any other book. To enable the child to appreciate knowledge, Tolstoy said that "there is no book but the Bible."<sup>49</sup> However, along with its excellent parts was also material in the OT that was "crude, primitive, and immoral," he felt.<sup>50</sup>

Like the Scottish translator James Moffatt, Tolstoy felt free to rearrange the Gospels in their chapters and verses according to his own discretion. He was interested in the morals, not the miracles. Tolstoy subscribed to the liberal or example treatment of the feeding of the 5,000. He even claimed that part of Matthew 22 had been copied from the Talmud!<sup>51</sup>

Aylmer Maude, Tolstoy's friend, wrote that Tolstoy "frankly disliked and disapproved of much in the Epistles of Paul, whom he accused of having given a false bias to Christianity..."<sup>52</sup> Most conspicuously, he abhorred Romans 13, for Tolstoy was overtly opposed to all human government. (Writers commonly call Tolstoy a "Christian anarchist.") Thus, it can be seen that Tolstoy's view of Scripture had little in common with that of historic mainstream Christianity. Tolstoy believed in reason rather than revelation as the vehicle for religious choice.

Even one of Tolstoy's best friends, the poet Fet (himself an atheist), said: "Tolstoy...want[ed] to draw pictures that would destroy the people's faith in miracles."<sup>53</sup> Tolstoy referred to "those offensive miracles with which the [book of] Acts [is] filled..."<sup>54</sup> In *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* Tolstoy declared that "for us [modern people] these [biblical] words [about God, creation, the ascension, etc.] have no meaning whatsoever."<sup>55</sup> In other words,

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<sup>47</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 588.

<sup>48</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, I:264.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, I:263.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, II:39.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, II:430.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, II:39.

<sup>53</sup> Sergei Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered*, 206.

<sup>54</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, 59.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

Tolstoy was in harmony with much of religious liberalism that, while the supernatural must be ousted, religious faith must be retained.

## B. God

Pinpointing Tolstoy's view of God is like trying to get one's fist on the mercury of a thermometer. Nevertheless, Tolstoy's contemporary, Gorky, penned: "The thought which beyond all others most often and conspicuously gnaws at him is the thought of God."<sup>56</sup> At age nineteen (June 16, 1847) the young Tolstoy spoke of God as "the highest, incomprehensible being, unlimited in space, time and power."<sup>57</sup> Five years later he formulated a working creed: "I believe in one, incomprehensible God, the immortality of the soul and eternal retribution for our acts; I don't understand the secret of the Trinity and the birth of the Son of God, but I do...not reject the faith of my fathers."<sup>58</sup> As we will see, Tolstoy later *did* reject most of this credo.

One of Tolstoy's principal characters, Prince Andrei in *War and Peace* (on which the author was working from 1862 through 1869), wrestled with the God-question. Andrei reflected on "to whom" he should ask mercy. "Either [there is] a power infinite, inconceivable to which I cannot appeal...or nothing."<sup>59</sup> Christ is his second option or "there is nothing, nothing certain but the nothingness of all that is incomprehensible to us..."<sup>60</sup> (That summary is—significantly—the end of Book I in *War and Peace*.)

Tolstoy denied any straightforward notion of God as supernatural Creator—as portrayed in Genesis 1. Aylmer Maude, his confidant, said that "Tolstoy prayed regularly and ardently, but he did not believe in a personal God..."<sup>61</sup> In Tolstoy's *Thoughts on God* (1900) he wrote, "Prayer is addressed to the personal God, not because he is personal (indeed, I know for certain that he is not personal, because personality is limitation, while

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<sup>56</sup> George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 246.

<sup>57</sup> *Tolstoy's Diaries*, I:12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>59</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (Garden City, NY: The Literary Guild of America, 1949), 168.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>61</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II:58.

God is unlimited)...”<sup>62</sup> On February 11, 1891, Tolstoy diaried: “Father, help me. I know there is no Father as a person. But this form is natural to the expression of passionate longing.”<sup>63</sup> Consequently, his oldest daughter stated that for him to “say his prayers” was “to summon up all the best energies of his being.”<sup>64</sup>

If Tolstoy was not a pantheist, he was close to it. Maude spoke of Tolstoy’s religion as a “cooperation with a Something greater than ourselves that makes for righteousness.”<sup>65</sup> In his diary, Tolstoy said, “God is the illimitable All...Or, even better—God is that illimitable All of which man is conscious of being a limited part...God is not love, but the more love there is in man..., the more truly does [God] exist.”<sup>66</sup> (Tolstoy denies 1 John 4:8 and 16! This note was written in the year of his death.)

Tolstoy commended Mathew Arnold’s *Literature and Dogma* “because he particularly insists on destroying the notion of God as something outside us, a ‘magnified man’ as he calls Him.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, when Pierre (in *War and Peace*) views the sky, he meditates: “this is me, and all that is within me, and it is all I!”<sup>68</sup>

With the erosion of a personal transcendent deity, naturally the doctrine of the Trinity could not be espoused. On August 3, 1898, Tolstoy entered in his diary: “I say that the God who created the world in six days and who sent His son, and also his son himself, are not God, but that God is the one existing, incomparable good, the beginning of everything...”<sup>69</sup> This is a direct denial of the Trinity.

In his *Critique of Dogmatic Theology* Tolstoy owned that the Trinity “forms the radical, essentially [orthodox] Christian dogma.”<sup>70</sup> Yet in the same volume he concluded that “there

<sup>62</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Thoughts on God* (New York: Willey Book Co., 1904), 416.

<sup>63</sup> *Tolstoy’s Diaries*, I:301.

<sup>64</sup> Tatyana Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered*, 217.

<sup>65</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II:56.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, II:509.

<sup>67</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 393.

<sup>68</sup> George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 270.

<sup>69</sup> *Tolstoy’s Diaries*, II:461.

<sup>70</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Critique of Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Willey Book Co., 1904), 162.

are absolutely no proofs in Scripture in confirmation of the Trinity..."<sup>71</sup> His final avowal is: "I reject this dogma."<sup>72</sup>

### C. Christ

Tolstoy acknowledged: "From my childhood I had been taught that Jesus was God..."<sup>73</sup> In the same book Tolstoy said: "According to the Church, [Jesus] taught that he was the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, and that he came into the world to atone by his death for Adams' sin. Those, however, who have read the Gospels know that Jesus taught nothing of the sort..."<sup>74</sup> Tolstoy wrote that "to consider [Christ] a God and pray to [Him], I esteem greatest blasphemy..."<sup>75</sup> Dostoevsky realized "where Tolstoyan thought would lead—to a Christianity without Christ."<sup>76</sup>

Naturally, Evangelicals wonder how Tolstoy could dismiss what they consider to be determinative NT evidence on Christ's deity. As one would suspect, Tolstoy's hermeneutic was radically different on the "Son of God" terminology. For example, commenting on Matthew 16, Tolstoy wrote; "Peter says to Christ what Christ has always said about all other people, that is, that they are sons of God..."<sup>77</sup> Later he wrote that "the appellation of the Son of God is precisely what Christ teaches...men to call themselves, and so Christ, if he had intended to say that he stood in an exclusive relation to God, would have been compelled to choose another expression in order to give it that meaning."<sup>78</sup> Further along Tolstoy penned that Jesus "taught that all men were the sons of God and must blend with God in life..."<sup>79</sup> (The reader is invited to see pages 162-271 in his *Critique of Dogmatic Theology*, which is Tolstoy's doctrine-by-doctrine attempt to refute of the Russian Orthodox Church's dogmas.)

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>73</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Religion* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1885), 15.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>75</sup> R. F. Christian, *Tolstoy: A Critical Introduction*, 269.

<sup>76</sup> George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 326.

<sup>77</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Critique of Dogmatic Theology*, 178.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 269.

Concerning the resurrection Tolstoy asserted (June 13, 1889): "There is fabrication in Mohammed and Paul. There isn't with Christ...He would not have been turned into a religion had it not been for the fabrication of the resurrection, and the chief fabricator was Paul."<sup>80</sup> Tolstoy, the Greek translator, even denied that there was a biblical word for "resurrection."

## D. Sin

On the subject of sin (or, more broadly, evil) Tolstoy did not speak blithely, as if he were some Christian Scientist. This was not "the best of all possible worlds" for him. In a letter to one of his disciples (M. S. Dudehenko) two years before his death (July, 1908), Tolstoy declared: "...I have been a sinner and am a sinner."<sup>81</sup> Even more revealing to his biographer Biryukov, Tolstoy owned: "To write about all my nastiness, stupidity, depravity, and meanness...entirely truthfully, even more truthfully than Rousseau, would make an alluring book...People would say: Behold...what a scoundrel he was..."<sup>82</sup> Such statements would not normally classify one as falling within the liberal camp.

Despite Tolstoy's statements about personal depravity, sin, and evil, the question arises as to the human locus of that "sin." Probably his son Sergei hit the nail on the head when he wrote that his father "believed that false thinking is the reason for all evil in the world, that men were not evil by nature, but because of incorrect thinking..."<sup>83</sup> (Contrast Sergei Tolstoy's approach with Eph 2:1-3.) Tolstoy's friend and biographer, Alymer Maude, spoke with a group consciousness as a Tolstoyan disciple when he penned: "we believe that evil does exist and that it is our duty to get rid of it."<sup>84</sup> Yet Maude recorded that to Olga Nikolaevna's questions: "Could there be life without evil? Could man exist if there were no evil?" Tolstoy replied, "Man comes of good, not of evil."<sup>85</sup> Tolstoy also claimed: "The theory of the fall of Adam...

