

GOSPEL WARS

Part 2

By Robert Dean, Jr.

[Author's note: For a detailed study of the controversial James 2:14-26 passage order Lessons 45-49 in the 98 James series]

In the previous paper I began to look at the questions raised in the current Lordship Salvation controversy. In the present debate the foremost proponent of the Lordship Salvation position is John MacArthur, Jr. Pastor of Grace Community Church in California and author of *The Gospel According to Jesus (GAJ)*. On the opposite side of the debate are the advocates of the Free Grace position, represented by Zane Hodges, author of *Absolutely Free (AF)* and Dr. Charles Ryrie, author of *So Great Salvation (SGS)*. While there are numerous other advocates of both positions spread among scholars and pastors, these are the main works in the current debate and so are the focus of these articles. The purpose of these articles is to help our readers understand the arguments more clearly by offering a comparison of their statements in reference to six key questions raised in the debate. These six questions are: 1) what is saving faith? 2) what is the basis for the believer's assurance of salvation? 3) what is the relationship of faith to works? 4) what is the relationship of discipleship to salvation? 5) what is the relationship of repentance to salvation? and 6) what is the meaning of "Lord" in "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."?

The first of these questions was the subject of the previous newsletter. The remaining five can be grouped into two categories. Questions two through five all relate to similar factors involving the relationship of faith to works. The sixth question concerns the meaning of "Lord." These are the subject of this paper.

What is the Relationship of Faith to Works? and What is the Basis for the Believer's Assurance?

The current debate reveals two opposing answers to this question. Lordship advocates ground personal assurance on evidence in the life of the Christian, grace advocates ground assurance on the promise of God as revealed in His Word. Since the Lordship position emphasizes works as the evidence of salvation, I will delay making comments until the conclusion of that section.

MacArthur

The Bible teaches clearly that the evidence of God's work in a life is the *inevitable* fruit of transformed behavior (1 John 3:10). Faith that does not result in righteous living is dead and cannot save (James 2:14-17). Professing Christians utterly lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance they are saved (1 John 2:4). (emphasis added, *GAJ*, 23)

Genuine assurance comes from seeing the Holy Spirit's transforming work in one's life, not from clinging to the memory of some experience. (*GAJ*, 23)

Obedience is the *inevitable* manifestation of true faith. (emphasis added, *GAJ*, 175)

Here is how Peter described God's saving work: "His divine power has granted to us

everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence (2 Peter 1:3, emphasis MacArthur's). Yet he taught that the proof of faith's reality is the virtue it produces in the life of the believer (2 Peter 1:5-9). (GAJ, 217)

I am committed to the biblical truth that salvation is forever. Contemporary Christians have come to refer to this as the doctrine of eternal security. Perhaps the Puritans' terminology is more appropriate; they spoke of the perseverance of the saints. The point is not that God guarantees security to everyone who will *say* he accepts Christ, but rather that those whose faith is genuine will prove their salvation is secure by persevering to the end in the way of righteousness.” (GAJ, 98)

True believers *will* persevere. If a person turns against Christ, it is proof that person was never saved. (For Biblical support MacArthur cites 1 John 2:19 and the example of Judas.) (GAJ, 98)

In summary, MacArthur teaches that the Bible distinguishes between a genuine faith in Christ and a spurious or non genuine faith in Christ. The only way a person may determine if the faith in Christ is genuine is through an inevitable, transformed life (not simply imperceptible, but nevertheless real fruit). How does MacArthur, and can MacArthur distinguish between the moral reformation of the religious unbeliever and the spiritual renovation of the believer? It seems that if the ground of assurance is in a transformed life, then many unbelievers who have gone through a moral reformation might have a false security as well.

Hodges

Prof. Hodges asserts that the Holy Spirit imparts an assurance of salvation at the moment of faith. Not that the believer might doubt later, but that the ultimate ground of assurance is not in works, moral transformation, or virtue, but in the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

But how, indeed, is this assurance conveyed? The answer by now should be obvious. The same miracle-working Word which regenerates also imparts assurance to the heart that believes. Indeed, the two things are both simultaneous and inseparable. (AF, 50)

This is not to say, however, that later on Martha could not have doubted this truth [if she believed in Christ she would never die (Jn. 11:26)]. Even John the Baptist doubted (Lk. 7:18-20).

