

# GOSPEL WARS

## Part 1

by Robert Dean, Jr.

A LONG TIME AGO  
IN A COUNTRY FAR AWAY,  
THE APOSTLE JOHN WROTE,  
“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT  
HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON  
THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM  
SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE ETERNAL  
LIFE.” (JOHN 3:16)  
EVER SINCE THEN MEN HAVE DEBATED  
WHAT HE MEANT BY “BELIEVE.”

This debate first surfaced during the early years of the Church and involved the apostles themselves. The controversy at that time centered on whether faith alone was enough, or was obedience to the Mosaic Law, specifically circumcision, an additional element necessary to gain salvation. The first mention of this debate is found in Galatians chapter 2. Here Paul reveals that the error of faith plus works had infiltrated the very ranks of the apostles. He relates his confrontation and correction of Peter over the issue, revealing that even his trusted missionary partner, Barnabas, had been carried away by this false doctrine (2:13).

This did not end the problem. Disputes over the nature of the Gospel and the relation of the Mosaic Law and works to faith continued. The Apostles finally settled the issue among themselves at what has come to be called the Jerusalem Council (Acts 16:13–29). The gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone was preserved!

The debate surfaced soon after in churches founded by the Apostle Paul in the political region of Galatia in modern Turkey. Having begun well by faith alone in Christ alone for their salvation the believers there were soon led astray into “another” or different Gospel. A gospel that emphasized human works along with faith, both for salvation and sanctification. Paul wrote the epistle to the Galatians to correct this insidious error.

Throughout the history of Christianity this debate has surfaced many times. Each time new and different nuances require Christians to think more clearly and precisely about the most important of all issues: What is necessary to have eternal life.

In recent years the debate has heated up again among conservative evangelicals. On one side are those who advocate the Lordship Salvation position. On the other, those who advocate the Free Grace position. Both terms, “Lordship Salvation” and “Free Grace,” are used and accepted by those on either side of the dispute, though MacArthur seems to disparage the term.

In the current scenario, advocates of the Lordship position are being most prominently represented by John MacArthur, Jr., pastor of Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California, and popular radio teacher of the “Grace To You” program (others include James M. Boice, J.I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, and

Walter Chantry). Advocates of the “Free Grace” position are being represented most visibly by Zane Hodges, former Greek and New Testament professor at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), and Charles C. Ryrie, author of the *Ryrie Study Bible*, retired professor of Systematic Theology at DTS and well known speaker and author. Other advocates include Earl Radmacher, Chancellor of Western Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, and Joseph Dillow, author of *Reign of the Servant Kings*, the most significant and comprehensive study of this topic available today.

This current controversy has become so intense that many pulpits which once were clarions of truth, now proclaim a fuzzy, if not false gospel. Seminaries and Bible colleges that once prepared men and women to take the gospel of grace to the ends of the earth, now send out graduates who proclaim a works gospel. At some schools the faculties have become almost completely advocates of lordship while convincing their financial supporters that they still advocate free grace. Some churches have also split over the issue. Of the many doctrines and issues splitting Christians perhaps this is one that is most valid. For if the opponents (MacArthur v. Hodges) are correct one of them is clearly teaching a false Gospel and is anathema according to Gal. 1:7–9.

Yet in the midst of this most important controversy we find that many Christians are unaware that there is a controversy, what the controversy is all about, why it is so significant, and what the real issues are. All three of these men have published one or more books directly interacting with the views of the others. While some people may read one of the books, few will take the time to read both positions and then take the time to do the careful analysis needed to search the Scriptures to see which is true to the Word of God. This is what we hope to accomplish in these two articles.

In these articles we want to simply break the argument down to its basic components which in most instances involves defining terms. After doing this we want to give you, our readers, an understanding of how each man differs in their understanding of the issues, how they support their positions from the Scripture, and then the implications of these arguments. We want to compare and contrast them in an understandable way so that you can better appreciate their arguments and can be sharpened in your understanding of the gospel.

Before I begin I want to make it clear that I hold all three of these men in high regard. Prof. Hodges (as he is called by his students) introduced me to the beauty and wonder of the Greek language, for which I will be eternally grateful. Dr. Ryrie was not only a favorite theology professor of mine, but has become a helpful advisor to Tommy and me in *Biblical Awareness Ministries*. Pastor MacArthur has always been a helpful expositor of the Scriptures. When he spoke at Dallas Theological Seminary during my student days, I never missed hearing him. And in the early days of my ministry, when I had more time, I regularly listened to his radio broadcasts and owe him a debt of gratitude for his ministry.