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<sup>80</sup> *Tolstoy's Diaries*, I, 237.

<sup>81</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 707.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 626.

<sup>83</sup> Sergei Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered by His Son*, 63.

<sup>84</sup> Alymer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II:38.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, II:180.

was unknown to Jesus; he never spoke of it..."<sup>86</sup> As we will see in the next section, despite Tolstoy's litany of personal sins, it is hard (from an evangelical viewpoint) to credit him with any substantive (or at least biblical) view of sin, because of his repudiation of the biblical solution for sin.

Nevertheless, it is revealing (despite the dilution of the sin-question) that in his deathroom (November 1, 1910) Tolstoy said to his right-hand man (Chertkov): "Evidently I shall have to die in my sins!" To this exclamation Chertkov replied: "That is not sin, but love that surrounds you. You have done all you could to escape from sin!"<sup>87</sup> (What Tolstoy meant in this context is uncertain. He may simply have been referring to his running away from the hellish situation at home during his final days.)

In relation to evil, two subcomments may be in order here. First, as in some theologies, Tolstoy had a garbled view of sex and viewed all sex (including marriage) as interconnected with sin. Lavrin stated that "sex in general was proclaimed by [Tolstoy] to be dirt and abomination, whereas desexualized love was raised on to the pedestal of...goodness..."<sup>88</sup> (Naturally the wife of an author who had fathered 13 children was rather embarrassed by these public pronouncements. Actually, Tolstoy could never really forgive himself for his early sexual affairs, and that guilt haunted him to his dying day.)

Second, for Tolstoy the ownership of property was intrinsically evil. Consequently, even though he'd willed his large Russian estate over to his family members, for him to continue living on that property and reaping its benefits caused him considerable inner anguish.

## E. Salvation

It is very easy for some readers to suppose—upon reading certain sections of *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*—that Tolstoy was a Christian because he freely uses the language of biblical soteriology ("saved," "regeneration," "new life," "begin anew," "believe," etc.). However, when this theological terminology is cast against the background of his prose expositions of later antsupernaturalism, it becomes obvious that Tolstoy

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<sup>86</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Religion*, 154.

<sup>87</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II:510.

<sup>88</sup> Janko Lavrin, *Tolstoy*, 128.

borrowed Christian vocabulary in a figurative, experiential, and nonorthodox way.

In *War and Peace* the semi-autobiographical character Pierre (wrestling with life's meaning) meets a Freemason. "This man knows the truth," Pierre thinks. Because of this, Pierre (a former atheist) wants "to begin anew." He wanted "regeneration."<sup>89</sup> But when we inquire into the Freemason's formula for "regeneration," we get a muddled answer (from a NT perspective). Among the Freemason's answers given are: "He is in me. He is in you...a Being all-powerful, infinite, and eternal;"<sup>90</sup> "only through the cleansing of my inner nature,"<sup>91</sup> one must "undergo self-purification."<sup>92</sup>

When a Christian reads Tolstoy's last major novel, *Resurrection*, one would be apt to assume a Christian conversion has taken place. One reads of Nekhludov's "cleansing of the soul," of his "newly awakened spiritual being," and that he prays, "Lord, help me, teach me, come enter within me and purify me of all this abomination."<sup>93</sup> However, in light of (1) the fact that Christ is never explicitly mentioned in the context of this "conversion;" (2) Tolstoy's espousal of antismaterialism elsewhere; and (3) how Nekhludov reacts to a gospel presentation from an Evangelical later in the same novel, there is ample reason for concluding that Nekhludov's experience is not equatable with biblical regeneration.

Tolstoy forged a pivotal statement which he formulated with clarity: "if obedience to the law is a condition of salvation, the salvation of men by the death of Christ is superfluous and quite useless. It is necessary to choose one or the other, and the church teaching in reality chooses the latter, i.e., it acknowledges the reality of the redemption..."<sup>94</sup> If he had stopped there, we could heartily say, "Amen," based on Gal 2:16 and 21. However (presumably from the ceremonialism of his Russian Orthodox experience), Tolstoy went on to add: "but...it [the church] does not dare make the last necessary deduction that the law is

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<sup>89</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 212.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

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

<sup>93</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, 113-14.

<sup>94</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Critique of Dogmatic Theology*, 279.

superfluous..."<sup>95</sup> Later in the same volume Tolstoy addressed "the question as to what saves, whether faith or good works... Some say that faith saves, and others say that works save."<sup>96</sup> He then proceeded to quote a standard Russian Orthodox theology text: "No matter how great may be the value of faith...and although this faith is the first condition for the appropriation by man of Christ's deserts—*it alone is not sufficient* [emphasis mine]...By faith alone a man may receive his justification and cleanse himself from sin in the sacrament of baptism, *only when* he just enters the kingdom of Christ's grace; he may after that receive the...other sacraments of the church...that finally he may be able, after having completed his terrestrial activity, to appear as justified and sanctified at the terrible judgment of Christ—for all that, *in addition to faith he needs good works...*"<sup>97</sup> Thus, Tolstoy saw clearly that the major church of his acquaintance rejected salvation by grace through faith alone.

Despite Tolstoy's critique of the Russian Orthodox dogma, in the final analysis his view boiled down to the same thing—a do-it-yourself scheme of salvation. Lavrin asserted that Tolstoy declared: "Christ does not teach salvation by faith."<sup>98</sup> To the relative Tolstoy affectionately called "Granny," the famous writer "belligerently declared that a thinking person could achieve his own salvation without the aid of anyone. She understood this 'anyone' to mean God, and no doubt he had intended it in this sense for her benefit..."<sup>99</sup>

Note the emotionally loaded term *blasphemous* in Tolstoy's following assertion: "A man who is taught by the church the blasphemous doctrine about his not being able to be saved by his own efforts, but that there is another means, will inevitably have recourse to this means and not to his efforts, on which he is assured it is a sin to depend."<sup>100</sup> On December 16, 1906, four years before his death, Tolstoy said, "I think a man can only filifill God's law by setting an example of good life, by purifying himself from evil, and increasing the good."<sup>101</sup> He added: "The

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Janko Lavrin, *Tolstoy*, 102.

<sup>99</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 529.

<sup>100</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, 79.

<sup>101</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II:453.

Kingdom of God is won by effort, said Christ; and that kingdom is not without, but within us."<sup>102</sup> In another book Tolstoy wrote: "I do not want to think that [Christ] will redeem me, where I ought to redeem myself"<sup>103</sup> Later in the same volume Tolstoy asked: "Why not permit me to think, as I do, that Christ has saved us by having discovered the law which gives salvation to those who follow it...?"<sup>104</sup>

Many are confused by Tolstoy's rebirth terminology. His eldest daughter referred to "what is termed Tolstoy's conversion or religious crisis (though he himself called it his second birth)."<sup>105</sup> Even Christian professor William Lyon Phelps spoke of Tolstoy's "Christian conversion," which confuses many readers.<sup>106</sup> Tolstoy interpreted "born again" in John 3 to mean that everyone "has a consciousness of a spiritual birth (John 3:5, 6, 7), of an inner liberty, of something within..."<sup>107</sup> Despite an overlap with NT terminology, the bottom line for Tolstoy is expressed in *My Religion*: "There is no salvation aside from fulfillment of the doctrine of Jesus."<sup>108</sup> By "doctrine of Jesus" Tolstoy meant carrying out Christ's commands. In a later section we will examine in what these chief commands consisted for him.

## F. Evangelicalism

Because of the readership of this journal and because Tolstoy did interact with Evangelicals, we include here a separate section as it relates to soteriology.

Tolstoy wrote *Anna Karenina* from 1870 to 1873. In the pages of the novel Anna's husband and brother interact with Evangelicalism (though it is not expressively labeled such). The Countess Lydia Ivanovna speaks of one whose "heart was made new."<sup>109</sup> Anna's husband (Alexei) grasps that they are "talking of religion." The countess asserts that believers' "sin has been

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Critique of Dogmatic Theology*, 247.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>105</sup> Tatyana Tolstoy, *Tolstoy Remembered*, 19.

<sup>106</sup> William Lyon Phelps, *Essays on Russian Novelists*, 171.

<sup>107</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Religion*, 125.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>109</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 766.

atoned for.”<sup>110</sup> To her comments Oblonsky objects (from James) that “faith without works is dead.” She responds: “What harm has been done by the false interpretation of that passage [in James 2]. Nothing holds men back from belief like that misinterpretation.” Anna’s husband chimed in approvingly. “We are saved by Christ who suffered for us. We are saved by faith.”<sup>111</sup> The countess held the position: “To be saved one only need believe...”<sup>112</sup>

Tolstoy investigated Buddhism, Islam, and other major religions. “Even the popular ‘New Christians’ of that time, the Evangelicals, who professed salvation by faith in the Redemption, were sympathetically considered. Tolstoy knew followers of Lord Radstock, the...English Evangelical preacher...One of them, Count A. P. Bobrinski, Minister of Ways of Communication, visited [Tolstoy] in February 1876, and [Tolstoy] wrote to Granny of this prominent [Evangelical]: ‘No one ever spoke better to me about faith than Bobrinski...you feel that he is happier than those who do not have his faith...And this I desire.’”<sup>113</sup>

In his diary for March 10, 1884, Tolstoy entered: “What a stupid phenomenon Luther’s reformation was. A triumph of narrow-mindedness and folly. Salvation from original sin through faith and the vanity of good works are just as bad as all the superstitions of Catholicism.”<sup>114</sup> Two months later (May 27, 1884) he diaried: “Reading

Augustine: Thought a lot about the fact that Paul’s, Augustine’s, Luther’s...teaching of redemption—the awareness of one’s weakness and the absence of struggle—are of importance.”<sup>115</sup>

In *Resurrection* (published in 1899) Prince Nekhludov encountered Evangelicals. He is invited to hear a preacher named Kiesewetter (an “adherent to that teaching which holds that the essence of Christianity lies in a belief in the Redemption...this teaching repudiated all ceremonies, icons, and sacraments...”)<sup>116</sup> Later in the book an Englishman comes into a prison preaching

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 768.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 770.