Commenting on 2 Peter 1:10 Hodges writes:

We should not suppose, as some have done, that Peter regarded the call and election of his *brethren* as “unsure.” Indeed, the words “make . . . sure, translate a Greek phrase that can be rendered to “confirm” or “verify” these things *to themselves*. A simple reading of his statements in verses 2-4 should dispel a notion like that. (AF, 174)

Later he adds:

It is utterly wrong to imagine that the first generation of Christians, converted under apostolic doctrine, wrestled with the problem of assurance as do so many evangelicals today. If we think that Peter's readers needed some other grounds of personal assurance than

the guarantees that Jesus Christ Himself made to them as believers, we do so without a shred of support from the biblical text. (*AF*, 175)

Ryrie

The Bible offers two grounds for assurance. The objective ground is that God's Word declares that I am saved through faith. Therefore, I believe Him and His Word and am assured that what He says is true (John 5:24; 1 John 5:1). The subjective ground relates to my experiences. Certain changes do accompany salvation, and when I see some of those changes, then I can be assured that I have received the new life. Some of those changes are keeping His commandments (1 John 2:3); loving other believers (1 John 2:9-11; 3:14); and doing right things (1 John 2:29; 3:9). It goes without saying that I will never keep all His commandments, nor will I love all other believers, nor will I always do right things. But the fact that these experiences have come into my life, whereas they were absent before, gives assurance that the new life is present (2 Corinthians 5:1) (*SGS*, 143)

Ryrie's view suggests that fruit is necessarily the result of regeneration, but that fruit is or may be less than MacArthur's transformed life. Hodges, would disagree and say that fruit is not necessarily present. This writer agrees with Hodges.

For there to be fruit, i.e., production, one must ask: what are the dynamics of spiritual production. Two power sources are mentioned in the Scripture: the Word of God and the Spirit of God working in tandem. If the believer knows no more than Christ's substitutionary death on the cross, then there can and will be no other production than response at salvation. Like the thief on the cross, regeneration takes place, but no experiential sanctification, since there is no bible doctrine in the soul other than soteriological truth to apply for production.

Works as Evidence of Salvation

MacArthur

Faith and works are not incompatible. There is a sense in which Jesus calls even the act of believing a work (John 6:29)—not merely a human work, but a gracious work of God in us. He brings us to faith, then enables and empowers us to believe unto obedience (cf. Romans 16:26). It is precisely here that the key distinction must be made. Salvation by faith does not eliminate work *per se*. It does away with works that are the result of human effort alone (Ephesians 2:8). It abolishes any attempt to merit God's favor by our works (v. 9), but it does not deter God's foreordained purpose that our walk of faith should be characterized by good works (v. 10). (*GAJ*, 33)

If on the other hand, salvation is truly a work of God, it cannot be defective. It cannot fail to impact an individual's behavior. It cannot leave his desires unchanged or his conduct unaltered. It cannot result in a fruitless It is the work of God and will continue steadfastly from its inception to ultimate perfection (Philippians 1:6). (*GAJ*, 74)

Fruit-bearing is the whole point of agriculture. It is also the ultimate test of salvation. (*GAJ*, 126)

The proof of salvation is fruit, for as Christ said, `Ye shall know them by their fruits'" (Matt. 7:16).

Not only does MacArthur insist upon the inevitability of fruit-bearing, but also the certainty that Christians will fail at times.

The mark of a true disciple is not that he never sins, but rather that when he does sin he inevitably returns to the Lord to receive forgiveness and cleansing. Unlike a false disciple, the true disciple will never turn away completely. He may occasionally turn back to his fishing nets, but ultimately he is drawn again to the Master. When Christ confronts him, he will return to a life of service for the savior. (*GAJ*, 104)

A real disciple, on the other hand, may fail Christ but will never turn against Him. A true Christian might temporarily fear to stand up for the Lord but would never willingly sell Him out. Inevitably, true disciples will falter, but when they fall into sin, they will seek cleansing and not wallow in the mire (cf. 2 Peter 2:22). Their faith is neither fragile nor temporary; it is a dynamic and ever-growing commitment to the Savior. (*GAJ*, 105; cf., also 192, 202, 227)

Hodges

A clear statement of Hodges on fruitful and barren Christians is found on pp. 117-8 in *AF* where he discusses 2 Peter 1:8-10. It is summarized here.

