

Articles by Zane Hodges

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Our Living Lord

The earliest Christian churches were like tiny islands surrounded by a sea of pagan religion. Yet these believers made a spectacular claim: Jesus of Nazareth, who had died on a Roman cross, was alive--and He was Lord of all!

Obviously, in a world where there were "many gods and many lords" (1Co 8:5), this was a bold confession to make. But this truth brought courage and power to those who had found eternal life through faith. Very simply it meant that the Jesus they trusted for God's free gift possessed "all authority... in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18).

And that in turn meant that they could come to Him for anything they needed.

Indeed, the members of the earliest churches were described as people who "called on the name of the Lord." The Greek word for "called on" could indicate a call for help and assistance and, in a legal setting, it could mean "to appeal" (Ac 25:11-12, 21, 25, etc.). Thus, in addressing the Corinthian church in his first epistle to them, Paul writes:

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours (1Co 1:2; italics added).

The members of the Corinthian church were people who were "washed," "sanctified," and "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" (1Co 6:11), and they shared this privileged status with believers all over the Roman

world who gathered as they did for worship and to invoke the aid and assistance of the risen Christ. In every place where Christians met, they called on the name of the Lord.

In fact, this very designation is used to describe the Christian disciples in Acts. In Ananias's prayer to the Lord, he notes that the Saul he is being sent to see "has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name" (Ac 9:14), and those who heard Saul preaching Christ in Jerusalem "were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem?'" (9:21).

In his last epistle to Timothy, the apostle urges him to "flee... youthful lusts" and to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2Ti 2:22). And using a similar expression, the apostle Peter writes, "And if you call on the Father... conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1Pe 1:17).

One can scarcely overestimate the immense significance that "calling on the name of the Lord" had for the earliest Christians. All the more so since the term "Lord" was used of the Roman emperor and because those who had the special privilege of Roman citizenship could "call on" him for legal justice and redress. It was precisely this privilege which Paul himself resorted to in the face of the judicial unfairness of the Roman procurator, Festus. The exchange between them is highly charged:

But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"

Then Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know... I appeal to Caesar" (Ac 25:9-11; italics added).

But the word "appeal" which Paul uses here is the very one that is employed in the New Testament phrase "call on the name of the Lord."

Not all Christians held Roman citizenship as Paul did. That privilege was a limited one in Paul's day. But all Christians did hold citizenship in heaven, and it was their right to "appeal" to a higher court than Caesar's. Indeed, they could even "call on" the name of Caesar's Lord since they worshiped Him who is "Lord of all."

And as they relied on His Name, they were living by faith in God's Son.

Saving the Saved

Naturally, there was a great deal to "call on" the Lord about. Every problem of life, every emergency or danger, every need, every concern, could be brought to Him. And He was Lord. He could save, deliver, defend, provide. It was to this distinctively Christian privilege of calling on the Lord that Paul was referring in Romans 10, when he wrote:

For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Ro 10:11-13; italics added).

"There is no need," Paul says, "for anyone who has believed in Christ to be put to shame. It doesn't matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, because Jesus is

Lord of all and lavishly generous to all who call on Him for aid. In fact, in the words of Scripture itself (Joel 2:32), deliverance is available to all who call upon the Lord for it!"

Many readers of Romans 10 have thought that the text talks about how a person could be saved from hell. But this completely ignores the fact that in the New Testament "calling on the name of the Lord" is a Christian activity. It also ignores the precise statements of the Pauline text.

Significantly, immediately after the words we have quoted, Paul writes:

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? (Ro 10:14-15a)

It is clear that we have here a series of steps which, to Paul's mind, are distinct and successive. Rearranging them into their proper temporal sequence, we get this:

- (1) Preaching can occur only if first the preacher is sent to do it.
- (2) Hearing can occur only if first the message is preached.
- (3) Believing can occur only if first the message is heard.
- (4) Calling on the name of the Lord can occur only if first a person has believed.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" Paul asks. How can one invoke the aid and assistance of a Lord in whom he does not believe?

Obviously, faith in Christ must precede our effort to obtain His aid and deliverance in daily life.

So the salvation Paul has in mind here is broader in scope than simply salvation from eternal damnation. Instead it embraces the whole range of spiritual and personal deliverances which a risen Lord is able to bestow on those who call upon Him for it.

But this is not to be done in a corner. In fact, the other New Testament references to "calling on the name of the Lord" imply that this activity is associated with the public life and witness of the churches. When Paul came to Damascus with authority to bind all who called on the Lord's name (Ac 9:14), he was not looking for closet Christians! He was looking for those who were publicly identified with that Name.

That is why, immediately before the words we have been talking about in Romans 10, Paul made this declaration:

But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way... But what does it say? "The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Ro 10:6a, 8-9).

As is well known, this famous statement has been used by many to present "confession" as a coordinate condition with faith for obtaining eternal life. But this error should never be made.

To begin with, if that were the intent of Paul's declaration, it would stand absolutely alone on the pages

of the New Testament. Not even Paul himself introduces this idea elsewhere in his thirteen letters.

Worse yet, the gospel of John, which explicitly claims to be written to bring people to eternal life (Jn 20:30-31), never even once lays down "confession" as a condition for that life.

Some have tried to deflect the impact of these observations by claiming that the Pauline statement really only teaches that confession is an inevitable result of salvation. But this explanation is not tenable. This is clear from the following verse: "For with the heart one believes to [Greek, "for"] righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to [Greek, "for"] salvation" (Ro 10:10).

Not only does this verse not say that confession is the result of salvation, it states instead that "salvation" results from confession,¹ while "righteousness" results from faith!

And here lies the real meaning of the text. By "righteousness" Paul obviously refers to "the righteousness of faith" (v. 6) or, in other words, to the truth of justification by faith (v. 3-4). And, for Paul, confession has nothing at all to do with that righteousness. The faith that occurs in the heart is the one and only condition for the imputed righteousness of God.

Paul's position on justification by faith alone is in no way modified or altered by Romans 10:9-10. "Confession" was not a part of justification precisely because confession is not a condition for the righteousness of God. Faith alone is the condition for that, just as faith alone is the condition for eternal life.

But confession with the mouth is a condition for the kind of salvation Paul has in mind here. For, as we have already seen from the verses that follow (v. 11-13), Paul is really thinking about the kind of salvation which is available to the believer in Christ if that believer is among those who regularly appeal to the name of the risen Lord.

It follows from this that the confession Paul calls for here is not merely telling my neighbor or close friend about my conversion. It is much more than that. It is my public identification as a member of that circle of people who "call on the name of the Lord." Indeed, to call on Him like this in public prayer is nothing less than a confession with my mouth that "Jesus is Lord." My whole experience of Christian victory and deliverance depends on my willingness to do this. The faith that is in my heart needs to be expressed through my lips!

Here, then, we meet the "saving of the saved." Drawing upon that wonderful flexibility which always marked the Greek words for "salvation," Paul stretches our horizons in a challenging fashion. He preached salvation in its most sweeping sense. Those who had been justified by faith were uniquely positioned to experience God's "deliverance" in their lives. They could dare to number themselves openly among those who called on the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Of course, Paul knew only too well that this did not mean the removal of all problems. What it really meant was victory in and over those problems, as one lived the Christian life by faith in God's Son.