<sup>113</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 319.

<sup>114</sup> *Tolstoy's Diaries*, I:204.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., I:216.

<sup>116</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, 284.

“that Christ pitied [the prisoners] and loved them and died for them. If they believe in this, they will be saved.”<sup>117</sup> In an earlier section Kiesewetter had told them “there is a way to be saved [from “everlasting torment”]. Here it is—a joyful, easy way. Salvation is in the blood shed for us by the only Son of God, who gave Himself up to torments for our sake.”<sup>118</sup> With the repeated mention of Christ’s “blood,” Nekhludov felt “disgusted” and secretly left the room. (This was Tolstoy’s final reaction toward Evangelicalism.)

In the year Tolstoy died his wife recorded in her diary (July 2, 1910) that (Tolstoy’s first lieutenant) Chertkov’s mother was “a ‘Radstockist’...and believes in redemption; she believes too that Christ dwells within her...”<sup>119</sup> On July 12th of the same year Chertkov’s mother had two Evangelical preachers visiting her. One preacher named Fetler (says Sonya Tolstoy) “tried assiduously to convert me to his faith—in Redemption. I argued with him only when he insisted on a material redemption, the shedding of blood, and the suffering and death of Christ’s body.”<sup>120</sup> Then Fetler “got down on his knees and started praying for me, for [Leo Tolstoy], for the peace and happiness of our souls...It was a beautiful prayer, but it was all so strange!”<sup>121</sup> Whether the Tolstoys got an *adequate* presentation of Evangelicalism or not, they rejected the brush that they had with it.

## G. The Kingdom of God

Tolstoy’s view of salvation was intensely bound up with his concept of the kingdom of God and the heart of the Sermon on the Mount. Lavrin summarized Tolstoyanism by saying: “the whole of Christ’s teaching consists in giving the Kingdom of God, i.e., peace to man...Men need only trust in Christ’s teaching and obey it, and there will be peace on earth.”<sup>122</sup> For Tolstoy, “the Kingdom of God must be established here and now on this earth and in this, the only real life that is accorded us.”<sup>123</sup> Said

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 504.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>119</sup> *The Diaries of Sophia Tolstoy*, 504.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 514.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Janko Lavrin, *Tolstoy*, 101.

<sup>123</sup> George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, 254.

Alymer Maude (his friend): "He was sure that it is our business to establish the Kingdom of God on earth."<sup>124</sup> Tolstoy declared: "Let all the world practice the [teaching] of Jesus and the reign of God will come upon earth."<sup>125</sup>

For Tolstoy the Gospels were the heart of the Bible, and the Sermon on the Mount was the heart of the Gospels, and Matt 5:39 ("resist not evil") was the heart of the Sermon on the Mount. Non-resistance to evil "involves [for Tolstoy] ultimately the entire abolition of compulsory legislation, law courts, police, and prison."<sup>126</sup> Tolstoy was a humanitarian anarchist who stood opposed to all human government and violence.

Tolstoy boiled down the essence of what he thought Christianity was to obeying the five commands of Christ in Matt 5:21-48. If people would genuinely fulfill these commandments, then the kingdom of God would be activated on earth.

Interestingly, there were pilot communities set up to practice Tolstoyan principles, but they all inevitably met with failure and went defunct. His disciple, Alymer Maude, who had been personally involved in a Tolstoy communal project, commented candidly that Tolstoy's teaching, which was supposed to save humanity, "alienated him from many friends, brought discord into his family life, strained his relations with his wife, and left him spiritually alone."<sup>127</sup> At the communal level, Maude said: "not one single Colony or Group formed under the influence of [Tolstoy's] writings, either in Russia, or elsewhere in Europe or America, was able to hold to his principles and show a satisfactory record."<sup>128</sup> In pragmatic, empirical reality Tolstoy's views of the kingdom of God never worked.

## H. Future Immortality

While over the years Tolstoy revealed some ambivalence about a personal existence beyond this earthly existence, on the whole Tolstoy denied individual immortality. When he was 24 years old, Tolstoy encapsulated his embryonic "creed" as embracing "the immortality of the soul and eternal retribution

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<sup>124</sup> Alymer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II:89.

<sup>125</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Religion*, 160.

<sup>126</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 332.

<sup>127</sup> Alymer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, II:71.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

for our acts.”<sup>129</sup> In *War and Peace* Pierre asks Andrei: “Do you believe in a future life?”<sup>130</sup> After Andrei’s death, Natasha wonders, “Where has he gone? Where is he now?”<sup>131</sup>

Aylmer Maude claimed that Tolstoy “expressed now one and now another view” on “a future life.”<sup>132</sup> [n 1871 Tolstoy’s brother-in-law, Dr. Behrs, asked him: “How can a man live at peace so long as he has not solved the question of a future life?” Tolstoy (apparently sardonically) pointed to two horses grazing and so laying up for a future life. Behrs indicated he was speaking “of our spiritual, not our earthly life.” To this Tolstoy replied: “Well, about that I neither know nor can know anything.”<sup>133</sup> On April 25, 1876, Tolstoy spoke of death and “Nirvana—the illimitable, the unknown.”<sup>134</sup> On September 12, 1884 he applauded Buddhism in that “one doesn’t ask questions about eternal life.”<sup>135</sup> In 1885 in *My Religion* Tolstoy claimed (astoundingly!): “Jesus said nothing about...personal resurrection.”<sup>136</sup> He reiterated that “Jesus, who is supposed to have been raised in person, said nothing in affirmation of individual resurrection and individual immortality beyond the grave.”<sup>137</sup>

Ernest Simmons tried to make a case that between 1884 and 1887 Tolstoy altered his position. He declared that “in one significant respect [Tolstoy] seems to have changed his view. In *What I Believe* (1884) he firmly indicated a disbelief in a personal resurrection and immortality...; in *On Life* [1887], however, he rather vaguely suggests the possibility of a future life.”<sup>138</sup> The evidence for this view, however, is not very strong.

The same set of conflicting viewpoints is found in later Tolstoy quotations. On December 25, 1894, Tolstoy diaried: “One may wish to, and believe one can, fly away to Heaven, or

<sup>129</sup> *Tolstoy’s Diaries*, I:63.

<sup>130</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, 210.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 583.

<sup>132</sup> Aylmer Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy*, I:216.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, I:333.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, I:360.

<sup>135</sup> *Tolstoy’s Diaries*, I:224.

<sup>136</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Religion*, 144.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>138</sup> Ernest Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 421.

be resurrected after death, but it won't occur to anyone to wish for or believe that  $2 + 2$  will make 5..."<sup>139</sup>

Tolstoy wrote "Granny" in 1904: "It may be that we shall not see each other again in this world; if this pleases God, then it is well. Nor do I think that we shall meet in the other world, as we understand the meaning of 'meeting'; but I do think and am fully convinced that in the after-life all the kind, loving, and fine things that you have given me in this life will remain with me."<sup>140</sup> This is a far cry from 1 Thess 4:16-17. However in 1908, two years before his death, Tolstoy said to Henry George's son: "We shall not see each other again. What message do you give me for your father in the other world?"<sup>141</sup>

The crystallization that seems more representative of Tolstoy's truest thought is found in *My Religion*: "As opposed to the personal life, Jesus taught us, not of a life beyond the grave, but of that universal life which comprises within itself the life of humanity, past, present, and to come."<sup>142</sup> In his letter of excommunication the Russian Orthodox Church declared that Tolstoy (among other cardinal doctrines) denied a future life and any recompense after this life. "Belief in personal immortality always seems to me a misunderstanding," Tolstoy stated in 1896, calling such belief "superstition."<sup>143</sup> Consequently, while Tolstoy's thought on the question of a future life was not static, his most representative position seems ambiguous and agnostic (at best) about any immortal personal existence and consistent in denying all future bodily resurrection.

## VI. Conclusion

While a surface reading of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Resurrection* might make a Christian reader suspect that Leo Tolstoy was a Christian, his non-fiction prose reveals unquestionably that he was anything but that. Of course, Tolstoy believed that virtually he *alone* had discovered real Christianity and his family constantly spoke of him as a "Christian." From

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<sup>139</sup> Tolstoy's *Diaries*, I:343.

<sup>140</sup> Simmons, *Leo Tolstoy*, 640.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 711.

<sup>142</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *My Religion*, 151.

<sup>143</sup> Janko Lavrin, *Tolstoy*, 98.

the vantage point of historic Christian orthodoxy, however, his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church was warranted.