(After quoting 2 Peter 1:8) “The key to Christian fruitfulness,” asserts the apostle, “is found in the very qualities I have just told you to add to your faith. With these things present and abounding in your experience, you will by no means live a barren or unproductive life.”

Yet once again, like all the other New Testament writers Peter takes nothing for granted in the Christian's pursuit of holiness. To be sure, it is highly desirable that no believer should be “barren or unfruitful.” The qualities the apostle has named, if added to the life, will guarantee that he or she is not.

But Peter can conceive of an alternative situation as well. He describes it this way: “For he who lacks these things is blind, cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged [cleansed] from his old sins” 2 Peter 1:9).

It goes without saying that the apostle is not speaking here of unsaved people. Of course unsaved people do not possess these spiritual qualities. Peter does not need to state that. Instead, he is clearly thinking of a saved person, for the kind of individual he has in mind has experienced God's forgiveness, and has been “cleansed from his old sins.”

But, regrettably, such a person has lost any awareness of God's forgiving grace in days gone by. Where once there was spiritual vision, now there is shortsightedness and loss of spiritual vision, now there is shortsightedness and loss of perception. And this is precisely because the precious qualities that make a believer fruitful are tragically lacking.

Obviously where these qualities are missing, so also is the fruit.

How strange that in our day and time we have been told so often that fruitlessness is a sure sign that a person is unsaved. Certainly we did not get this idea from the Bible. Rather the Bible teaches that unfruitfulness in a believer is a sure sign that one is no longer moving forward, no longer growing in Christ. It is a sign that the Christian is spiritually sick, and

until well again, cannot enjoy spiritual success.

Ryrie

So we read a statement like this: “A moment of failure does not invalidate a disciple's credentials.” (*GAJ*, 199) My immediate reaction to such a statement is to want to ask if two moments would? Or a week of defection, or a month, or a year? Or two? How serious a failure and for how long before we must conclude that such a person was in fact not saved? Lordship teaching recognizes that “no one will obey perfectly,” (*GAJ*, 174) but the crucial question is simply how imperfectly can one obey and yet be sure that he “believed” in the lordship/mastery salvation sense? If “salvation requires total transformation” (*GAJ*, 183) and I do not meet that requirement, then am I not saved? Or if my transformation is less than total at any stage of my Christian life, was I not saved in the first place?

Suppose I was genuinely willing to forsake all when I believed, but later on I rejected that willingness or some part of it. How am I to view my salvation? Assuming that willingness was present when I believed, then according to the lordship view, I was truly saved. And if I believe in eternal security, then I cannot lose that salvation. So we are back to a relative amount or degree of disobedience in the Christian life which can be tolerated without doubting the original reception of salvation. A moment of defection, we have been told, is not an invalidation. Or “the true disciple will never turn away completely” (*GAJ*, 104). Could he turn away almost completely? Or ninety percent? Or fifty percent and still be sure he was saved? Further we are told that the motivation which cause us to defect even momentarily makes the difference between proving the reality of falsity of our faith. The motivation it is said, is permissible, but the motivation of treachery is not (*GAJ*, 104).

Frankly, all this relativity would leave me in confusion and uncertainty. Every defection, especially if it continued, would make me unsure of my salvation. Any serious sin or unwillingness would do the same. If I come to a fork in the road of my Christian experience and choose the wrong branch and continue on it, does that mean I was never on the Christian road to begin with? For how long can I be fruitless without having a lordship advocate conclude that I was never really saved? (*SGS*, 48, 49)

Comments

1) MacArthur and Ryrie are very clear that fruit is the inevitable product of a transformed life. Hodges is less clear. In a personal conversation Prof. Hodges stated to me that he believes that every true believer has produced fruit to some extent, but he theoretically allows for a true believer who produces no works. It is this theoretical position that seems to get Free Grace advocates in trouble. Many who hear them believe that they hold to a position that a believer need not and may not produce fruit or be obedient. At other times they indicate something different. In a response to a review of *The Gospel Under Siege (GUS)* by S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. Hodges stated that if all Dr. Johnson meant was that a regenerated nature must produce something in keeping with its new nature then they were in agreement. When I informed Johnson of this he was surprised and told me that was not what Hodges had written in *GUS*. Ryrie and others who hold to a Free Grace position are clear that works and fruit will follow. The real issue is how much. This is indicated in the last statement from Ryrie above. The inherent problem with this is that it leads to fruit inspection and quantification. How much fruit? and What is true fruit?