And even when Paul faced impending martyrdom, this confidence did not desert him. And though, at his first

hearing, no human help was available to him (2Ti 4:16), still he could say triumphantly: "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me... And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (v. 17).

Yet death was coming, as he knew so well (2Ti 4:6-8), but even that death would be a glorious victory. For by his martyrdom for Christ Paul would be rescued forever from the evil against which he had struggled so long:

And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for [or, save me into] His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen! (2Ti 4:18; *italics added*).

Such in fact is always the experience of those who "call on the name of the Lord" in faith. Tragedy is turned into triumph, disaster into deliverance, by the powerful lordship of Jesus Christ.

Yes, no matter what the circumstances may be, the Lord Jesus Christ can save the saved!

Confident Living

But Christ can do more than that. He can live so dynamically within His disciples that they can enjoy an experiential realization of His presence. They can know that He is actually at work in them. This is more, of course, than knowing that we are saved, although our assurance of eternal life is fundamental to all vital Christian experience. What we are talking about is the result of fellowship with Christ, and it is nothing less than the manifestation in our lives of His indwelling presence and power.

It is thrilling, of course, to have a Lord to call on who is "far above all principality and power and might and

dominion, and every name that is named" (Eph 1:21). But it is also thrilling to have this same Lord manifesting Himself in our lives--and to be able to recognize that fact.

Such indeed was the confident persuasion of the apostle Paul as he served the risen Christ. And this confidence comes through powerfully as he closes his second letter to the Corinthian church. In the final chapter of that epistle, he writes this:

I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time... that if I come again I will not spare--since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you (2Co 13:2-4).

What boldness there is in these words! Yet, at the same time, what humility and dependence.

Paul had critics and enemies in the city of Corinth. The believers there listened to these people more than they should have (2Co 10:7-12; 11:12-15). Even some of his own converts apparently wondered whether Paul could furnish "proof of Christ speaking" in him. But Paul had no doubt that he could do that because of the power of the Lord he served.

True, the Savior had suffered crucifixion in the "weakness" of His self-giving death for men. But He had also risen from the dead, and now He lived by the very "power of God." And though Paul knew that he, too, was weak, yet in fellowship with his Lord he could be strong toward these Corinthian believers: "... we shall live with

Him by the power of God toward you" (13:4; italics added).

Yet Paul is not so arrogant as to suppose that such spiritual confidence was his alone. The Corinthians themselves could likewise enjoy a confidence like this:

Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know [or, recognize] yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disqualified? (2Co 13:5).

Regrettably, however, these forceful words have been sadly misconstrued. They have been read by some interpreters as though they were a challenge to the Corinthians to find out whether they were really saved or not!² This is unthinkable. After twelve chapters in which Paul takes their Christianity for granted, can he only now be asking them to make sure they are born again? The question answers itself.

Let the readers of this book examine 2 Corinthians on their own. They will see clearly how often the apostle affirms in one way or another his conviction that his readers are genuinely Christian. Think, for example, of these words:

... inasmuch as you are manifestly declared to be an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart (2Co 3:3; italics added).

No indeed! Paul is not saying, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are born again, or justified." He is saying, however, "Take stock and see if you are in the faith." But that's a different matter.

Surprisingly, the closest analogy to these words of the apostle is to be found in a statement toward the end of his first letter to this same church. There Paul writes like this: "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1Co 16:13; italics added).

Elsewhere Paul speaks of those who are "weak in the faith" (Ro 14:1) and of others who need to be "sound in the faith" (Tit 1:13). Even Peter's words suggest a parallel:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith (1Pe 5:8-9; italics added).

To be "in the faith," therefore, is to be operating and acting within the parameters of our Christian convictions and beliefs, precisely as Paul claims to be doing in the immediately preceding verses. It meant living in a dynamic, faith-oriented connection with Jesus Christ, who Himself was living by the power of God (v. 4).

Paul had confidence that he could demonstrate to the Corinthians that he did live like that--that Christ was indeed speaking in him. But he also thinks they can demonstrate the same thing about their own experience of Christ.

"Take a look at yourselves," he challenges them, "test yourselves. Can you not recognize yourselves as people in whom Jesus Christ is very much alive? You most certainly can--unless, however, you are `disqualified.'"

The word "disqualified" is a significant one for Paul. He used it in his first letter to the Corinthian church when he wrote as follows:

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1Co 9:27; italics added).

But in that passage the image of the Christian race, or contest, was prominently in Paul's mind. Here in 2 Corinthians the simple translation "disapproved" is probably to be preferred.

So long as the Corinthians were not living "outside the boundaries of their faith," so long as their lives were not "disapproved" by God, they could indeed discern in their own experience--as Paul did in his--the reality of the indwelling Christ.

If John the Evangelist had written this text, he might well have spoken of "abiding in Christ" and of "Christ abiding in us." He might also have spoken of the fruit that will be the manifestation of God's "approval" on that kind of an experience.

Yet whether John or Paul, or any other New Testament writer, each bears witness to the dynamic reality of a life lived in fellowship with Him who is Lord of all. They fully believe, and teach, that this reality can be richly known and experienced by those who are born again.

The songwriter has captured it well:

Once far from God and dead in sin,
No light my heart could see;
But in God's Word the light I found,
Now Christ liveth in me.

Christ liveth in me, Christ liveth in me,
Oh! What a salvation this, that Christ liveth in me.
-Maj. D. W. Whittle
Christ Liveth in Me

Conclusion

Christ lives in me! What a marvelous conviction to possess! What an excellent experience to live out!

But however rich and deep, however full and fruitful our realization of this privilege may become, it began for all of us in exactly the same way. It began with a simple childlike act of faith. It began with a single, irreversible appropriation of the water of life.

It never started for anyone any other way, and it never will. For the words of our living and all-powerful Lord stand as an authoritative and immutable testimony to God's gracious way of salvation: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (Jn 6:47).

There are no other conditions. There are no hidden clauses or commitments. Whoever wants it, can have it. The Spirit and the bride themselves say so:

"Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17).

The chorus writer was correct after all. He breathed the spirit of the Bible when he penned these words:

Absolutely free! Yes, it is absolutely free!

For God has given salvation, absolutely free!

Absolutely free! Yes, it is absolutely free!

For God has given His great salvation, absolutely free!

-Author unknown

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Notes

(After the first reference to an author's work, later references to the same work often use a shortened form and the reader is referred back to the initial reference for full bibliographic details.)

Chapter 15

1Thus the Bauer-Gingrich-Danker lexicon (for bibliographic data, see chap. 2, n. 4) translates the phrase in Romans 10:10 this way: "confess to salvation = so as to receive salvation" (p. 229; italics in the original).

2See MacArthur, pp. 23, 190, 197. On page 190, MacArthur states in a footnote: "As a pastor, I take issue with Hodges' assertion that Paul was unconcerned about the destiny of members of the flocks he pastored." The word "unconcerned" has a pejorative ring to it. And, of course, I too am a pastor. My statement is found in *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981), p. 95, where I affirm that Paul was not "constantly concerned about the eternal destiny of his readers."