Both Tommy and I have had the opportunity to discuss the issues with these men. In July, 1988 we attended a small pastor's breakfast at a Christian book store in Irving, Texas, where MacArthur introduced his book. Afterward we had the opportunity to question him. Dr. Ryrie has been a constant help. And this past January I had an opportunity to question Hodges at some length over lunch. For those unaware of the controversy you need to know that these are three basic books which must be read to gain a full perspective. While others have contributed to the discussion and may be mentioned in this article, these three will be the main focus. The Lordship position is articulated in MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*. (GAJ) I understand we can anticipate *The Gospel According to Paul* this summer. Just after the original publication of this article, MacArthur wrote a response, “Faith According to the Apostle James” in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Vol. 33, No. 1, March 1990, 13–34) quotes from this will be referred to by FAAJ. The Free Grace position is articulated by Zane Hodge's in *Absolutely Free* (AF) and in Charles Ryrie's *So Great Salvation* (SGS). One earlier work by Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (GUS) and Ryrie's earlier *Balancing the Christian Life* (BCL)

are also cited in the debate. But the most comprehensive theology of this issue is *Reign of the Servant Kings* by Joseph Dillow (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing, 1992) which came out after the original publication of this paper. This latter book I include among the most significant books any pastor should study.

Six key questions have been raised in this controversy which must be answered if we are to properly understand the issues. In this issue I will look at the first: what is saving faith? In the next I will look at: what is the relationship of faith to works? and what is the ground of the believer's assurance of salvation? The third issue this year will then explore some of MacArthur's criticisms of dispensationalism and their doctrines of salvation.

### **The Importance of the Issue**

To some, this may appear to be simply an intrafraternal dispute, while others may think it is simply another example of theologians getting too caught up with theological fine points and semantics. This is simply not the case. The issue is the very meaning of the gospel and what a person must do to be saved. In addition, believers can never spend too much time examining what the gospel is and how to correctly present it to the unbeliever.

The importance of maintaining the purity of the gospel is an issue of utmost importance. When Paul corrected the Galatians he wrote:

“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different [another of a different kind of] gospel; which is really not another [of the same kind], only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” (Gal.1:6–8)

#### ***MacArthur***

The approach of the two different positions is of such magnitude that they offer two different gospels. If one is Biblical, the other necessarily is accursed. MacArthur (*GAJ*, 17) is the only one who mentions the Galatians passage. He does not directly apply it to Hodges, but it is clear he believes that Hodges and others have distorted the gospel. He accuses them of preaching a gospel of easy believism,

The gospel in vogue today holds forth a false hope to sinners. It promises them they can have eternal life yet continue to live in rebellion against God. Indeed, it encourages people to claim Jesus as Savior yet defer until later the commitment to obey Him as Lord. It promises salvation from hell but not necessarily freedom from iniquity. . . . By separating faith from faithfulness, it leaves the impression that intellectual assent is as valid as whole hearted obedience to the truth. Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners. It is not the same message Jesus proclaimed. (*GAJ*, 16).

#### ***Hodges***

Hodges believes that those preaching a Lordship salvation have also changed the Gospel:

Instead of promoting holiness, the doctrine of lordship salvation destroys the very foundation on which true holiness must be built. By returning to the principles of the law, it

has forfeited the spiritual power of grace. (*AF*, 18).

It may even be said that Lordship salvation throws a veil of obscurity over the entire New Testament revelation. In the process, the marvelous truth of justification by faith, apart from works, recedes into shadows not unlike those which darkened the days before the Reformation. What replaces this doctrine is a kind of faith/works synthesis which differs only insignificantly from official Roman Catholic dogma. (*AF*, 20)

This same idea was reiterated by Dr. Earl Radmacher, President of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary at the Fall 1990 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, "The lordship salvation position is not a return to Wittenburg [where Luther began the Reformation] but to Rome." If MacArthur is correct, Luther and the entire Protestant Reformation are wrong.