MacArthur correctly identifies this as inconsistent. In “Faith according to the Apostle James” (*JETS*, Vol. 33, No. 1, p. 33 footnote 97) he states:

Ryrie, for example, says in the footnotes under James 2 in his study Bible that “genuine faith cannot be `dead' to morality or barren to works” (*Ryrie Study Bible* 1859). But in his book on salvation Ryrie clearly allows for the possibility that faith can fail, leaving the believer in effect both dead to morality and barren of any works (Ryrie, *Great* 48, 141). How he reconciles this apparent discrepancy is not explained.

This is only a discrepancy if MacArthur's own assumptions on faith and perseverance are accepted. In the above quote MacArthur confuses a `dead or barren' faith with the possibility that faith can fail. Just another example of how MacArthur frequently shifts the meanings of his terms in mid paragraph. Ryrie clearly indicates that a believer will produce fruit, but at some time in their later life they may fail for a period of time that conceivably may continue until their death. But when their life is evaluated they did produce fruit no matter how imperceptible it might have been to other believers.

MacArthur of course rejects the idea that a true believer would not turn back to the Lord if he fails. However, as he himself grudgingly admits Christians do fail. The logical implication of this statement is that Christians will never die during a period of failing. This idea that Christians will inevitably return has absolutely no ground in the Scripture. It is based historically on the error developed by Calvin's followers when they redefined faith by adding the element of faithfulness (see discussion in the previous edition, p. 5).

2) Since “faith” means “faithful” for MacArthur, he is merely consistent when he states that fruit is the ultimate test of salvation. He makes a major error in his interpretation of the parable of the soils (Matt. 13:1-23; cf. *GAJ*, 117-127), which leads him to conclude that only the good soil which produces fruit represents the believer. The error he falls into is attempting to quantify fruit. In that passage some bear fruit thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold. Fruitbearing will vary widely among believers. I think a fair implication from the text is that some may only bear fruit one or two-fold. This low level of fruit production may not be observable to others, but is nevertheless fruit. The danger of the Lordship position is that it may lead some to be fruit inspectors which is God's job alone. The person who bears fruit onefold is certainly barren in comparison to the person who bears fruit a hundredfold. But that does not mean that he is not saved. This seems to be Hodges point in his discussion of 2 Peter 1:8,9. True believers, especially in comparison to other believers and whose fruit may be small and imperceptible to others will appear to be fruitful and barren. The Lordship advocate would doubt their salvation.

Fruit is the production, the application of doctrine. If the believer, like the thief on the cross, only knows doctrine related to salvation then the only application can be salvation. How can anyone expect a new believer to apply doctrine of which he is ignorant? Failure to recognize this principle creates confusion for many believers today.

3) Another result of the Lordship position is that no believer can be one hundred percent sure that he or she is saved. At a recent debate on this issue held at DTS between Ken Sarles, a professor of theology, and Dr. Bob Wilkin, editor of the Grace Evangelical Society newsletter, Wilkin asked Sarles (the Lordship advocate) if he was certain of his salvation. Sarles replied 99.9 percent sure, since he was not omniscient and did not want to presume.

It seems to me that this uncertain assurance, whatever the reason, ultimately leads to a spiritual agnosticism. Scripture teaches that if I believe in Jesus as my Savior (John 3:16) I have eternal life. We can know 100 percent what we believe. While we may believe something that is wrong, I do know what I believe. I believe Jesus died as a substitute for my sins. The Bible says if I believe Jesus died for me then I have eternal life as a current and eternal possession. To assert that I cannot have 100 percent certainty of my salvation, must imply that I cannot know with 100 percent certainty if I believe something, no matter what. If I cannot know what I believe then how can I know anything with

certainty. To deny certainty of knowledge of personal belief at best opens the door to subjectivity and agnosticism.