MacArthur's response to me is inadequate for two reasons. (1) He is reading the modern church situation back into the New Testament. It has been estimated on the basis of the number of names mentioned in the greetings found in Romans 16:3-15, that the church at Rome itself was not likely to be much larger than about fifty people. And this must have been one of the larger

congregations. If Paul did not know each member of his churches personally, the elders of each church did. It was quite easy for New Testament church leaders to find out whether or not an individual understood and believed the gospel in congregations as small as New Testament churches usually were.

But this leads us to (2). MacArthur's own doctrine of faith and assurance does not even permit the believer himself to know for sure whether he has truly believed. So how could a pastor find out if a person does, without watching that person's behavior over a long period of time? And even then, the pastor could not be sure just as the believer himself could not be sure, since perseverance to the end is required!

But Paul did not preach the sort of gospel that creates this kind of uncertainty and doubt. Paul knew that the Philippian jailer and his family were saved the very night they believed and, accordingly, he baptized them that same night (Ac 16:33)! If there is any significant number of people in our congregations today who are actually unsaved, the fault is ours for not preaching the gospel clearly and for not making sure that each individual understands and believes it.

But such faults are not to be laid at the feet of Paul or of Pauline-trained church elders! They preached and taught a clear gospel of faith and assurance, and they did so "publicly and from house to house" (Ac 20:20).

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Problem Passages in Paul

Certain passages in the Pauline letters have been taken to prove that perseverance in good works is an inevitable outcome of genuine saving faith. As has already been pointed out, this kind of idea destroys the believer's ground of assurance. A man who must wait for works to verify his faith cannot know until life's end whether or not his faith was real. This leads to the absurd conclusion that a man can believe in Christ without knowing whether he has believed in Christ!

Naturally the Pauline texts in question are all consistent with his fundamental doctrine of justification by faith apart from works. When the Apostle writes that it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Tit. 3:5), his true conviction comes through clearly. Paul could never have so expressed himself if he had regarded works as the real means by which we can know we are saved. To the contrary, he directs our focus away from the works we have done to the mercy of God. How can anyone read Paul and still believe that we can only be sure of God's mercy by our works?

Similarly, Paul also writes, "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5; emphasis added). Can anyone imagine that Paul would then go on to add, "But you need to work or you will not know whether you have been justified or not"! Such a proposition is a monstrous distortion of Pauline truth. Any articulation of the Gospel which can affirm such a thing ought to be forcefully rejected by the Christian

Church.¹ In the next few pages some Pauline statements will be examined which are claimed to lead to the result we have just criticized. A few others will be considered in Chapter 9 in connection with the subject of heirship. The first text that claims attention here is Galatians 6:8.

Galatians 6:8

In Galatians 6:7-9 Paul writes as follows:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

It is important to see exactly what this text says.

"Everlasting life," Paul states, is the direct consequence of sowing to the Spirit, of doing good. Corruption is what you reap if you do evil. It is all part of the law of the harvest. A man gets what he deserves to get.

It goes almost without saying that there is nothing said here about the "inevitable" results of saving faith.

Indeed, the hortatory thrust of the passage shows the opposite. The Galatians must be careful about how they sow. They must never suppose that they can "mock" God or avoid the inexorable law of the harvest. The final reaping is not a foregone conclusion, but rather it is contingent on not "growing weary" while doing good.

But equally there is nothing here about justification by faith or the concept of a free gift. Nothing is plainer than that the "everlasting life" of which Paul speaks is not free, but based on the moral merits of those who

reap it. To deny this is to deny the most obvious aspect of the text.

All becomes clear, however, if we simply remember that the Apostle is addressing believers (see, for example, 3:2-5) who have already been justified by faith and who possess everlasting life as a free gift. Naturally Paul knew that eternal life was freely given (Rom. 6:23; see also Rom. 5:15-18), just as the Apostle John knew this. But Paul is not speaking about what the Galatians already have, but about what they may yet receive. Herein lies the key to this text.

(1) The Nature of Eternal Life

It must not be forgotten that eternal life is nothing less than the very life of God Himself. As such it cannot be thought of as a mere fixed and static entity. Rather, its potentialities are rich beyond the power of the mind to conceive them. Thus we find Jesus declaring, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). From this we learn that eternal life can be experienced in more than one measure or degree.

But it cannot be experienced at all unless first received as a free gift. Not surprisingly, the Creator of the universe has illustrated this with every human life that is born into the world.

No man or woman possesses physical life at all except by his parents imparting it to him. Even physical life, therefore, is a free gift! But when a child is born into this present world, the capacities of human life (all present at birth) must be developed by himself under the guidance of his parents and subsequent teachers.

How "abundantly" he will experience human life is determined by his response to instruction and to experience itself.

So it is in the spiritual realm too. In order to have life "more abundantly," one must meet the conditions for this. One must respond properly to his heavenly Parent.

Here it should be stated clearly that in the New Testament eternal life is presented both as a free gift and as a reward merited by those who earn it. But one important distinction always holds true. Wherever eternal life is viewed as a reward, it is obtained in the future. But wherever eternal life is presented as a gift, it is obtained in the present.

Naturally, it goes without saying that no one can ever receive eternal life as a reward who does not first accept it as a free gift. This is the same as saying that a person must first have life before he can experience it richly.

(2) Harvesting Eternal Life

If Galatians 6:8 is understood as speaking only of a man's final salvation from hell, then it teaches clearly that this final salvation is by works. Not to admit this is not to be candid. But no one excludes works from his doctrine of salvation more vigorously than Paul does, and he insists that to mix works and grace is to alter the character of both (see Rom. 11:6).

Galatians 6:8 is irreconcilable with fundamental Pauline truth so long as one holds the view that final salvation is under discussion.

But why hold this view? It is easy to understand how the measure and extent of one's experience of God's life must depend on the measure of his response to God.

From that perspective the image of a harvest is exactly right. The nature and quantity of the seed we sow determines the nature and quantity of the harvest.

It is obviously wise for a Christian to be reminded that every act he performs is like a seed sown in a field. Its harvest will be either corruption or eternal life.² And is there a Christian alive who has not sown much more often to his flesh than he ought to have done? Clearly the Church needs this reminder about the law of life. To make the issue here a man's final destiny in heaven or hell is to lose the whole point of the exhortation.

If the matters just discussed are kept in mind, other passages which offer eternal life as a future experience based on works can be understood in their proper bearing. One might think especially of Matthew 19:29 with its parallels in Mark 10:30 and Luke 18:30. The eschatological "harvest" is in view in these places. Obedient men reap an experience of eternal life precisely because they are obedient.³ But this in no way conflicts with the reality that such obedience must be preceded by, and motivated through, a gift of life given freely and without any condition but faith alone.

Colossians 1:21-23

Colossians 1:23 has sometimes been taken to teach that perseverance in the faith is a condition for final salvation. The passage reads as follow:

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight - if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and

are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard... (1:21-23a).