## **Evaluation**

This statement by MacArthur raises three important points. First, he seems to put Hodges and many DTS professors in the camp of those who preach a superficial believism that denies the need for obedience and holiness as demands for the believer. Two groups exist, the Free Grace group and those who present the gospel as if all that is required is to pray the sinners prayer or simply recite a pat phrase. This latter treats the prayer of salvation as if it were simply a magic formula. Yet, prayer is not necessary if the Scripture simply says believe. Omniscient God who looks on the heart, knows who and who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who died as a substitute for their sins. To include Hodges and the others in the latter does them a great disservice. They clearly affirm that trusting Christ is more than simply vocalizing a set of words. They would agree with MacArthur:

"Contemporary Christians have been conditioned to believe that because they recited a prayer, signed on a dotted line, walked an aisle, spoke in tongues, were slain in the spirit, or had some other experience, they are saved and should never question their salvation" (*GAJ*, 23)."

MacArthur does the evangelical community a great harm by failing to distinguish these two positions.

Second, this statement reflects what I believe to be a major error throughout MacArthur's discussion. He fails to distinguish between demands placed upon unbelievers to come to salvation, entering the family of God, and demands placed upon believers as responsible family members. This is a confusion of salvation issues with Christian life issues.

Third, MacArthur implies that those in the Free Grace camp are encouraging new converts to continue in their sin and do not press upon them the commands of Scripture to pursue holiness. As the statement from Hodges reveals, he, too, is concerned about believer's living holy lives, so again MacArthur misrepresent his opponent's views.

I would agree with the assessment of Hodges and others. As just stated, it seems that at critical points MacArthur too closely identifies salvation and sanctification doctrine. This is the essential error of Roman Catholic theology and ultimately leads to a works based salvation.

## **What is Saving Faith?**

This is the crucial question which determines whether one holds to a lordship gospel or a free grace gospel. We cannot reduce our understanding of these issues to simply "making Christ Lord of your life"

or “committing your life to Christ” as opposed to “faith alone in Christ alone.” For there are those who claim to reject Lordship, yet still hold to a position that there are two kinds of faith in Christ, and the genuine “saving” faith is always evidenced by works which then become the basis for assurance. This is the underlying “root” heresy in Lordship. So the key question: Is saving faith a unique kind of faith, or is it saving because it has a unique object: the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross?

### **MacArthur**

Forsaking oneself for Christ's sake is not an optional step of discipleship subsequent to conversion; it is the *sine qua non* of saving faith. (GAJ, 135)

Faith as He [Jesus Christ] characterized it is nothing less than a complete exchange of all that we are for all that He is. (GAJ, 135)

The faith God begets includes both the volition and the ability to comply with His will (cf., Philippians 2:13). In other words, faith encompasses obedience. Berkhof sees three elements to genuine faith: an intellectual element (*notitia*), which is the understanding of the truth; an emotional element (*assensus*), which is the conviction and affirmation of truth; and a volitional element (*fiducia*), which is the determination of the will to obey truth. Modern popular theology tends to recognize *notitia* and often *assensus*, but eliminates *fiducia*. Yet faith is not complete unless it is obedient. (GAJ, 173).

And so the faithful (believing) are also faithful (obedient). “Fidelity, constancy, firmness, confidence, reliance, trust, [and] belief” are all indivisibly wrapped up in the idea of believing. (GAJ, 176)

### **Hodges**

[Faith] is the *inward conviction* that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That and that alone is saving faith. (AF, 30)

Regarding MacArthur's definition of faith as *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*, Hodges claims MacArthur “seriously distorts a well known theological definition of faith.” He adds:

This is astoundingly inaccurate. *Assensus* is *not* an “emotional element,” and *fiducia* means trust and *not* a “determination to obey the truth.” (AF, 207, f. 5)

In another response he claims that MacArthur draws a distinction between true and false faith. False faith lacks the:

elements of true repentance and submission to God. Thus, saving faith ought not to be defined in terms of trust alone, but also in terms of commitment to the will of God. In the absence of this kind of submission, they insisted, one could not describe his faith as biblical saving faith. (AF, 27)

After stating that Greek readers would have understood the Greek equivalents in the same way that English readers understand “faith” and “believe,” Hodges states:

The reader *most certainly* would not understand this word to imply submission, surrender, repentance, or anything else of this sort. For those readers, as for us, “to believe” meant “to

believe.” (AF, 29)

Ryrie response brings clarity to the question:

Do these basic facts about the Gospel require only a casual, academic, or intellectual acceptance in order for one to be saved? Not if one defines *faith* as the Greek dictionary does: “be convinced of some thing” or to “give credence to.” Specifically to believe in the Gospel is “to put one's trust in the Gospel. Being convinced of something or putting one's trust in the gospel could hardly be said to be a casual acceptance of something. When a person gives credence to the historical facts that Christ died and rose from the dead and the doctrinal fact that this was for his sins, he is trusting his eternal destiny to the reliability of those truths. (SGS, 30)

*Faith* means “confidence, trust, holding something as true.” Certainly, faith must have some content. There must be confidence *about* something or *in* someone. To believe in Christ for salvation means to have confidence that He can remove the guilt of sin and give eternal life. It means to believe that He can solve the problem of sin which is what keeps a person out of heaven.