Tolstoy was ambiguous about whether God was truly a personal being. He denied the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Naturally, corollaries of those denials meant that he did not believe in the virginal conception of Christ, His genuine miracles, His redemptive death, or His bodily resurrection. To Tolstoy Jesus was simply teaching that He was what all people were and potentially could be.

It is clear from Tolstoy's writings that eventually he was disgusted with (what he knew—for better or for worse—of) Evangelicalism. Whether he got an adequate picture of evangelical doctrine and personal attractiveness is not clear. Nevertheless, *he stood adamantly against the notion of salvation by grace through faith alone*. He expected people to be ushering in God's kingdom by means of carrying out Christ's commands found in the last part of Matthew 5. The genius of Tolstoyanism was embodied in the doctrine of non-resistance to violence (which for him implied the abolition of all governments, courts, and police).

Tolstoy was an eclectic on world religions, so for him Christ only meant a formulator of what was truest in all the great religions. Basically he was a religious naturalist. Despite being the world's most famous writer at his death, Tolstoy died with a dysfunctional family and a set of disciples who couldn't agree enough to form a cohesive unit. In his tragic death Tolstoy was the prodigal son reenacted—running away from home as an old man—but without any happy homecoming in the aftermath or conviction of individual immortality in the afterlife. Tolstoy may have achieved literary immortality, but he denied theological immortality. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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***The Riddle of Grace.*** By Scott Hoezee. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996. 164 pp. Paper, \$14.00.

What does it mean to be “saved by grace” and then—as a result of that salvation—to live “graciously”? Do Christians know what it means to be a “graced people”? This is the basic thrust of the author, Scott Hoezee, pastor of preaching and administration at Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. While he initially warns the reader of the fact that the Reformed tradition has “misconstrued” the need to live “the grateful life” (p. 7), his decidedly Reformed mindset has left an indelible mark on his attempt to adopt a “new” approach: “*Only* those who know just how *bad* sin is can also know how *great* grace is” (p 46, emphasis mine).

Hoezee has divided his thoughts into four chapters. First, he traces the biblical data for the doctrine of grace. Second, he explores the “dimension of the gracious life” (or, how to find ways to say “Thank You” for the greatest gift that God can give). Third, he attempts to grapple with the implications of grace in a capitalistic world. In the final chapter he wrestles with the difficult questions surrounding grace and church discipline (or, how can the church handle sin/scandals in ways different from other societal institutions). Interspersed between the chapters are short “meditations on grace” which Hoezee has drawn from OT passages.

The author’s treatment of the biblical understanding of grace (pp. 11-46) is especially noteworthy—readers will find several helpful insights from both the OT and NT passages he explores.

Unfortunately, Hoezee’s second chapter, “Grace and Gratitude,” is basically the standard Reformed position on sanctification, complete with reference to “antinomianism” (p. 53). While the author subscribes to the fact that works have nothing to do with our salvation, “the power of God’s grace is so enormous that it inevitably *will* result in a distinctive kind of life” (p. 57, emphasis his).

I found his thoughts on “Grace and Capitalism” (chapter 3) confusing: “What effect has the capitalist way of life had on the church, its theology, and most importantly, its view of grace?” (p. 89). Hoezee has somehow concluded that American capitalism and the “modern preoccupation of the Self” (p. 91) are synonymous, and therefore dangerous, even though he recognizes that the great reformers *all* put great emphasis on the “lay life.” While stopping short of equating socialism with “gracious living,” he warns that the business “ethos” is affecting the Church (p. 92) and not the other way around. The pastor has become the “spiritual C.E.O.” and “bottom-line results” are more important than “preaching the Word.” I sensed here more of the author’s frustration with the megachurch concept than capitalism per se (even though Hoezee grew up in Ada, Michigan, which just happens to be the corporate home of Amway!).

Hoezee seems to consider the concept of rewards—whether earthly or heavenly—as detrimental to a proper focus on grace:

The idea that we must each “make it on our own” [the author’s understanding of the “American spirit”], *the seeking of rewards* (and the proffering of rewards to motivate right behavior),...are difficult ideas to transcend in our culture (p. 110, emphasis mine).

Moreover, any emphasis on the biblical view of accountability (“...feared punishments [especially punishments from God],” p. 118) should be carefully phrased by parents and teachers with “well-tuned theological antennae.”

This issue of accountability appears further diluted when the author discusses his concept of “Grace and Discipline” (pp. 129-59) with regards to sin/scandals within a church body. He summarizes his discussion of Matt 18:15-19 and Jesus’ emphasis on proper exclusion from fellowship—“treat as pagans and tax collectors”—by stating: “But we do not for that reason cease having contact with him (i.e., the recalcitrant brother)” (p. 141)—even though later Paul gives specific instructions to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 5:11 “not even to eat with such a man!” This chapter contains many good intentions, but falls far short of a well-reasoned biblical explanation of corporate discipline.

I cannot recommend this book to GES members for a proper view of the foundation of God's grace and its work in one's life. This book is well named: it is indeed a *riddle* of grace.

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***Out of Ashes.*** By Keith Phillips. Los Angeles: World Impact Press, 1996. 196 pp. Cloth, \$10.00.

This book chronicles author Keith Phillips's ministry of discipling and

church planting in the racially-torn, depravity-dominated ghettos of America's inner cities, with a special focus on Watts, that section of Los Angeles made famous by the 1965 riots. Phillips is reaching out—in a truly cross-cultural way—to people whom the traditional evangelical church has de-emphasized as a local missions target.

To Phillips's credit, he has lived a "gutsy" and committed life of reaching high risk, largely unloved, and low-hope-for-life individuals with the practical and personal love of Jesus. Scores of children, teens, and adults in Watts have learned about God's loving character from the author and his team.

But have they been introduced to the gospel of God's grace? In a nebulous way, Phillips notes that human experience is fulfilled by knowing Christ (pp. 167-74), and then making Him known to others (p. 174). But, in making Christ known to others, the gospel presentation needs to accurately define God's gift of salvation. How is this vital issue treated by Phillips? Perhaps the best answer to this question is a quotation from the book (pp. 173-74):

You "make disciples" [alluding here to the Great Commission] by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism represents self death. When you are immersed under the baptismal waters, think of it as drowning. You lose control. You die.

Imagine that I was on that ill-fated 1996 TWA flight #800 that crashed off of Long Island. When the fuselage hit the ocean my lungs filled with water and I

drowned. After two days, my corpse was still buried in the Atlantic Ocean when Jesus came to me and said, "Keith, I'll make a deal with you. I'll breathe into you the breath of new life—you can be born again! But, it will cost you everything you have—you will have to go anywhere I ask, do anything I ask, for as long as I ask—no questions asked!"

Immediately I say, "No way. That's slavery." Then, I realize I am not in a good bargaining position, and I accept the grace of God for what it is—a gift.

Once I have died to myself (yielded control of my life to Christ), then I can be resurrected with Him to new life. The evidence of my new life (after self death) is the fruit of the Spirit and servanthood. I will go to Watts and raise a family, teach junior high boys in Bible club or Sunday School—do whatever God wants me to do.

John 12:24 says, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies (self death), it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (reproduction).

Is the offer of salvation a "gift" or a "deal"? Is it free, or does it "cost you everything you have"? Is the gospel about the redemptive work Christ has *finished*—that He died for our sins and rose again according to the Scriptures—or, should we trust in *another gospel*, about *future partnered work* that the Holy Spirit is willing to begin *if* you "yield control of your life to Christ"?

If Phillips really means what he says above, he is denying that believing the good news of Christ's finished redemptive work saves us. Rather, his words say that it is surrendering oneself to the Lord's future work (which requires "self death" and the decision to pay the "cost" of "everything you have," the reality of which can only be assured by the "evidence of the new life").

Logically, if one's salvation is grounded on a "new life" that is given in response to a Lordship-surrender decision, then the only reliable assurance one can have is to verify that one's new life is evidenced by good works (such as going where Christ commands one to go, raising a family, making Christ known to others).

However, if one's salvation is a free gift of God received by faith, then the basis of one's assurance is the trustworthiness and the authority of the Scriptures (and thus also of their

divine Author), that proclaim that such saving grace is given to believers.

If you want a chronicle of social action-oriented outreach to America's inner-city unfortunates, I recommend this book for its methodologies and cross-cultural insights. If, however, you want a book on evangelizing inner-city people, one must look elsewhere, since, sad to say, this book promotes "another gospel" (Gal 1:6-9).

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***The Seven Laws of the Harvest: Understanding the Realities of Sowing and Reaping.*** By John W. Lawrence. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995 (original copyright, 1975). 130 pp. Paper, \$7.99.

In his classic work, *The Seven Laws of the Harvest*, John Lawrence responds to why the lives of many Christians are so ineffective. His thesis is simple and straightforward: Most Christians do not understand God's spiritual laws which depict the realities of sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7-8). Throughout his book, Lawrence builds a strong case for God's discipline now, in time. This is an element of reaping that many scholars and pastors too quickly pass over. Not Lawrence. He cites several cases of divine discipline in time throughout the Scriptures (e.g. Lot, Jacob, Israel, and David). He also includes numerous amusing—and some not so amusing—anecdotes and illustrations which powerfully drive home his point.