Summary

The personal assurance the believer has is derived from his belief in the saving truth of the Gospel and from the promise of God. Fruit, or spiritual production, is subjectively apprehended. How does one know if the morality produced is a reformation in the energy of the flesh or a product of the Holy Spirit? When does fruit production begin, does it include the initial response of faith alone in Christ alone or does it come only post-salvation? These are questions which must have clear, lucid answers, but are often ignored in the literature.

However, we must agree with Lordship advocates that there are many who profess salvation whose lives appear to have little or no fruit. It is the responsibility of pastors and other Christians to challenge them to move forward in their spiritual life, learn Scripture, and to bear much fruit.

What is the relationship of discipleship to salvation?

MacArthur

Every Christian is a disciple. (This is explained in footnote 1) It is apparent that not every disciple is necessarily a true Christian (cf., John 6:66). The term *disciple* is sometimes used in Scripture in a general sense, to describe those who, like Judas, outwardly followed Christ. It certainly is not restricted to higher level believers. The disciple in Matthew 8:21-22, for example, was anything but committed. (*GAJ*, 196)

Those who teach that obedience and submission are extraneous to saving faith are forced to make a firm but unbiblical distinction between salvation and discipleship. This dichotomy, like that of the carnal/spiritual Christian, sets up two classes of Christians: believers only, and true disciples. Many who hold this position discard the evangelistic intent of virtually every recorded invitation of Jesus, saying those apply to discipleship, not to salvation. (*GAJ*, 30)

Hodges

It is an interpretative mistake of the first magnitude to confuse the terms of discipleship with the offer of eternal life as a free gift. "And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17), is clearly an unconditional benefaction. (*GUS*, 37)

The distinction in question is openly recognized in the Gospel of John. In John 8:30 we are told, "As He spoke these words, many believed in Him." In the original Greek, the words "believed in Him" represent a special construction which is almost . . . unique to the Fourth Gospel. . . . Even a cursory examination of these texts shows that this specialized expression is John's standard way of describing the act of saving faith by which eternal life is obtained. To deny this in John 8:30 would be to go directly counter to the well-established usage of the author. Yet precisely to these individuals who had exercised saving faith Jesus adds: "If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (8:31, 32)

On the authority of Jesus Himself it can be said that the believers of John 8:30 received eternal life in response to their faith. . . . But to these who now had that life, Jesus set forth a

conditional relationship [i.e., discipleship]. (*GUS*, 37,38)

The original Greek word meant neither more nor less than a pupil, a learner. The heavy religious overtones which the word “disciple” has today in English did not exist for the multitudes to whom Jesus spoke the words we are discussing. (*AF*, 67)

Explaining Luke 14:26 Hodges writes:

The Lord's answer to their question was startling. “I you don't hate your family,” He said, “and even your own life, too, you cannot possibly be My pupil.”

It is at once clear that these words set a high price on discipleship. To suggest otherwise is to evade their obvious point.

But equally it should be clear that they have nothing to do with the terms on which we receive eternal life. That should even need saying. yet, tragically, that does need to be said in the modern church In fact, it is one of the major errors of lordship theology that it reads the words of Jesus about discipleship as if they were basically no different from the word He spoke to the woman from Sychar about the water of life. (*AF*, 68)

Every human being possesses physical life as a parental gift, just as every Christian possesses eternal life as a gift from God, our heavenly Father. But education -in both spheres-requires hard work.

It is only when we deal with the issues of spiritual growth and development, that good works have an appropriate role to play. The Bible is clear that in regard to new birth and justification they have no role at all. (*AF*, 71)

Ryrie

The word *disciple* itself means “learner or pupil” It always involved a teacher-student relationship. John the Baptist had his disciples (Matthew 9:14), the Pharisees had theirs (Matthew 22:16), and Paul had his (Acts 9:25).