It is clear that "condition" is the only appropriate word here. There is nothing to support the view that perseverance in the faith is an "inevitable" outcome of true salvation. On the contrary, the text reads like a warning. Naturally, in the context of the Colossian heresy (Col. 2:8, 16-23) that is exactly what it is.⁴ But once again the mistake is made of referring the statement of the text to a man's final salvation. Words like "holy," "blameless," and "above reproach" do not require the sense of "sinless" or "absolutely perfect." Men can be described in all these ways who are not completely sinless. The word translated as "above reproach" is actually found in the Pauline list of qualifications for deacons and elders in the sense of "blameless" (1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6, 7).

A comparison of Colossians 1:22 with 1:28 is also helpful. In 1:28 Paul writes:

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

This statement is connected with 1:22 by the presence of the special word "present." But here Paul employs the word "perfect" which is the normal Greek word for "mature" (and is so used in 1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Heb. 5:14). Obviously this word also does not have to suggest sinless perfection.

It is natural, therefore, to see 1:22 and 1:28 as slightly different forms of the same idea. The aim of Christ's reconciling work at the cross is the aim Paul serves by his teaching ministry. He seeks to bring men to that

matured experience of holiness which will enable them to be presented acceptably to God. When they stand on review before Him their lives ought to meet with His approval (see also Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

But this approval can only be achieved, he cautions his readers, if they hold firmly to their faith in the Gospel and do not allow new ideas and doctrines to move them away from fundamental truths (1:23).⁵ As we have seen already, Paul knew perfectly well that Christians were not immune to the influences of heresy (2 Tim. 2:17-19; 1 Tim. 1:18-20). He is saying, then, that the Colossians will never reach maturity in holiness if they listen to the wrong voices. In that event, they could not be presented to God in a spiritual state which truly fulfilled the aims of the cross. Their lives would be open to His censure. They are, therefore, to hold firmly to the faith they had heard from the beginning.

But about perseverance in the faith as a condition for final salvation from hell, Paul here says nothing at all.

1 Corinthians 15:2

It might be thought, however, that such an idea does find expression in 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2. There Paul writes:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain.

The problem in correctly understanding this verse is caused by the English translation. A very flexible Greek verb (*katecho*) is translated "hold fast" in the New King

James Version (the AV has "keep in memory"). But the verb could equally well be rendered "take hold of" or "take possession of." In that case it would refer to the act of appropriating the truth of the Gospel by faith.⁶ Closer examination of the Greek text suggests that this is indeed the correct understanding. The Greek word order can be represented as follows: "by which also you are saved, by that word I preached to you, if you take hold of it, unless you believed in vain."⁷ From this it appears that Paul is thinking of the saving effect of the preached word when it is duly appropriated, unless in fact that appropriation (by faith) has been in vain.

What he means by believing "in vain" is made clear in verses 14 and 17:

And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty [the AV has "vain" for "empty"].

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins [the AV has "vain" for "futile"].⁸ First Corinthians 15:2 must be read in the light of the subsequent discussion about resurrection. Paul is simply saying, in verse 2, that the Gospel he has preached to them is a saving Gospel when it is appropriated by faith, unless, after all, the resurrection is false. In that case, no salvation has occurred at all and the faith his readers had exercised was futile. But naturally Paul absolutely insists on the reality of the resurrection of Christ. He therefore does not think that the Corinthians have believed "in vain."

But neither here nor anywhere else in the Pauline letters can the Apostle be correctly understood as teaching that

perseverance in the faith is a condition of, or an indispensable sign of, final salvation from hell.

1 Corinthians 1:8

In the opening chapter of his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul speaks positively and hopefully about the church's spiritual prospects. The context shows clearly that he is speaking of the church corporately:

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:4-9).

Here the Corinthian church is praised because it is so richly endowed with spiritual gifts, because the testimony of Christ has received confirmation in the church's life and experience, and because it waits eagerly for the coming of Christ. Paul fully expects God to bring the church to the place where it is blameless before Him (the letter shows the church has a long way to go!), and he bases this expectation on God's faithfulness. Paul is sure that the many problems at Corinth, which he is about to discuss, can be worked out.

It would be a mistake to read more into the text than that. There is not to be found here a guarantee that each and every Christian individual will necessarily be brought to the place where his Christian life is "blameless" before God. (The word "blameless" is the same one we have met as "above reproach" in Colossians 1:22.) In Paul's mind no such guarantee existed.⁹

(1) Paul's view in 1 Corinthians 3

This is made perfectly plain in this very letter. In chapter 3 the Apostle describes the evaluation of the Christian's life and work which will someday take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ (see again, Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). His words are these:

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

It is clear from this text that Paul entertained the possibility that in the Day of divine evaluation, a Christian's work might be "burned up." The Greek verb employed in verse 15 (the one rendered "burned") is in fact an intensive word like our own verb "burned down." Should a Christian's works suffer such a fate Paul insists that his eternal destiny nevertheless will not be affected. "But he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."¹⁰

This declaration is so straightforward that it is absolutely amazing how widely it has been ignored. Obviously, if a believer's works are "burned down" he will not stand "blameless" before God. So 1:8 does not claim that a "blameless" state will be true of every Christian at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul was speaking primarily about the spiritual status which he expected the Corinthian church to achieve corporately.

(2) A Further Caution

But even here caution must be exercised not to make the words of 1:8 say more than they actually do.

If a counselor says to a troubled counselee, "God will strengthen you and see you through," this claim ought not to be taken as a flat and unconditional prediction. Instead it is an expression of the counselor's conviction that God can be relied upon by the troubled individual who needs Him. Naturally he expects the counselee to appropriate God's help in the proper ways.

In 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 Paul begins his epistle on a positive note. He commends in the Corinthian church what there is to commend (there was a great deal to criticize!), and he expresses the expectation that "God will confirm you [that is, 'give you strength'] to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." But it is implied in such a declaration that the Corinthians must want that strength and must appropriate it properly.

Paul's main point is that God will furnish the needed help, because He is faithful (verse 9). Those who have elevated the statement of 1:8 to the level of a theological

claim about Christian perseverance have misunderstood Paul's meaning.¹¹ They have also created false theology.

Philippians 1:6

It has often been said that the Epistle to the Philippians is a "thank you note." The Philippians have sent a monetary gift to Paul for which he is deeply grateful (4:10-19). Naturally at the very beginning of the epistle he refers to their material generosity. In 1:3-6 he writes:

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

It is natural to understand this passage in special reference to the Philippians' recent generosity. This is implied rather plainly by the Greek word "fellowship." This word very often refers to material "sharing" and can sometimes even mean "contribution" (see Rom. 15:26). Paul is assuring the Philippians that their "good work" of sharing in the spread of the Gospel will be carried to full fruitfulness by God. Its total effects (for example, in the winning of souls) will only be manifest in the day of Jesus Christ.

In fact, this very epistle can be seen as part of the fruit which that "good work" produced, since the Philippians' gift occasioned the letter. Whatever spiritual impact Paul's letter has had on the Church down through the centuries (who can calculate it?) is therefore part of the "interest" which has accumulated on this simple material investment in the cause of Christ.¹² It may also

be suggested that every good work which we do has a potential for usefulness that lies far beyond its original intent. God alone can "perfect" our good works and give them their full impact - often far beyond the lifetime of the one "in" whom the good work begins. Only the day of Jesus Christ will disclose all that God does with what we do for Him.