From Ryrie's clarity we understand that MacArthur has loaded the dice by changing the definition of faith from trust, to faithfulness. Thus artificially and wrongly importing works into his definition of faith, and falling into soteriological heresy. Ryrie, like Hodges and MacArthur, comments on the division of faith into *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. He cites the passage from Berkhof, but without the same criticism as Hodges. What he does do is cite Berkhof more fully and then comments:

Berkhof does not inject or speak to the issue of the mastery of Christ over one's life when discussing these three elements of faith. His third aspect, *fiducia*, concerns the involvement of the human will in personal trust in the Lord for salvation, not commitment of the years of one's life to His mastery (contrary to MacArthur's misrepresentation of Berkhof).

### ***MacArthur***

MacArthur is critical of the approach Ryrie and Hodges take to faith saying that it is merely intellectual assent. It is clear that the term “intellectual assent” has a certain negative or prejudicial connotation, but MacArthur goes to great lengths to make it even more so. He adds pejorative adjectives such as “*bare* mental assent” and “*mere* academic acquiescence” (MacArthur, Evangelical Theological Society, 1989 Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA). Yet what more is there? Mental assent means to agree that something is true? The use of bare and mere adds no substantive meaning and only raises an emotional issue. MacArthur ought to be ashamed!

No one is saved simply by believing facts.... The object of saving faith is not a creed; it is Christ Himself. True faith embraces the person of Christ, not just the data of the gospel. (GM, 68)

Salvation is a gift, but it is appropriated only through a faith that goes beyond merely understanding and assenting to the truth. Demons have that kind of “faith” (James 2:19). (GM, 32)

### ***Hodges***

Hodges recognizes that “intellectual assent” has a prejudicial connotation for most English readers who

often think that the idea of mental assent implies detachment and personal disinterest. He rejects those connotations (*AF*, 30). Regarding attempts to break faith down into intellectual, emotional, and volitional elements he writes:

The Bible knows nothing about an intellectual faith as over against some other kind of faith (like emotional or volitional).

He affirms that faith is believing the *right* set of facts, to illustrate this he interacts with Jesus' discussion with Martha (Jn. 11:25,26). The following statements come from *Absolutely Free*, pp. 37-40 and trace the flow of Hodges argument.

It is often claimed by those who teach lordship salvation that saving faith cannot be merely “believing facts.” But this assertion is both misconceived and clearly wrong. It simply cannot stand up under biblical examination. . . In His exchange with Martha, the Lord Jesus announced some staggering facts.... Nothing is trivial about any of these facts [Jesus claim to be the Resurrection and the life and His ability to guarantee the eternal destiny of anyone who believes in Him]... .Let there be no mistaking that indeed we are talking about “believing facts.” Jesus said, “Do you believe *this*?” and Martha replies, “I believe *that You are . . .*” And John wants his readers to “believe *that Jesus is. . .*” The content of the faith... is unmistakably factual.

The facts presented to her by the Lord are more than great facts. They are *saving* facts. That is, they are *divinely revealed facts which are to be believed for salvation*.

Not all facts about God are saving facts... But to believe that Jesus is the Christ *in John's sense of that term* is to believe saving truth... Everything depended on the *truth* of what she believed. It was not at all a question of what *kind* of faith she had.

From all that has been said it should be clear that there is nothing wrong with “believing facts” if those facts are true. And equally there is nothing wrong with “believing facts” in order to be saved if those facts are indeed *saving truth*.