Our Lord had many (Luke 6:17). Some learned only for a time, then defected and left Him (John 6:66). On Palm Sunday a multitude of disciples followed the Lord, but by the end of the week most of them had also defected (Luke 19:37-39). Some were believers (John 8:31). One at least, Joseph of Arimathea, was a secret disciple for some time (John 19:38). A few belonged to an inner circle of intimate friends (Matthew 10:1; 17:1). Our Lord expected discipleship to involve strict commitment (Luke 14:25-33). (*SGS*, 104)

Great Commission disciples are believers who are learning and obeying. But learning and obeying are not prerequisites for believing; they are products of believing. If the examples of disciples in the Gospels may be carried over into today, then we would have to conclude that there will be some disciples who learn a little, some a lot; some who are totally committed, some who are not some who are secret, some who are visible; some who persevere, some who defect. But all are believers (or at least professing believers who have been baptized). (*SGS*, 105)

Today, the discipleship concept in the Gospels of Teacher-student has been transferred to a

Lord-servant relationship. We are being told that one cannot be a true believer unless he has surrendered to the mastery of Christ over his life. We are told that a person must take Christ's yoke when he believes or he is not a true believer. Again we are told that there is no salvation apart from cross-bearing. Or, in order to be saved, "You must accept Christ as your Savior and your Master. (SGS, 106)

Comment

It is important to observe MacArthur's first quote above on discipleship. There he admits that disciples (saved) can leave Jesus. The verse states that "many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." This seems to contradict everything MacArthur says about perseverance.

Ryrie and Hodges have a much better grasp of discipleship than MacArthur. A disciple was a learner, a student, a pupil. The word itself connotes nothing about the individual's eternal state. Some disciples, as MacArthur admits, were not saved. Some even were secret disciples and were afraid to let it be known. MacArthur erroneously equates salvation to discipleship and ends up in heresy, making works necessary for salvation.

Repentance

MacArthur

Repentance *is* a critical element of saving faith, but one must never dismiss it as simply another word for believing. The Greek word for "repentance" is *metanoia*, from *meta*, "after" and *noeo* "to understand." Literally it means "after thought" or "change of mind," but biblically its meaning doesn't stop there. As *metanoia* is used in the New Testament, it *always* speaks of a change of purpose, and specifically a turning from sin. In the sense Jesus used it, repentance calls for a repudiation of the old life and a turning to God for salvation. (GAJ, 162)

It is a redirection of the human will, a purposeful decision to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead. (GAJ, 163)

Above all, repentance is *not* a pre-salvation attempt to set one's life in order. The call to repentance is not a command to make sin right *before* turning to Christ in faith. Rather it is a command to recognize one's lawlessness and hate it, to turn one's back on it and flee to Christ, embracing Him with wholehearted devotion. (GAJ, 163)

Repentance is not a one-time act. The repentance that takes place at conversion begins a progressive, life-long process of confession (1 John 1:9). (GAJ, 165)

Hodges

Originally these Greek words (*metanoia* and *metanoeo*) meant to change one's mind. But the standard Greek-English dictionary does not list any New Testament passage where the meaning "to change one's mind" actually occurs. (AF, 146)

The call to faith represents the call to eternal salvation. The call to repentance is the call to enter into harmonious relations with God. (AF, 145)

Thus, though genuine repentance *may* precede salvation (as we shall see), it *need not* do so. And because it is not essential to the saving transaction as such, it is in no sense a condition for that transaction. (*AF*, 146)

Ryrie

In both the Old and New Testaments *repentance* means “to change one's mind.” But the question must be asked, About what do you change your mind? (*SGS*, 92)

Repent about what? Change your minds about Jesus of Nazareth. Whatever you thought about Him before or whoever you thought He was, change your minds and now believe that He is God and your Messiah who died and who rose from the dead. *That* repentance saves. (*SGS*, 96)

Commenting on Jesus conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:

It would have been most appropriate to use repent or repentance in the account of the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. But believe is the word used (John 3:12, 15). So if Nicodemus needed to repent, believe must be a synonym; else how could the Lord have failed to use the word repent when talking with him? (*SGS*, 98)

Comments

1) MacArthur fails to distinguish between the repentance of the unsaved turning away from a life of independence, to God in dependence and the repentance of the believer. He says repentance (saving repentance) is progressive, which is consistent with his view that faith is progressive (faith is faithfulness). By doing this he makes repentance a condition of salvation.

2) Ryrie's arguments that repentance is synonymous with belief are more convincing. Even so he would not deny that part of the change of mind toward Jesus involves a rejection of what we trusted before salvation, all of which was sin.

3) Hodges view of repentance is very unusual and few free grace advocates agree with him. Since it is not necessary to hold his position I won't comment further.