The seven chapters are devoted to defining and applying these seven laws: (1) *Considering*: We reap much that we did not sow. The first law focuses on the goodness of God. Whatever follows, it is important to recognize that the Lord has blessed us with His Son and His Word. (2) *Identifying*: We reap the same in kind as we sow. This chapter speaks to the effect of our sin upon our children. Since everything reproduces after its kind, God will never be mocked. Confession and forgiveness in no way stop the harvest (p. 39). (3) *Waiting*: We reap in a different season than when we sow. Lawrence states, "The harvest

never comes immediately" (p. 48), yet it will come. Whether saved or unsaved, we will all reap what we sow. This chapter closes with "Dying Statements of the Unsaved" (pp. 54-57) and "Dying Statements of the Saved" (pp. 57-59). (4) *Remembering*: We reap more than we sow. The lives of Jacob and David serve to remind us that there are grave consequences for our sinful actions (pp. 62-71). Two OT verses are bolstered to validate this principle: Prov 22:8 and Hosea 8:7. (5) *Doing*: We reap in proportion as we sow. This chapter is a sermon on spiritual stewardship. Although the thrust of the chapter is financial stewardship, there are principles for every other area of our lives. (6) *Persevering*: We reap the full harvest of the good only if we persevere; the evil comes to harvest on its own. Lawrence writes, "The problem of the average believer today is not a lack of knowledge, but the application of truths he already knows" (p. 85). Stories from the lives of Paul and David are used to urge us to persevere by waiting on the Lord, dealing well with trials and discouragement, reading the Word, and living one day at a time. (7) *Forgetting*: We cannot do anything about last year's harvest, but we can about this year's. In this final chapter, Lawrence utilizes several rewards passages (e.g. John 15:5; 1 Cor 3:11-15; 9:24-27; Heb 6:1-8) to motivate his readers to make up for lost time and press on to maturity. His key for growth and maturity is a simple equation: "Discipline produces character which produces fruitfulness" (p. 117).

From cover to cover, this is an excellent book. It is concise, practical, and witty. GES members will appreciate much of Lawrence's theology evidenced in statements like these: "So the Father gives salvation to all who do nothing more than to believe in His Son...We either believe the witness God has given concerning His Son that salvation is only through Him or we are still trying to be saved by and through our own deeds of righteousness" (pp. 20-21). Especially noteworthy, is the concluding chapter where Lawrence unveils his understanding of Heb 5:11-6:8 (pp. 104-120). In this section, he insists that the recipients of Hebrews are Jewish Christians in need of "going on to maturity" (p. 106). Lawrence understands the consequences of not pressing on to maturity to be the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (p. 111).

This book will continue to stand the test of time. More importantly, John Lawrence's life will stand the test of time and eternity. Having had the privilege of calling Professor Lawrence a friend during the last six years of his life, I can honestly say that this book is a reflection of his life and theology. He lived a life of grace and finished well. He is now with the Lord and already reaping the blessings of a life devoted to teaching and practicing the Word of God.

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***When God Says "Well Done!": Running to Win the Prize.***

By R.T. Kendall. Scotland, U. K.: Christian Focus Publications, 1993. 224 pp. Paper, \$9.99.

In his preface Kendall writes, "This book will hopefully show us at least two things: (1) How to know we are going to Heaven not Hell; and (2) how we might ensure we will receive a reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ" (p. 9). He also writes, "This book is presented to the reader with the hope that you will abandon any effort to clear your name in this life. But there is more. This book comes to you with the prayer that you will live the rest of your life in the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ" (p. 15).

How does the author achieve this lofty aim? By delivering a thought-provoking exegesis of 1 Cor 3:6-15; 4:3-5; 5:3-5; and 9:24-10:5. This study goes to great lengths to reveal Kendall's understanding of the doctrine of rewards. After reading his careful analysis, this reviewer believes Kendall has succeeded at both of his objectives. Not only has he succeeded in his exegesis, he has done so in a very simple and practical fashion.

Kendall makes several significant points in this book worth mentioning. First, he boldly tackles what he calls "The problem of reward" (pp. 123-28). By *problem*, he is referring to Christians who are "put off by the very idea of a reward. It is almost beneath them" (p. 123). The following objections should ring a bell: "I do

not care about rewards. I will be glad if I just make it to heaven. After all, being saved is all that really matters." Fortunately, Kendall capably demolishes this objection: "The one who says, 'I don't care about that sort of thing' [rewards] either is not being honest and has become very self-righteous, or is so deeply hurt that he or she is no longer in touch with his true feelings" (p. 121). Next he goes on to write about whether sanctification is ground for *assurance* or for *reward*. Although, Kendall once held to the former, after thorough study, he is now convinced of the latter. He shares three dangers of his former belief: (1) Sooner or later, one will look to his good works for assurance; (2) if a person is very conscientious about it, he will always have some doubt whether he is really saved; (3) one who subscribes to this view is one step away from salvation by works (p. 124).

A second significant point this reviewer appreciated is the author's practical approach to the doctrine of rewards. Few writers have gone to the lengths that Kendall does to demonstrate the true relevancy of rewards. He discusses, for example, how we can persevere through trials, overcome temptation, tame the tongue, and remain humble. He tackles these topics with great humility and transparency, and then demonstrates how each of these relate to our rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema).

A third point Kendall makes concerns the interpretation of 1 Cor 3:10-15. The vast majority of commentaries insist that the "foundation" that Paul mentions refers to the work of Apollos and various other teachers. Contextually, this does seem to be true. Yet, Kendall argues that Paul deliberately and carefully changes metaphors, from watering to building (3:8-9). Why? To ensure that his readers understood that he was making a transition from talking about Paul and Apollos to challenging their own individual responsibilities as believers (p. 48). This is particularly helpful since this passage has been applied by many writers to individual believers at the Bema, yet with seemingly little or no justification as to how this view fits the context.

Finally, because Kendall is Reformed and an Amillennialist, some of his exegesis may provide a different slant for many GES readers (e.g. "For believers are the true Israel of God," p. 217). However, it can be both challenging and productive to read from a different theological perspective. In this case, it proved

quite refreshing to find an author, pastor, and scholar with a Reformed perspective who is also rewards (and grace) oriented.

Every GES member would do well to purchase a copy of this book.

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***An Easy-To-Understand Guide For Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds.*** By Phillip E. Johnson. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997. 131 pp. Paper, \$15.99.

Phillip Johnson is the author of *Darwin on Trial* and *Reason in The Balance*. He wrote this book for high school juniors, seniors, and beginning college undergraduates. In it he discusses common mistakes made by people who try to resolve the conflict between creation and evolution through theistic evolution. Johnson points out that the official statement of the 1995 American National Association of Biology Teachers expressly states that evolution was unsupervised, impersonal, and unpredictable. This represents the general understanding of major science organizations and educators. Evolution according to the scientific community does not mean a God-guided gradual creation but an unguided purposeless change.

An evolution that was unsupervised and mindless is in direct conflict with the God of the Bible who, as the ultimate Creator of everything, takes an active supervisory role in the world. To consider that the God who made the laws of nature would then leave it to its own devices is problematic to say the least. God cannot be changed in order to reconcile evolution and creation.

Johnson says much about the "Inherit the Wind" stereotype. This refers back to the 1960 movie which portrayed the famous Scopes Trial of 1925. The film depicted the Evolutionists as the good people who desired to know truth, whereas the Creationists were labeled as dishonest bigots who had no desire to know truth. This basic stereotype is still seen whenever the creation/evolution controversy comes up. The Creationists are

characterized as trying to force their religious views on others and their position is perceived as being anti-science.

One of his objectives in speaking out on this issue is to show that the theory of evolution does have problems as far as the evidence itself is concerned, such as, selective use of evidence, ad hominem arguments, and straw man arguments. He also warns students about the selective use of transitional forms in the fossil record. The fossil record does not contain any clear examples of transitional forms.

Johnson's strategy is to drive a wedge between scientific investigation and the materialist/naturalist philosophy that their view is based on. The problem is a failure on the part of many Evolutionists to recognize that their interpretation of the data is based on a philosophical presupposition and not on an objective interpretation of the facts.

Johnson's book is worth reading for anyone who has an interest in this subject but who is not particularly well read on the issue. It is simple to read and is an excellent gift for high school and college students.

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***Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches About Prayer.***

By Thomas L. Constable. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995. 190 pages. Paper, \$11.99.

*Talking to God* is not just another motivational book on prayer. It is a biblical theology of prayer that is the culmination of 20 years of teaching at Dallas Theological Seminary as well as a doctoral dissertation on the subject.

Constable discusses the different kinds of prayer in the Bible and their particular uses in the time period in which they were found. In the chapter on NT prayer, the author points out several important new characteristics including early Christians addressing the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer as well as God the Father (Acts 2:21, 36; 7:59; 9:5, 4, 21, 29; 22:16); the role of the

indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit in providing guidance and assistance in prayer, and the fact that prayers were for spiritual rather than physical blessings.

Among the theological problems discussed are: human freedom and prayer, God's immutability and asking, Divine omniscience and prayer, and God's sovereignty and prayer. Constable does an excellent job of pointing out that God does not force people against their will to do things, but simply removes distractions that otherwise might prevent them from hearing the message and responding to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. God can answer prayer without compromising His immutability since He remains the same in His being. Even though God knows all things, it facilitates fellowship and communication when we share things with God. He argues convincingly that even though there are certain things that cannot be altered by prayer (e.g., God told Jeremiah to *stop praying* for the people because He was going to judge them, Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11), some of God's foreordained actions are not fixed from the perspective of time (e.g., when Moses prayed, God postponed His judgment, Exod 32:14).