Philippians 1:6 is a lovely and thought-provoking utterance by an appreciative Apostle. But about the issue of Christian perseverance it has nothing to say at all.

Philippians 2:12, 13

Philippians 2:12, 13 are more relevant to the issues under discussion. In these verses Paul writes:

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

It is clear that if the "salvation" Paul speaks of here refers to escape from hell, then obedient works are a condition for that. Once again it would be unwarranted to read into the passage the idea that such obedience is merely the evidence of true faith. That idea has nothing whatsoever to support it in the text. It can only amount to an evasion of the plain declaration that this "salvation" must be "worked out."

Whatever is involved here, it is manifestly salvation by works!

It follows that Paul must be talking about something quite different from the salvation he speaks of in

Ephesians 2:8, 9 and Titus 3:4-7. As a matter of fact he is.

(1) Salvation Equals "Deliverance"

In only two other places in the epistle does Paul use the term "salvation." One of these is in 1:19, 20 where he writes:

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance [AV, "salvation"] through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

The first century reader was not likely to have any problem understanding this. The Greek word for "salvation" (soteria) simply meant "deliverance," as the NKJV now translates it here. Like the English word "deliverance" it could have wide application and was particularly applicable to life-threatening situations. Paul now confronts a life-threatening situation in which the outcome of his impending trial cannot be predicted with absolute certainty.

His readers knew this, of course. When Paul writes, "I know that this will turn out for my deliverance," their first impression would be that he anticipated release from his imprisonment. But the remainder of his words show them that this is not what he has in mind. "For me," says Paul, "real 'deliverance' (or, 'salvation') will consist of magnifying Christ whether I live or die. For this, I need your prayers and the help of God's Spirit."

In a very courageous way, therefore, Paul elevates his natural human concern with "deliverance" (or

"salvation") from trouble to the level of a spiritual concern that he will be "delivered" (or "saved") from failing to honor God in whatever befalls him. In saying this, of course, he hopes to motivate his readers to a similar objective.

(2) The Parallel in 1:27-30

In fact, that is exactly what he tries to do directly a little later in this chapter. In 1:27-30 he writes:

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition [or, "ruin," as it could be translated] but to you of salvation [or, "deliverance"], and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

In this exhortation, the Apostle applies to the readers the idea he had earlier expressed concerning himself.

The Philippians also have sufferings just as he does. But they too can aspire to a "deliverance" (or "salvation") in which Christ is magnified in them as well. If they will stand unitedly for the Gospel and are not terrified by their adversaries, that will be proof that this "deliverance" (or "salvation") is being realized in their lives.

By contrast, their courage and fidelity foretell the ruin of their enemies, whether temporally or eternally.

Paul and his readers are aware that there is a "deliverance" (or "salvation") from hell which they have already obtained by faith in Christ. But the "deliverance" (or "salvation") he offers them here is over and above that which they already have. It is one that issues from sufferings.

Therefore, Paul can say, "For to you it has been granted... not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." In other words, just as there is a salvation through faith, so there is one through suffering. That too is being granted to the Philippians.

But this "salvation" (or "deliverance") must be worked out. It is the product of obedience even under the most trying of circumstances. When Philippians 2:12,13 is properly referred back to the Apostle's earlier references to "salvation," then its bearing becomes clear. Since this "salvation" consists essentially in honoring Christ by life or by death, it is necessarily inseparable from a life of obedience.

In the words that follow immediately in 2:14-16, the nature of this life is once more described. The Philippians are encouraged to be "children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (2:15). Clearly, such a result would be a magnificent triumph, a kind of spiritual "deliverance" or "salvation," in the midst of a hostile and dangerous earthly situation.¹³

Interlude: Biblical Salvation

What we have just seen in Philippians is important for the Bible as a whole. The exact meaning of the term "salvation" must never be taken for granted.

(1) The Word for Salvation in the Greek Bible

When the Greek translation of the Old Testament is considered along with the Greek New Testament, it can safely be said that the most common meaning of the word "salvation" (soteria) in the Greek Bible is the one which refers to God's deliverance of His people from their trials and hardships. This meaning is widespread in Psalms especially. Among the references which can be cited are Psalm 3:8; 18:3, 35, 46, 50; 35:3; 37:39; 38:22; 44:4; etc. In all these places, and many more besides, the Greek Old Testament uses the word soteria ("salvation").

First century Christians, therefore, were every bit as likely to understand a reference to "salvation" in this sense as they were to understand it in the sense of "escaping from hell."

New Testament interpreters forget this fact very frequently. In place of careful consideration about the sense which the term "salvation" has in any given context, there is a kind of interpretive "reflex action" that automatically equates the word with final salvation from hell. This uncritical treatment of many New Testament passages has led to almost boundless confusion at both the expository and doctrinal levels.

Serious interpreters of the New Testament Scriptures must carefully avoid this kind of automatic response. They should seek to determine from the context the kind

of "deliverance" in question. It may well be deliverance from death to life or from hell to heaven. But equally it may well be a deliverance from trial, danger, suffering or temptation. The context - sometimes the larger context of the book itself (as in Romans and Hebrews) - must determine the exact meaning.

(2) "Saving the Life" in the Bible

Furthermore, in the teaching of Jesus a distinctive note is sounded which is not really found in the Old Testament passages about "salvation." Although the Old Covenant saint thought instinctively of the preservation of his physical life, the New Covenant person is taught to go beyond this consideration.

According to Jesus, a man can "save his life" even when he "loses" it (see Matt. 16:25 and parallels). This paradox suggests that even death itself cannot destroy the value and worth of a life lived in discipleship to Christ. Such a life survives every calamity and results in eternal reward and glory.¹⁴ Paul is not far from such a thought in Philippians. To be truly "delivered" in suffering is not necessarily to survive it physically, but to glorify Christ through it.

The same idea is present in the Apostle Peter's famous passage on suffering found in 1 Peter 1:6-9. The expression in verse 9 which is translated "the salvation of your souls" would be much better translated according to its normal Greek sense: "the salvation of your lives." Peter is describing the messianic experience in which the believer partakes of Christ's sufferings first, in order that he might subsequently share the glory to which those sufferings lead (1 Peter 1:10, 11). In this way the "life" is saved, even when paradoxically it is

lost, because it results in "praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7).¹⁵ In fact, it can be said that there is not a single place in the New Testament where the expression "to save the soul" ever means final salvation from hell. It cannot be shown that any native Greek speaker would have understood this expression in any other than the idiomatic way. That is, he would understand it as signifying "to save the life."

In modern use, of course, "to save the soul" is almost universally understood as a reference to eternal salvation. But this fixity in its meaning is not relevant to its New Testament use. In the New Testament we should always understand it as equal to our expression: "to save the life."

In Philippians Paul never uses the word "salvation" to refer to the question of heaven or hell. After all, both he and his readers knew where they were going. Their names were in the Book of Life (Phil. 4:3)!