Since this critique first appeared Hodges has refined his position on repentance. He has well noted that the Gospel of John was specifically written “that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that by believing you might have life through his name.” (John 20:31). Yet nowhere in this Gospel is the word repentance found. If repentance is necessary to salvation then the apostle John was remiss. Therefore, we must agree with Hodges, repentance is not necessary for salvation, only faith alone in Christ alone.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus as Lord?

MacArthur

We do not “make Christ Lord; He *is* Lord! Those who will not receive Him as Lord are guilty of rejecting Him. (*GAJ*, 28)

The two clearest statements on the way of salvation in all of Scripture both emphasize Jesus'

lordship: . . . [Acts 16:31 and Romans 10:9] No promise of salvation is ever extended to those who refuse to accede to Christ's lordship. (*GAJ*, 28)

Opponents of lordship salvation have gone to great lengths to make the claim that “Lord” in those verses does not mean “Master” but is a reference to His deity. Even if that contention is granted, it simply affirms that those who come to Christ for salvation must acknowledge He is God. The implications of that are even more demanding than if “Lord” only meant “Master”! (*GAJ*, 29)

All of these passages include indisputably the lordship of Christ as part of the gospel to be believed for salvation. We saw that Jesus' lordship includes the ideas of dominion, authority, sovereignty, and the right to govern. (*GAJ*, 207)

Hodges

Commenting on Acts 16:31: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be save, you and your household.” he writes:

Instead of accepting its obvious meaning, therefore, they attempt to extract their own doctrine from the text by way of implication. Thus, for many lordship teachers, justification for their view is found in the fact that Paul and Silas say, “Believe on the LORD Jesus Christ.: They then go on to say that the use of the word “Lord” implies submission to His authority when we believe. (*AF*, 169)

No unsaved sinner can possibly respond appropriately to the lordship of Christ. The capacity to do so is not within one until rebirth. Only at one's new birth does one receive the full range of capabilities needed for Christian submission and obedience. (*AF*, 171)

But although submission to the lordship of Christ is not in any sense a condition for eternal life, it is crucial to the manifestation of that life. Indeed to live as a disciple is to live under the lordship of our Savior. (*AF*, 172)

Ryrie

Of course Jesus is Lord. He is Lord because of who He is. He is also Lord of creation, Lord of history, Lord of salvation, Lord of the church, Lord of disciples, Lord of the future. But even if there were no creation, no history, no salvation, no church, no disciples, no future, He was, is, and always will be Lord. (*SGS*, 70)

What is the meaning of Lord in Romans 10:9-10? . . .

To sum up: Romans 10:9-10 is not dealing with the question of the subjective lordship of Christ, but with His deity and His resurrection. To believe that Jesus (the man) is Lord (God) and that He is alive (which means that He died) results in righteousness and salvation. Notice too that this interpretation is held by several generation of scholars who represent differing schools of theological thought. (Ryrie had supporting quotes from W. G. T. Shedd (Calvinist), B. F. Westcott (Anglican), Everett Harrison (Evangelical) and the NIV Study Bible) (*SGS*, 73)

Comments

MacArthur continuously creates the exegetical fallacy of reading his theology into the text. When "Lord" is used in Acts 16:31 and Rom. 10 the issue is not His authority but His deity. Again it is obvious that MacArthur fails to distinguish between justification and sanctification. Learning to orient to the authority of Jesus is the process of spiritual growth, sanctification. Sanctification is subsequent to justification. To be justified, all that is required is faith, faith in Jesus substitutionary atonement on the cross. To insist that any sanctification mandates are part of justification is to slip back to the heresy of Roman Catholicism.

Only as the believer advances in his understanding of Bible doctrine can the concept of Jesus authority in His life have relevance. To assert that the unbeliever must be completely oriented to divine authority to be saved is so foreign to statements like Acts 16:31 and John 3:16, 18 that it is amazing theologians can consider "belief" and "submission" to be synonymous.

Conclusion

I hope that this comparison and contrast of these three writers has been helpful. The issues are not necessarily simple, but are extremely important for they effect what we tell the unsaved they must do to be saved. We dare not add or subtract a thing.

The lordship position does not reflect the teaching of the Scriptures, it is a subtle, but dangerous error which front loads the gospel offer with obligations which only the regenerated believer can recognize, understand, or fulfill. To do this is to engage in the Galatian heresy. The gospel must remain clear, faith alone in Christ alone.

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