Practical problems discussed focused on improper actions and attitudes that can lead to unanswered prayer.

This is an excellent book. I highly recommend it.

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***Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography.*** By John Dominic Crossan. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995. 209 pp. Paper, \$12.00.

John Dominic Crossan is one of the more influential members of the "Jesus Seminar" (a group of 74 scholars who have recently voted that Jesus spoke only 18% of what is attributed to Him in the NT). Crossan has written extensively on what we can know about the life of Jesus. This book is well written, and very readable condensed version of *The Historical Jesus*:

*The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

Members and followers of the Jesus Seminar believe that Jesus Christ was a Jewish Cynic Philosopher. Cynics in those times lived contrary to society in general and did many socially unacceptable things to protest the social structure which they saw as confining. This becomes the context in which the life of Jesus is understood.

According to the author, the kingdom of God for Jesus was not a future event but rather a mode of life in the immediate present. Jesus did not actually heal people's diseases. Crossan makes a distinction between healing an illness (accepting those who were social outcasts as a symbol for Jesus' vision of an egalitarian society), and curing a disease (when someone is actually healed). Jesus also invited people from unacceptable social backgrounds (e.g., tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners) to eat with Him. Crossan calls this combination "magic and meal." Jesus' acceptance of all people, no matter how poor or sinful, was radically egalitarian and negated the ancient Mediterranean pivotal values of honor and shame, patronage and clientele, and the culture's and civilization's hierarchies, discriminations, and exclusions. This is considered to be the heart of Jesus' message.

Crossan's unique argument against the resurrection denies that Jesus was ever buried. If Jesus was buried, it was only in a shallow grave where He was later torn to pieces by wild dogs. He believes that the first Christians did not see any special significance in His untimely death or have a concept of the resurrection. Instead these followers tried to live out the radical egalitarian vision of their founder and continued to center themselves around open meals and symbolic healings as a means of demonstrating their egalitarianism.

Crossan focuses on materials that he dates between A.D. 30 and 60. He feels that the greater the number of independent attestations for a given saying, the greater the chance that it stems from Jesus Himself. Any saying that occurs once is eliminated even if it occurs in the first stratum. According to Crossan, Q (material common to Matthew and Luke) and the Gospel of Thomas (114 sayings of Jesus), represent the earliest records of these communities. The Gospels, Acts, and Pauline

epistles represent later Christian "Mythmaking" about Jesus. They do not represent either the historical Jesus or His earliest communities. The narratives on the resurrection of Christ as well as His nature miracles are stories that were written to give the disciples power and position in the community.

Crossan has a number of presuppositions that allow him to reconstruct Jesus in the way that he does. (1) The presupposition of anti-supernaturalism has dramatically effected Crossan's thinking. He never demonstrates that God cannot do miracles, he only *assumes it*. (2) He has a preference for extra or non-canonical sources. He places significant portions of the Gospel of Thomas and Q in the first layer of tradition, whereas the canonical Gospels are excluded from this first layer. (3) He also enlists very questionable dating procedures, giving the Gospel of Thomas a very early date. The vast majority of scholars date the Gospel of Thomas no earlier than 140 A.D. The Gospel of Thomas also exhibits clear evidence of being influenced by second century Gnostic thought. Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Romans are dated in the 50's by most scholars, yet they are considered irrelevant by Crossan. He also never interacts with the evidence for the early dating and authorship of the Gospels.

There are a number of problems with specific arguments used in this book. First, Crossan argues from the general to the specific. Pointing out that *most* people who were crucified were not *buried*, he concludes that therefore *Jesus* was not buried. The burial of Christ is mentioned in every Gospel and in 1 Cor 15:3-4. These are at least two independent traditions. Paul also uses the words "delivered" and "received," referring to oral tradition. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in A.D. 55, and most likely received this tradition from Peter and James while he was in Jerusalem, three years after the death of Christ (Gal 1:18-19). This places the tradition back to the event itself as it took time to formulate it. A general statement cannot outweigh specific eyewitness testimony, especially when it only says that *most* were not buried as opposed to *all*.

Second, Crossan ignores the fact that a number of Jesus' teachings were inconsistent with Cynicism. Jesus *forbade* His followers to carry a knapsack and staff, whereas these items were *trademarks* of the Cynics.

Third, he fails to demonstrate why his Jesus, who supposedly never spoke of Himself as having a decisive role in God's final plans and who showed acceptance of other people by eating with them and symbolically healing them, could ever get Himself crucified. Such a Jesus would never have been a threat to the Roman empire. The author also never comes to grip with the martyrdom of the disciples and Paul, who died saying that Jesus was Lord and that He appeared to them after His death in bodily form.

Fourth, although Crossan shows that Jesus had different ideas than society in general about the treatment of others, he never demonstrates that Jesus sought to reform a peasant society by advocating a radical egalitarianism. There is no evidence that Jesus confronted village officials, patrons, landlords, or owners of tenant farms or argued for a new vision of society. Jesus' confrontations were with religious authorities. Crossan also never establishes that the meals Jesus shared with others and the symbolic healings reflected a new egalitarian agenda.

Finally, he disregards Jesus' message. The miracles He performed, although secondary to His message, were done to authenticate that message. Crossan strips Jesus of His message and then tries to reconstruct a new one on the basis of actions.

*Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* is must reading for anyone who wants to understand how the scholars of the Jesus Seminar committee arrived at their reconstruction of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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## PERIODICAL REVIEWS

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***“The Parable of the Sower and the Soils,”*** Mark L. Bailey, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June 1998), 172-88.

Bailey is Professor of Bible Exposition and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Dallas Theological Seminary. He considers one of the most famous parables, The Parable of the Four Soils. This parable clearly deals with reception of the gospel and with fruitfulness. The first soil, on the path, clearly represents those who neither receive the gospel nor are productive. The fourth soil pictures those who both receive and are productive. These points are agreed upon by nearly all interpreters. But what of the middle two soils?

Lordship Salvation practically demands that one understand the middle soils as representing unregenerate people since they are unproductive and they do not persevere. According to Lordship Salvation *all* born-again people are productive and ultimately persevere.

Essentially the article is a review of much of the current literature and views on the parable. Readers of *JOTGES* will be disappointed, however, to see that this review does not include Free Grace literature and views. There is no consideration, for example, of the writings of Hodges and Dillow, or the GES newsletter on this parable.

Bailey's personal comments on the identification of the middle soils are ambiguous. He never calls them regenerate. Yet he also avoids saying directly that they are unregenerate.

Bailey indicates his view by approvingly citing a Reformed writer, Blomberg, “(2) Like the three kinds of unfruitful soil, many will respond to His Word *with less than saving faith*, be it (a) complete lack of positive response due to the enticement of evil, (b) temporary superficiality masquerading as true commitment, or (c) genuine interest and conviction about the truth that simply falls short due to the rigorous demands of discipleship. (3) Like the fruitful soil, the only legitimate response to God's

Word is *the obedience and perseverance which demonstrates true regeneration*" (p. 187, italics added).

No explanation is given as to how someone can have *genuine conviction* about the truth of the gospel and yet not be regenerate due to falling short of the rigorous demands of discipleship. Is not saving faith *the conviction* of the truth of the gospel? Must one meet the rigorous demands of discipleship in order to be regenerate? Is that not works salvation? Unfortunately, no answers to these obvious questions are given.

In the Lukan version of this parable the Lord directly indicates that the rocky soil represents those who believe the gospel (Luke 8:13). Since Jesus had just said that Satan snatches away the seed from those on the path lest they should believe and be saved (Luke 8:12), those rocky soil persons are regenerate. The fact that they only believe "for a time" cannot reverse the fact that they did believe the gospel and that all who believe the gospel are saved. Again, unfortunately, there is no discussion of the Lukan parallel.

Why can't the point of the parable be a comparison between unbelievers (soil one), unproductive believers (soils two and three), and productive believers (soil four)—as Hodges, Dillow, and I argue?

Bailey concludes, "This parable provides not only a forceful challenge to believers but also gives a warning to unbelievers. For the not-yet-responsive, this parable serves to challenge them to receive the Word of God and to enjoy its productivity in their lives" (p. 188). Once again, there is a bit of ambiguity here. Is it possible to receive the Word of God and yet be unproductive? Based on his earlier citation of Blomberg, it seems he means that all who genuinely receive the Word are productive.

If so, why does the Lord say that the middle soils received the Word if they did not? The second and third soils were responsive. They received the Word with joy. The seed germinated. Initial growth took place.

Though I disagree with the position of this article on the middle soils, I recommend it for the well-grounded believer. The value of the article is in seeing the ambiguous treatment given

(except for the one citation of another's writings) of the most important issue, the spiritual condition of the middle soils.

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***"Is Water Baptism Necessary for Salvation?"*** G. Michael Cocoris, *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* (Summer/Fall 1997), 8-11.

Christian water baptism, Cocoris shows, plays no role in the reception of eternal life. The new birth and justification occur by faith alone, not by faith plus baptism or anything else.

The article is divided into four major sections, the first three are short (1, 3, and 9 paragraphs) and the last section is longer (23 paragraphs).

Cocoris shows in the first section, "Salvation is at the point of faith," that regeneration and justification occur at the moment of faith, before water baptism. This is helpful. Later in the article he stresses the conversion of Cornelius and his household before they were baptized. While he mentions Acts 10:43 in passing, it would have been helpful to stress here, at least briefly, the regeneration of Cornelius before he underwent Christian baptism. One crystal-clear example like that proves the case so well.