Romans 2:7, 10, 13

It is a tragic feature of the modern debate over salvation, that certain statements made by Paul in his great epistle to the church at Rome have been turned upside down. These statements are found in Romans 2 and are intended by the Apostle to underline man's hopeless state before the bar of God's judgment. Instead, some modern theologians take them as proof-texts that good works, as the fruit of faith, will be the final test of a person's salvation.¹⁶ Let us look at the Pauline statements in question:

... who `will render to every man according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality...

... but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

... for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified... (Rom. 2:6, 7, 10, 13).

It is certainly astounding that these words could be taken in such a way as to nullify the doctrine Paul goes on to teach in this epistle, when he writes emphatically:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

This tragic confusion could have been easily avoided. In Romans 2 Paul is discussing how God will deal with men in the final judgment (Rom. 2:5). One should remember that born-again believers do not come into that judgment (John 5:24).¹⁷ At the judgment bar of God, the day of grace will be past and men will stand before their Judge for His final assessment of their lives (see Rev. 20:12). His judgment will be impartial and based on their works. Those who have persevered in doing good may expect eternal life. Those who have not only heard, but kept, God's law, will receive God's justification.

But who are these? There are none. Romans 3:20 says so plainly. So does Romans 3:9-19 - very emphatically!¹⁸ The standpoint in Romans 2 is analogous to a judge who has a line of defendants ranged before his tribunal. Speaking in the non-prejudicial language of the law-courts he might say to them: "In this courtroom

everyone will get exactly what he deserves. The innocent will be cleared, but the guilty will be condemned to punishment." Does this statement imply that some of the defendants are innocent and will be cleared? Of course not. The judge is simply stating the principles which will obtain in his court. Justice and equity will be the hallmarks of this judicial proceeding.

Romans 2:7, 10, and 13 are not spoken as a prediction, as though there actually will be people whose works entitle them to eternal life and justification. Instead, these verses state the principles on which judgment will be based in God's final assessment of lost men. Each person will get what he deserves. But Paul's doctrine was that no one would gain eternal salvation on the basis of principles like these. In the very next chapter of this epistle (Rom. 3), Paul will demonstrate that very point.

Precisely, then, because men fail to persevere in good works or truly to do God's law, they are utterly shut up to "the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:21-26).¹⁹

Other Pauline Texts

Within the limited scope of this book it is not possible to touch every single passage which at one time or another has been used to prove that Paul treated good works as an "inevitable" outcome of true regeneration. Paul simply did not hold such a view of works, though no writer insists more strongly than he that Christians ought to do them.

Unfortunately, the Apostle has not always been credited with being truly consistent with his fundamental

insistence that works have nothing to do with determining a Christian's basic relationship to God. That relationship, in Pauline thought, is founded on pure grace and nothing else.

Often Paul's statements are treated in a very one-dimensional way. Even though every epistle he wrote is addressed to those who have already come to saving faith, his teachings are frequently taken as though he was constantly concerned about the eternal destiny of his readers. But there was no reason why he should have been. His many direct declarations that his audiences have experienced God's grace show that he was not concerned about this.²⁰ Such declarations abound in the Pauline letters, and Ephesians 2 and Titus 3 are merely two of the most notable. Simple statements like, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:20), show exactly what he thought about his readers' relationship to God. There is not even a single place in the Pauline letters where he clearly expresses doubt that his audience is composed of true Christians.

(1) Romans 8:14

So when the Apostle writes, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14), he is not offering a "test" by which his readers may decide if they are saved or not. His readers possess a faith which "is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8). They enjoy "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" as well as "access by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Rom. 5:1,2; note the repeated use of "we"). That they could conceivably be

unregenerate is the farthest thought from the Apostle's mind.

But for Paul the concept of being a "son of God" involved more than simply being regenerate. As he makes clear in Galatians 4:1-7, a "son" is one who has been granted "adult" status, in contrast to the "child" who is under "guardians and stewards" (Gal. 4:1, 2). This, of course, means that the Christian, as a "son," is free from the law. Thus the statement of Romans 8:14 is identical in force to that of Galatians 5:18: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." The identity between the statements is confirmed also by the reference to "the spirit of bondage" in Romans 8:15.

Consequently, both in Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18, Paul is talking about the way in which our freedom from the law is experientially realized. When the Spirit leads the life, there is no more legal bondage. The believer enters into the freedom of real "sonship" to God and that sonship becomes a reality in his day-by-day experience.

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(2) Titus 1:16

Nor should a "test" of regeneration be detected in a verse like Titus 1:16: "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." It is superficial to take the word "deny" as though it meant nothing more than "is not a Christian."

A little reflection will show that there are various ways in which a believer may "deny" God. He may do it verbally, as Peter did on the night of our Lord's arrest. But he may also do it morally by a lifestyle that

contradicts the implications of the truth he professes. How easily this can be done even by a single act that clashes with our Christian profession, every honest Christian ought to be able to know out of his own experience.

Besides, the people Paul has in mind in Titus 1:16 are evidently the same as those of whom he says in verse 13: "Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."

The Greek word for "sound" means to be healthy. Hence, the persons he thinks of are not individuals who are completely outside the Christian faith. Rather, they are people whom he regards as spiritually "sick" and who need a rebuke designed to restore them to good health. So far from showing that Christians cannot drift disastrously from the path of good works, Titus 1:16 shows the reverse!

(3) Romans 1:5 and 16:26

Finally, an expression like "obedience to the faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) has nothing to do with the works that follow salvation. The fact that it does not is widely recognized since the Greek expression is more literally rendered "the obedience of faith." In harmony with one well-known Greek usage of such expressions, the "obedience" in question is "faith" itself.²² Naturally, God demands that men place faith in His Son and is angry with them when they do not (John 3:36). Faith is an obedient response to the summons of the Gospel. But the man who exercises faith is reaching out for the unconditional grace of God.

(4) Conclusion

The Apostle Paul remains, therefore, the Apostle of divine grace. No doubt there were those who could twist his teachings into "antinomian" formulations (see Rom. 3:8).

Ironically, the charge of "antinomianism" has frequently been hurled at the book you are now reading. But this theological "swear word" is totally inapplicable here, just as was such a charge in Paul's case.

Paul never allowed such accusations to keep him from teaching the freeness of God's salvation nor did he neglect to call for a lifestyle that was truly responsive to this divine generosity. But the Apostle was also a realist and a pastor who knew only too well the failures to which Christians are prone. Yet he does not for that reason modify his concept of God's saving grace. He simply redoubles his efforts to stir up his fellow Christians to live so that they will honor their true calling (Eph. 4:1).

It may safely be said that no man in Christian history - with the exception of our Lord Himself - ever motivated believers more or threatened them less than did this great servant of Christ. Those who feel unable to inspire lives of obedience apart from questioning the salvation of those whom they seek to exhort have much to learn from Paul.

Postscript: 2 Corinthians 13:5

In the first edition of this book there was no discussion of 2 Corinthians 13:5. This proved to be a significant oversight. Critics of the book sometimes spoke as though the oversight was due to a reluctance on the

author's part to confront this text.²³ This was not the case. But we did misjudge the role this verse would play in the debate that followed publication of the first edition. The inclusion of 2 Corinthians 13:5 in this second edition is therefore absolutely necessary.