As Ryrie states:

Hodges use of the word *trust* may be particularly appropriate today, for the word *believe* and *faith* sometimes seem to be watered down so that they convey little more than knowing facts. Trust, however, implies reliance, commitment, and confidence in the object or truths that one is trusting. An element of commitment must be present in trusting Christ for salvation, but it is commitment to Him, His promise, and His ability to give eternal life to those who believe. (*SGS*, 121)

## Evaluation

1. MacArthur's statement that “fidelity constancy, firmness, confidence, reliance, trust, [and] belief’ are all indivisibly wrapped up in the idea of believing.” (*GAJ*, 176) is based on J. B. Lightfoot's discussion of faith (*The Epistle to the Galatians*, Zondervan, pp. 154–155). It seems that MacArthur misuses Lightfoot's conclusions. In that passage Lightfoot clearly recognizes that at times *faith* (Gr. *pistes*) has the idea of trust and at others the idea of trustfulness or what MacArthur calls faithfulness. At other times Lightfoot states both ideas are present and at others “Fidelity, constancy, firmness, confidence, reliance, trust, belief—these are the links which connect the two extremes...” MacArthur concludes that

the two extremes *faith* and *faithfulness* are always present. (In essence he confuses the meaning of *pistis* with *pistos*, the latter does mean faithful.) If this were true then Eph. 2:8 would be translated “For by grace you are saved through *faithfulness*...” thus making salvation a process of faithfulness. In other words a salvation by works. Though MacArthur claims that he believes in salvation by faith alone, this redefinition of faith contradicts that claim.

2. Those within the Reformed theological tradition, that which traces its roots to John Calvin, often explain faith as understanding (*notitia*) assent (*assensus*) and trust (*fiducia*). This explanation has numerous problems

a. It fails to recognize that the Latin *fides* is a poor translation of the Greek *pistes* (faith). Lightfoot recognizes this in the passage cited above, but not included in MacArthur's citation.

b. This view bases its meaning for the Greek *pistes* on the Hebrew which is poor linguistic methodology as demonstrated by James Barr in *Semantics of Biblical Language*.

c. This definition contains a redundancy. Since the Latin *fiducia* was used to translate the Greek *pistes* (faith) this definition in effect says: faith consists of understanding, assent, and faith. It is invalid to define a term with itself. Reformed theologian Gordon Clark recognized this in *Faith and Saving Faith* and suggested that understanding and assent *when properly understood* describe faith. *Webster's Third International Dictionary* gives as one meaning of assent, “the accepting as true or certain of something.”

For example, when I sit down to fill out my tax return I first understand the financial facts. I record them in their proper places and then add them up. I check and recheck my figures, but when I finally assent to their accuracy I stop checking and rest in their reliability. Assent, accepting facts to be true, is faith.

In the same way when a person understands the facts of the Gospel, that they are a sinner, that Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God died for their sins and rose again the third day and assents to their truthfulness, he then rests or relies upon Christ alone for his salvation. He believes they are true. The Apostle John makes this abundantly clear in John 3:18, “He who believes is not condemned, but he who believes not is condemned already because He has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Clearly for John the only condition for salvation is belief and for condemnation, no belief.

It must also be noted that not all Reformed theologians accept this threefold definition of faith. Clark is one example and Calvin himself another. Calvin defined faith as “a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us.” Calvin held that assurance was an essential part of believing in Christ. So Calvin disagreed with MacArthur. Later Reformed theologians changed their definition of faith which seriously effected their understanding of assurance of salvation. Hodges cites Reformed theologian Robert L Dabney to illustrate this, “The source of this error [about faith and assurance] is no doubt that doctrine concerning faith which the first Reformers, as Luther and Calvin were led to adopt . . . It is very obvious to the attentive reader that these views of faith and assurance which we have examined ground themselves in the faulty definitions of saving faith which we received from the first Reformers. They, as we saw, defined saving faith as a belief that “Christ saved me,” making the assurance of hope of its necessary essence. Now, the later Reformers, and those learned, holy and modest teachers of the Reformed Churches. . . have subjected this view to searching examination and rejected it (as does the Westminster Assembly) on scriptural grounds. (AF, 2089).

By placing obedience and faithfulness into the definition of faith, the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone was subtly altered with the result that the grounds of the believers assurance was shifted away from the promise of God's Word to the obedience in the believer's life.



3. MacArthur wants to draw a distinction between faith in the person of Christ and faith in facts. This may sound good but contains a subtle error. No one today, prior to salvation, has a direct knowledge of Jesus Christ. We only have an indirect knowledge. Our knowledge about the person of Christ is based on the facts revealed to us about Christ in the Bible. Because we believe the facts the Bible tells us about the person of Christ we are then led to a personal relationship with Christ. The object of belief is always facts. Someone may object that the Bible says we must “believe in” Jesus rather than “believe that” Jesus. But the Gospel of John uses both phrases interchangeably. They are virtually synonymous.