The second section, "Baptism is not a part of the gospel," shows from 1 Cor 1:17 that Christian baptism is not a part of the gospel message. Paul was not sent to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Cocoris shows that since one is saved simply by believing the preached message, then baptism cannot be a condition of eternal salvation. In other words, Paul could not say what he says in 1 Cor 1:17 if baptism were required for regeneration.

Cocoris tackles the issue of Holy Spirit baptism in section three. This section is probably the best in the article. Here he shows that there are not only different types of water baptism in the NT (the baptism of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, and Christian baptism), but there is a baptism, Spirit baptism, which doesn't even involve water. He builds his case nicely from

1 Cor 12:13 and Acts 10:44-48. He then suggests that Romans 6, Galatians 3, Ephesians 4, and Colossians 2 all refer to Holy Spirit baptism as well.

It might have helped a bit if Cocoris had shown that there are actually a number of other waterless baptisms in the NT, beside Holy Spirit baptism. Paul spoke of Israel being "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor 10:2). Jesus, alluding figuratively to His approaching death on the cross, said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50).

I would have preferred, as well, to see a bit more discussion of Romans 6, Galatians 3, Ephesians 4, and Colossians 2. Each of those warrant a whole article in themselves. I realize that the author was trying to keep this a short article. However, presenting only one paragraph on each of those passages seems a bit too brief to be very helpful.

The final section deals with the following problem passages, Mark 16:16, John 3:5, Acts 2:38 and 22:16, Titus 3:5, and 1 Pet 3:21. While I don't agree with all of the interpretations given, there is much helpful material here. In my opinion the author's best discussions are on John 3:5 and Titus 3:5. The discussions of Mark 16:16 and 1 Pet 3:21 make a number of good points as well.

Cocoris attempts to explain Acts 2:38 and 22:16 by appeals to grammar. I feel a more plausible approach is to recognize that there is a clear difference in the Book of Acts between the condition of regeneration, which is faith in Christ (Acts 10:43-44), and the condition for Spirit baptism, which for some is allowing the apostles to lay hands on them, and for Palestinian Jews, repentance and baptism. Thus Paul was clearly saved before he heard Ananias's words (compare Gal 1:11ff.) and so were Peter's listeners before he told them to repent and be baptized (see Acts 2:37, "they were cut to the heart" shows they believed that Jesus is indeed the Messiah!).

This is a very helpful overview article on the question of baptism and salvation. I recommend it.

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Associate Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

Irving, TX

***“Free But Costly: A Sermon on Luke 14:16-33,”*** Daniel M. Doriani, *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review* (Fall 1997), 67-77.

As the subtitle indicates, this article was first delivered as a sermon. Doriani, a pastor, writes (and speaks) with compassion and warmth. It is evident that he loves God and desires to please Him.

In places he sounds like he believes in the Free Grace gospel. Note these powerful words, for example: “Salvation is the gift of God’s love, received by faith alone, period. Works play no role whatsoever in obtaining the gift. That is the gospel. That is the Reformation. Good works are our response to his love. We do not produce them in order to acquire salvation or God’s favor. Rather, we obey because we have his love. Everything hangs on the conjunctions. We obey, not *in order to* obtain God’s love or salvation, but *because* God has redeemed us” (p. 74, italics his). Unfortunately, however, he doesn’t mean by those words what we might hope.

As the title indicates, Doriani’s thesis is that the free gift is also costly. This is pressed throughout the article. These words from the conclusion are illustrative: “Friends, this is no mere intellectual issue, it is a matter of life and death. The salvation Jesus offers in the gospel is free, but costly—it costs all you have. This dual truth is the Reformation...It [the gospel] requires commitment; it has a cost. Today we celebrate the free gift of the gospel. But we remember its cost” (p. 77).

Needless to say, this is hopelessly confusing. Anyone who understands the call of *discipleship* as constituting the message of how we gain eternal *salvation*, at best, will end up with a contradiction, and at worst, will end up with unalloyed works salvation. In any case, here is an article which illustrates the danger in failing to see the distinction between justification and progressive sanctification.

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***“Viticulture’s Contribution to the Interpretation of John 15:1-6,”*** Gary W. Derickson, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (January–March 1996), 34-52.

According to Derickson, the key to understanding the viticulture of first century Judah is found in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, dated around AD 280. This document contains a contract for labor in a vineyard, which, along with Pliny, represent the nearest viticultural documents to the first century. Derickson states that the vineyard was started with cuttings from desired varieties. These were provided from the branches removed in the post-harvest pruning, likely from a nearby vineyard. When the stems were *trained* along the ground, the grape clusters were propped up to keep them from contacting the soil and being ruined. *Trellising* of vines appears to have been introduced primarily by the Romans as one of their advancements in viticulture. “Thus when Jesus related His analogy the disciples would likely have been familiar with both trailing and trellising approaches” (p. 44).

As important as the trailing and trellising is, the pruning of the vineyards is where the interpreter needs to pay special attention. Pruning occurred at various times during the year.

Immediately following the harvest, the grapes were pruned severely and all leaves were stripped from the plants to induce dormancy. In the Oxyrhynchus Papyri contract the procedure for vineyard management began with “pruning, transport of leaves and throwing them outside the mud-walls.” This, being the second stage of labor contracted, argues for the “pruning” to be post-harvest and early dormant season, the severe pruning.

With this last bit of information, Derickson states that the question concerning the meaning of key terms and concepts in the passage may be answered. Regarding the setting and context of the passage, it is important to note that, in terms of the seasons, Jesus gives His instruction during early spring growth.

The central issue of Jesus’ analogy involves abiding and fruitfulness in light of His impending departure and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is addressing a small group of men, all who clearly believe in Him, and He is comforting their troubled hearts in light of His coming departure.

Concerning the farmer’s actions in the second verse, Derickson sees basically two kinds of pruning occurring in the vineyard as

mentioned previously, dormant pruning and then that accomplished during the growing season. Dormant pruning removes unwanted material from desired branches as well as unwanted branches and water sprouts. All remaining leaves are removed as well. The growing season pruning removes succulent sprigs from the fruiting branches, dead and diseased wood, and some unwanted branches in the sense of adventitious buds on the trunk of the vine. However, some non-fruiting branches were kept on the vine. Therefore, when dealing with *airei* and *kathairei* much of the difficulty of the passage is removed when exegetes stop attempting to make the sixth verse an exposition of the second.

The approach of most exegetes is to see in Jesus' words a process by which the farmer picks off the advantageous sprigs from the fruiting branches (cleansing them) and cutting off non-fruiting branches (taking them away). Yet with the evidence from Pliny that non-fruiting branches were preserved and nurtured for use the next season, this interpretation of *airei* contradicts the common practice. It would be better to see Jesus indicating what actually occurred at the time of spring growth. Namely, certain non-fruiting branches were tied to the trellis along with the fruiting branches while the side shoots of the fruiting branches were being "cleaned up." The non-fruiting branches were allowed to grow with full vigor and without the removal of any side growth or leaves since the more extensive their growth the greater the diameter of stem connected to the vine and thus the greater ability to produce fruit the following season. By removing them from the ground and placing them on the trellis the rows of plants would benefit from unhindered aeration which was considered an essential element to proper fruit development. Therefore, according to Derickson, to see *airei* in v 2 as removal (judgment or discipline) is to contradict the actual practice of the time.

Jesus told His disciples that they were fruiting branches which had been "cleansed" and so they could anticipate immediate fruitfulness, though that depended on their maintaining a proper relationship with Him. It is important to note also that it is this "unfruitful" branch which will be the fruiting branch the following season if the present fruiting branch weakens.

The nonabiding branches of v 6 are not the same as the unfruitful branches of v 2. The sprigs cleaned from the vines in the spring would be too small and succulent to do anything more than wither away. In order to build a fire from cuttings as is described in v 6, mature wood would have to be removed. This happens in the severe pruning which occurs at the beginning of the dormant season after all fruit has been harvested, and all branches look alike. The burning need not describe judgment, but may simply be a part of the description of the process; it is what happened to pruned material. Their uselessness is being emphasized in this verse, not their destruction. Finally, the "judgment" of v 6, however it is viewed, cannot be read back into v 2.

This article is a "must read." Derickson has contributed greatly to the interpretation of Jesus' words to His disciples recorded in John 15:1-6.

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# **A Hymn of Grace: THE SOLID ROCK**

**KEITH W. WARD**  
Scientist  
Coatesville, PA

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

When darkness veils His lovely face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace;  
In every high and stormy gale,  
My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, His blood  
Support me in the whelming flood;  
When all around my soul gives way,  
He then is all my hope and stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound,  
Oh, may I then in Him be found;  
Dressed in His righteousness alone,  
Faultless to stand before the throne.

Refrain:  
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand,  
All other ground is sinking sand.