In 2 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul is announcing his intention to visit the Corinthian church once more. He writes:

I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare - since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you. Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified (2 Cor. 13:2-6; emphasis added).

Just as with most of the verses already discussed in this chapter, 2 Corinthians 13:5 is often ripped out of its context. Failure to consider the context is almost always a formula for misunderstanding and doctrinal confusion.

(1) The Situation at Corinth

The situation at Corinth was somewhat different from that which existed when 1 Corinthians was written. Although the church as a whole still had warm regard for Paul (2 Cor. 7:6-16), Paul now had critics and enemies in Corinth. The believers there had listened to

these people more than they should have (10:7-12; 11:12-15).

Apparently some of Paul's own converts wondered whether Paul could furnish "proof of Christ speaking" in him (13:3). Paul is now insisting that he will indeed revisit Corinth (see 13:1), though a previously planned trip had been canceled (see 2 Cor. 1:15-2:2).

Furthermore, he insists that when he comes his conduct toward them will be marked by the "power of God" (verse 4).

The tone of 2 Corinthians 13:2-4 is both humble and confident. Paul promises not to "spare" those Christians among them who had sinned and had remained unrepentant (see verse 4 and 12:20,21). This implies that Paul will either lead the church to discipline these people or that he himself, through prayer, will deliver them to Satan who will be an instrument for their chastisement. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is what Paul did at a later time with Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20).

Paul knows, of course, his own weakness (13:4), yet he has total confidence that his actions at Corinth will be effective because God's power will work through him. The sinning believers will be dealt with in such a way that the Corinthians will get "a proof of Christ speaking in me" (verse 2). In short, Paul says, "we will live with Him [Christ] by the power of God toward you" (verse 4, emphasis added).

(2) Paul's Challenge to the Corinthians

Yet Paul is not so arrogant as to suggest that such confidence was a special privilege belonging to him

alone. True, he knew perfectly well that Christ lived dynamically in him and used him. But could not the Corinthians have the same confidence about themselves?

Of course they could. Provided of course, that their lives did not stand under God's disapproving censure.

So he writes:

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified (2 Cor. 13:5; emphasis added).

Unfortunately these forceful words are often read as though they challenged the Corinthians to find out whether or not they were saved.

This is unthinkable and absurd. After twelve chapters in which the Apostle takes his readers' Christianity for granted, can he only now be telling them to make sure they are born again? The question answers itself.

It is impossible to read the first twelve chapters of 2 Corinthians carefully without seeing how frequently the Apostle expresses confidence that his readership is truly Christian. Let us notice a few places where this is true:

Paul... to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia (1:1,2).

Now I trust you will understand to the end... that we are your boast as you also are ours in the day of Jesus Christ (1:13, 14; emphasis added).

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ... (1:21; emphasis added).

You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart (3:2, 3; emphasis added).

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers [the Corinthians are believers!]. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?... Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God (6:14-16; emphasis added).

But as you abound in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us - see that you abound in this grace also (8:7; emphasis added).

It is needless to extend this list further. How can anyone read 2 Corinthians and conclude that Paul thought his readership needed to find out whether they were really saved or not?²⁴ To draw this conclusion from 2 Corinthians 13:5 is to impose on that verse an alien theology, about which Paul knew nothing at all.

No indeed! Paul is not saying, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are born again, or justified." But he is saying, "Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith." And this is a different matter.

(3) The Meaning of "in the Faith"

It is tragic how often a text like this can be read with preconceived notions about the meanings of certain words or phrases. Why should anyone assume that the

expression "in the faith" equals "to be a Christian"? On what grounds is such an assumption based?

What about the same phrase in 1 Corinthians 16:13? There we read:

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

Or equally, what about this phrase in Titus 1:13?

Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound [healthy] in the faith [see also Titus 2:2].

There are other passages where an equivalent expression appears. These, too, are helpful:

... strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith (Acts 14:22).

Receive one who is weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1).

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith (Col. 2:6,7).

Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith (1 Pet. 5:8, 9).

In all of the passages we have mentioned, the phrase "in the faith" relates in some way to our Christian walk or warfare. The meaning "to be a Christian" is not relevant in any New Testament passage at all!

We must conclude that the expression "in the faith" refers instead to the proper sphere of our spiritual activity. It is the sphere in which we are to "remain," "stand fast," "stand," "resist the devil," and "be spiritually healthy." It is this type of meaning alone that fits the context of 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Paul is quite sure that he himself is "in the faith" in the sense that he is dynamically related to Christ. Christ speaks in him, God's power works through him. He is confident this will be evident when he returns to Corinth.

But the Corinthians can see this in themselves, too, if they will but examine their experience. They can see Jesus Christ living dynamically in themselves as well.

Thus the statement, "Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?" has no more to do with the question of salvation than do the words "in the faith." What Paul has described of his own experience shows that he is thinking of Jesus Christ being in himself, or in the Corinthians, in a dynamic, active and vital sense.

In the language of the Apostle John this could be expressed in terms of the abiding life, where the disciple is in Christ, and Christ is in the disciple, in a dynamic, fruit-bearing relationship (see John 15:1-8; 14:19-24).²⁵ So Paul is saying, "Take a look at yourselves; test yourselves. Can you not see Jesus Christ actively living in you, just as I can see Him in me? Of course you can - unless, however, you are `disqualified.'"

(4) The Meaning of "Disqualified"

The word "disqualified" is a significant one for Paul. He used it in his first letter to the Corinthian church when he wrote:

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

In this passage, the Apostle has been talking about the Christian life as a race. He is careful to pursue God's

approval in that race so that he will not be "disqualified" from winning the proper reward.

But the Greek word translated "disqualified" basically means "disapproved." In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul is telling his Christian readers that as long as they have God's approval on their lives (that is, as long as they are obedient to Him) they will be able to see in their own experience the dynamic reality of Christ living in them.

This could be observable in terms of answered prayer, spiritual blessing, and fruitfulness in the lives of others. Obedient Christians experience such things. Disobedient Christians do not. Obedient believers are living their lives "in the faith." Disobedient believers are cut off from this kind of vital fellowship with Christ. They may be described as living "according to the flesh" (Rom. 8:13) or as "walking in darkness" (1 John 1:7).

(5) Paul's Concluding Comment

Paul knows he is in fellowship with Christ. "I intend to prove that when I come to Corinth," he says. "But such confidence is not mine alone. It's for you Corinthians too! You can see its reality in yourselves, if you take the trouble to look - unless, after all, God disapproves of your way of life."

Then he adds:

But I trust that you will know that we [the Greek pronoun is emphatic] are not disqualified (13:6).

"When I come to Corinth," says Paul, "I hope to convince you that God's approval rests on me. You can know this about yourselves, and I expect you to know it about me as well!"

Such then was the confident spirit with which the Apostle prepared to go back to Corinth. No doubt he would be horrified to hear his words to his brethren twisted into a call to test their justification by examining their own good works.²⁶

Conclusion

Nothing highlights the tragedy of today's evangelical church like the degree to which Paul's teachings are distorted into anti-Pauline thought. After all, it was Paul who wrote:

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (Rom. 4:5; emphasis added).