4. Drawing a distinction between “intellectual faith” and other types of faith is based on a nonbiblical distinction. With what do we believe if not with our minds. We must agree with Hodges and Ryrie that the Bible never recognizes this sort of distinction. MacArthur seeks support for a faith that goes beyond understanding and assent saying that the demons had that type of faith in James 2:19. But a careful reading of James 2:19 shows that the issue was not the shallowness of the demon's faith, but the wrong object of their faith. They believed God was one. This is not saving truth. A person is not saved by a belief in monotheism or the Trinity, but by faith alone in Christ's finished, substitutionary death on the cross.

### Conclusion

Answering the question “what is saving faith?” involves much more than offering simple definitions. As I have attempted to show, the definitions offered often are built on underlying assumptions which must be revealed and tested by the light of Scripture.

The danger in MacArthur's position lies in its effect upon the believer's assurance of salvation. Those who hold to the Lordship position suggest that the type of faith required for salvation is in some way different from the type of faith exercised by everybody, everyday. The difference between saved and unsaved is the *kind* of faith, not the *object* of faith. The central issue in the Lordship position is not merely the acceptance of Jesus authority or Lordship, but the contention that a person can have a faith in Jesus as their savior that is not saving. MacArthur calls it a “spurious” faith (FAAJ, 16). Yet the Apostle John knows of no such thing. According to Lordship, the only way for a believer to know if he has the right kind of faith is through works. Thus making personal experience and self-evaluation the basis of assurance and not the promise of God. Thus, true assurance that one has exercised saving faith must be delayed until death, for it will not be until then that the works of one's life are evident.

Appeal for support to their position is usually made to John 2:23–24:

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many *believed in His name*, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.” (emphasis added)

The crucial phrase is “believed in His name” (*episteusan eis to onoma autou*) the identical phrase is used by John in the next chapter. There it refers to the basis for condemnation, not believing in the name of the only begotten Son of God. In fact, John's stock phrase for expressing the gospel is the verb *pisteuo* plus the preposition *eis*. Thus by every canon of interpretation and the rule of consistency those John refers to in 2:23 must be genuine believers.

The objection is then raised that if they were believers why didn't Jesus trust Himself to them? The answer is too simple for them to understand. Though these believers knew enough to accept Jesus as Savior, they did not know enough Bible doctrine to have changed their political agenda for the Messiah

or to become trustworthy. Just because someone gets saved does not mean they are automatically trustworthy. Again we see the superficial and shallow anthropology often exemplified by naïve theologians.

Usually these same theologians argue that the faith mentioned in John 2 is spurious or superficial is because it is based on the observance of signs, the miracles of Christ. Yet is signs produce only a superficial faith why did John write,

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these [signs] have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30–31)

John wrote about the signs Jesus performed to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah so people would believe. To claim the faith in John 2 is spurious because it is based on signs contradicts the entire purpose of the fourth gospel.

Grace advocates suggest saving faith is not a unique type of faith, but is saving because its object is the promise of God that Christ paid for our sins in full and that He is the only way to salvation. Thus if one believes that Jesus Christ died as a substitute for one's sins, was buried and rose again on the third day (1 Cor. 14:3–4), that is sufficient, to add commitment, submission to Christ's authority, yielding to Christ's authority (FAAJ, 13), or anything else is to add works to the gospel.

It is interesting to note that the circumstances which have driven these men to opposing answers to the question are pretty much the same. We live in an age when many people have made professions of faith, yet their lives show no evidence of a regenerated nature. MacArthur has suggested that the reason is that the demands of full obedience as part of faith are left out of many gospel offers. Hodges suggests that to include that is a subtle form of works salvation. He offers a different answer to the question of the relationship of works to faith which we will examine more fully in the next issue.

In this issue I have shown that in answering the question “what is saving faith” MacArthur has indeed added the element of obedience or continued faithfulness. This goes beyond the Scripture and enters the realm of works-salvation heresy.

The Scripture is clear that faith is trusting or relying with confidence upon the work of Christ alone for salvation. It is, as Hodges and Ryrie argue, trusting the *saving* facts contained in the promises of God. I believe that one reason there are so many who make professions and show no evidence may be because they have not truly understood or entrusted themselves to the saving facts.

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