—Edward Mote (1797-1874)

The name of Edward Mote does not often rest on the lips of the Church today in the same fashion as Fanny J. Crosby, B. B. McKinney, Ira Sankey, or other greats in hymnody. However, the testimony of his life is one that should inspire all Christians. Mote was not brought up in a godly home and did not have the advantage of early exposure to Scripture. In fact, his parents managed a pub in London and often neglected young Edward,

who spent most of his Sundays playing in the city streets.<sup>1</sup> Of his theological upbringing, he said "So ignorant was I that I did not know that there was a God."<sup>2</sup>

Eventually Mote became exposed to the Word of God, and was baptized at the age of 18. This event, however, did not send Mote immediately into the ministry. He was apprenticed to become a cabinetmaker, a career which he successfully conducted for another 37 years. Eventually, at the age of 55, he became pastor of a Baptist church in Horsham, Sussex, where he did not miss a Sunday in the pulpit for the next 21 years.<sup>3</sup> He resigned from this pastorate in 1873 due to ill health, and died the following year at the age of 77.

It was with this background that Mote wrote the hymn we have today, "The Solid Rock." It was during his career as a cabinetmaker that the hymn came into being. One morning in 1834 as he was walking to work, it entered his mind to write a hymn. By the time he got to work, he had the chorus. He wrote four more verses over the course of that day and two additional verses before he was finished.<sup>4</sup>

The hymn was published anonymously in several hymn collections before first being attributed to Mote in a collection of approximately 100 of his hymns published in 1837 (*Hymns of Praise, A New Selection of Gospel Hymns, Combining All the Excellencies of our Spiritual Poets, with Many Originals*). Mote's original title for the hymn in this collection was "The Immutable Basis of a Sinner's Hope." The tune "Solid Rock" to which Mote's words are most commonly set was composed by William B. Bradbury for this text in 1863. An alternative tune sometimes used is "Melita" by John B. Dykes, to which the hymn "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" (i.e., "The Navy Hymn") is commonly sung.

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<sup>1</sup>Price, Milburn, "Edward Mote," in *Handbook to the Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1992), 411.

<sup>2</sup>Brown, Robert K., and Mark R. Norton, eds., *The One Year Book of Hymns* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1995).

<sup>3</sup>Terry, Lindsay L., "The Day the Cabinet Shop was Closed," in *Stories Behind Popular Songs and Hymns* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 178.

<sup>4</sup>"The Solid Rock," in *Great Hymn Stories* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Productions, 1997), 135.

Interestingly, there seems to be some discrepancy surrounding the verses of this hymn. In addition to the four commonly sung verses printed above, Mote composed two others. One source lists the other two as

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
'Midst all the hell I feel within,  
On His completed work I lean.

I trust His righteous character  
His council, promise, and His power;  
His honor and His name's at stake,  
To save me from the burning lake.<sup>5</sup>

Another writer, however, states that the first line of Mote's original version read, "Nor earth, nor hell my soul can move."<sup>6</sup> Even the verses that are commonly preserved are somewhat in question. For example, the second stanza is often rendered in many modern hymnals with an alternative version of the first line, such as "When darkness seems to hide His face."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, some hymnals alter the word "veil" in the last line to read "vale"<sup>8</sup> or "vail,"<sup>9</sup> either with or without invoking the alternative first line.

Regardless of the exact version employed, "The Solid Rock" falls firmly into the category of a gospel hymn. Frances Mosher has identified several musical characteristics of gospel hymns which apply to "The Solid Rock."<sup>10</sup> The song has a simple melody, a 3/4 meter, and a repeating refrain. Although the term "gospel hymn" is considered distinctively American, with its origins

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<sup>5</sup> Boyd, Vicky, "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less," in *HymnSys: The Multimedia Hymnal System* (<http://www.hymnsys.com/sotc475.htm>, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Price, Milburn, "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less," in *Handbook to the Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1992), 193.

<sup>7</sup> "The Solid Rock," in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1993), 406.

<sup>8</sup> "The Solid Rock," in *Victorious Service Songs* (Philadelphia: The Rodeheaver Company, 1925), 43.

<sup>9</sup> "The Solid Rock," in *Make Christ King* (Chicago: The Glad Tidings Publishing Company, 1912), 291.

<sup>10</sup> Mosher, Frances, "Towards Singing with the Understanding: A Discussion of the Gospel Hymn, Part 1." *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 1992), 55-76.

in the camp meetings of the early nineteenth century,<sup>11</sup> Mote's 1836 publication from London contained this term, and this hymn, which certainly qualifies it as one of the earliest gospel hymns.

As to the doctrinal message of the hymn, several key thoughts and phrases qualify it as a "Hymn of Grace." Of course, the chorus itself clearly sets forth the message of grace. The metaphor of Christ as a rock is one with a firm basis in Scripture (1 Cor 10:4), and has been previously described in depth in this feature.<sup>12</sup>

In the first stanza, hardly a clearer statement of total dependence on Christ could be made. Mote recognizes that our hope for eternal life depends completely upon Jesus' righteousness, not on some sweet earthly frame. Nothing in this hymn ever hints that any work on our part can add to Christ's work in order to secure our eternal salvation. However, the hymn is not ignorant of the reality of our daily struggles. In the second and third stanzas, Mote recognizes that there are times when the doubts, cares, and darkness of this world will seem to weaken our fellowship with God and veil His face from us. Even in these times, when "all around [our] soul gives way," God has not left us. Our anchor of faith can still hold in the darkness, knowing through faith that even though not seen (Heb 11:1), He still sustains us. It is at these times that it is most important, in Mote's words, to "rest on His unchanging grace." It is the immutable, certain promise of God unto salvation that allows us to have assurance even in times of great spiritual darkness. Unlike those who spend times of spiritual struggle doubting their very salvation, those who adhere to the tenets expounded from Scripture by GES rest, with Mote, in the firm knowledge of our destiny.

From a declaration of God's grace in the first stanza, to the application of that grace in times of trouble in the second and third stanzas, the writer brings his hymn full circle in the final stanza, with the ultimate realization of God's grace.

This hymn, penned by the son of neglectful pubkeepers in London, has become one of the most beloved gospel hymns in the Church today. Despite some variations in the precise words

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<sup>11</sup> Bailey, Albert Edward, *The Gospel in Hymns* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 482.

<sup>12</sup> Mosher, Frances, "Rock of Ages." *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 1995), 97-99.

of the song, the basic message strongly sets forth Christ's righteousness as the only requirement for salvation, making it very much a "Hymn of Grace."



## IN MEMORIAM

It is with sadness that GES notes the passing of Winifred Mary Griffith Thomas Gillespie on April 16 of this year, at the age of 95 years, 8 months. The daughter of W. H. Griffith Thomas, noted theologian and Bible scholar, Mrs. Gillespie carried on her father's legacy of being a strong proponent of the free grace gospel. She made a valuable contribution to Christian scholarship by editing many of her father's sermon notes for publication. She also served on the editorial board of the *Journal*.

Mrs. Gillespie, or Winnie, as she was known to her friends, wrote "At Sunrise" at Stony Brook, New York when she was in her early 20's.

### AT SUNRISE

The sky dawn-tinted, flecked with rosy clouds,  
Shone in the east like myriad opalescent shrouds.  
Slow-opening coverlets of night let faery glimmers through,  
Faint portents of the light the god of day would show.  
His path of glory stretched above the sleeping wood,  
And earth was wrapped in slumbrous, tranquil mood.  
Indeed there seemed no mortal thing to view the miracle of day  
Save I alone, and all this glorious vision prompted me to pray.

Till far away the village chanticleers saluted morn,  
The smoke from one lone chimney rose to greet the dawn.  
The sun above the wakening hills its rim did show  
And straightway bathed the world in rosy glow.  
Then climbed it heavenward and in its trail  
My wavering thoughts alike did mount o'er hill and dale  
Up, up through trembling ether—till they stood  
Awe-spellbound round about the throne of God.

And as the king of day scanned his immense domain,  
I viewed my world—much joy therein, so little pain  
Compared to that which many fellow-men must bear.  
Help me, O God, their travail-pains to share,  
And may I ease some shoulder bowed with burdens borne  
Before the solemn stillness of another sunrise morn.

—Winifred Griffith Thomas



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## BOOKS RECEIVED

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*Dictionary of Premillennial Theology.* Mal Couch, general editor. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996. Pp. 442. \$22.00 (cloth).

GOVETT, ROBERT. *Sins Before Faith & Sins After Faith: The Believer's Standings in Grace and under Responsibility.* Reprint. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1989. Pp. 40. \$3.95 (paper)

JOHNSON, DENNIS E. *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1997. Pp. 248. \$16.99 (paper).

LANG, G. H. *Firstborn Sons, Their Rights and Risks.* Reprint. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1984. Pp. 232. \$14.95 (cloth).

----- . *Ideals and Realities.* Reprint. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1988. Pp. 36. \$2.95 (paper).

MILLER, C. JOHN. *Powerful Evangelism for the Powerless.* Revised edition. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1997. Pp. 152. \$9.99 (paper).

OLFORD, STEPHEN F. *The Way of Holiness.* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998. Pp. 157. \$14.99.

RADMACHER, EARL D. *The Nature of the Church.* Reprint. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1996. Pp. 441. \$10.00 (paper).

REISINGER, ERNEST C. *The Law and the Gospel.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1997. Pp. 196. \$9.99 (paper).

STANLEY, CHARLES. *The Power of the Cross.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998. Pp. 200. \$12.99 (cloth).

STANFORD, A. RAY. *Handbook of Personal Evangelism*. Reprint. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., no copyright. Pp. 230. \$8.95 (paper).

WHITE, JAMES R. *The Roman Catholic Controversy*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996. Pp. 268. \$10.99 (paper).





14748627R00066

Made in the USA  
Charleston, SC  
28 September 2012



ISBN 9780977227440



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