But today, many theologians respond to this with a "yes, but... " "Yes, but if you don't do works you are not justified at all."²⁷ In this way, the Pauline declaration is annulled in favor of a faith/works synthesis which is contrary to both the Scriptures and to the doctrine of faith expounded in the Reformation by Calvin and Luther.²⁸ It is nothing less than a retreat into the theological darkness that made the Reformation necessary in the first place. Although those who advocate such doctrine describe it as "orthodox" and "reformational," in reality it is neither.

The evangelical church will have no message for the world if it allows this false doctrine to prevail.

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ENDNOTES

ABBREVIATIONS

AB | The Anchor Bible

BGD | A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd edition Revised and Augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer's Fifth Edition, 1958 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

BNTC | Black's New Testament Commentaries

BSC | Bible Study Commentary

CGNT | Cambridge Greek New Testament

Comm. | Stands exclusively for the commentaries of John Calvin which are always quoted from the series Calvin's Commentaries, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, various dates).

Herm | Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible.

HNTC | Harper's New Testament Commentaries

ICC | International Critical Commentary

Institutes | John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, always quoted from the 2 vol. translation by John Allen (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1935).

MNTC | Moffatt New Testament Commentary

NIC | New International Commentary

NIGNTC | New International Greek New Testament Commentary TNTC | Tyndale New Testament

Commentaries WBC | Word Biblical Commentaries WC | Westminster Commentaries Chapter 7 1Dabney states the Reformed view with bold (and tragic) candor. He writes: "A second objection [to the Plymouth Brethren

view of assurance] is: Consciousness reveals to me precisely my own subjective mental states if it is clear in its revelations. Is not that correct? But the question I have to settle, in order to entitle myself to the assurance of hope, is this, viz.: Whether this my subjective mental state is the faith which saves; for notoriously there is a temporary faith simulating the real. That act of self-consciousness does not decide this question; it only presents the thing to be compared, namely, my subjective state. The standard of comparison is the Word. When I think I believe, I am but conscious of exercising what I think is faith. That is all which this immediate act of self-consciousness contains. Whether I think right, in thinking that to be true faith of which I am conscious, is a question of comparison to be settled by the Word, which describes the true exercise." See Discussions by Robert L. Dabney, vol. 1: Theological and Evangelical, ed. C. R. Vaughn (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1890), p. 225 (*italics in Dabney*). In the statements just quoted Dabney means, of course, that what he thinks may be saving faith must be tested by his conformity to the moral and ethical demands of God's Word. The tragic result of this process is that a man must look elsewhere than at Christ and the cross to find personal assurance of salvation. Dabney states this clearly (p.226): "The necessary object of faith is a gracious Saviour; while my soul looks at him, faith may be in exercise. I wish to inspect my consciousness of the faith exercise. Then the affection of which I was conscious becomes the object; the gracious Saviour ceases to be, for the time, the object of attention [*italics added*], and the affection, as the present exercise, vanishes under inspection. How clear is it, hence, that the thing whose nature I really judge is the

remembrance [*italics his*] of my consciousness? If then the consciousness was to any degree indistinct or its remembrance dim, trustworthy inspection cannot take place. But I proved in the previous paragraph the necessity of this inspection or self-acquaintance in order to the assurance of hope. What follows? I infer, with Chalmers, that imperfect but genuine believers may often have actings of faith of such kind that their self-consciousness of them does not ground an assurance of hope; and thence that it is useful and important for their peace to compare with scripture their remembered consciousness of other gracious actings [*italics added*], which, the word tells them, are also marks of a saved state. 'In the mouth of two or three witnesses' they gain the solid advantage of concurrent evidences." These words reveal starkly how fully Dabney has surrendered the Reformers' view of assurance as being of the essence of (inseparable from) saving faith itself. Indeed, Dabney even admits that this is the case. He says (p. 173): "The source of this [Plymouth Brethren] error is no doubt that doctrine concerning faith which the first Reformers, as Luther and Calvin, were led to adopt from their opposition to the hateful and tyrannical teachings of Rome. This mother of abominations denies to Christians all true assurance of hope, teaching that it is neither edifying nor attainable... These noble Reformers, seeing the bondage and misery imposed by this teaching upon sincere souls, flew to the opposite extreme [*italics added*], and (to use the language of theology) asserted that the assurance of hope is of the essence of saving faith." Subsequently, in the second of two treatises called "Theology of the Plymouth Brethren," he responds to a correspondent (identified as M.N.) who had objected to Calvin being charged with the "error" Dabney had

ascribed to him. So Dabney writes (p.216): "Now, I assert that Calvin... was incautious enough to fall into the erroneous statement, that no faith was a living faith which did not include essentially both the assurance of faith and the assurance of hope. He is not satisfied that even the weak, new believer shall say, 'I believe, with head and heart both, that Christ saves all who truly come to him [*italics his*], and I accordingly try to trust him alone for my salvation, and so far as I have any hope, rest it on him alone'. He requires every one to say, in substance, I believe fully that Christ has saved me [*italics his*]. Amidst all Calvin's verbal variations, this is always his meaning; for he is consistent in his error [*italics added*]. What else is the meaning of that definition which M.N. himself quotes from the Institutes: 'Our steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence toward us' [*italics his*]. But I will show, beyond all dispute, that the theological 'Homer nodded', not once, but all the time, on this point. See then Institutes Book III., Chap. II., Sec. 16. 'In short, no man is truly a believer, unless he be firmly persuaded that God is a propitious and benevolent Father to him,... [*italics and ellipsis his*] and feel an undoubted expectation of salvation.'" We may conclude our quotation of Dabney with this telltale observation made by him (p. 215): "... I assert: 1. That Calvin and Dr. Malan, and the Plymouth Brethren, hold a definition of the nature or essence of saving faith which is, in one respect, contrary to the Westminster Confession and to the Scriptures, as well as to the great body of the confessions of the Presbyterian Churches, and of their divines since Calvin's day. I said, by way of apology for the earliest Reformers, and most notably, Luther and Calvin, that they were betrayed into this partial error by

a praiseworthy zeal against the opposite and mischievous error of Rome, who seeks to hold believers always in doubt of their salvation... Now I give this explanation of Calvin's partial error to save his credit. M.N. will not have it so; then he will needs have his admired leader discredited, for as sure as truth is history, Luther and Calvin did fall into this error, which the Reformed churches, led by the Westminster Confession, have since corrected." Dabney's articles, from which we have cited, are well worth reading in their entirety. But we have quoted enough to show the following: (1) On the subject of faith and assurance, Calvin is at odds with Reformed theology and with the Westminster Confession; (2) since, for Dabney, Calvin's error was an overreaction against Roman Catholicism, the correction of this error by the Reformed churches amounts to a retreat in the direction of Catholic theology. More recent historical studies have strongly reaffirmed the difference between Calvin and post-Calvin "Calvinism" in the area of faith and assurance. See A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," *Vox Evangelica* 11(1979):32-54; R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: University Press, 1979); and M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985). To the best of this writer's knowledge, none of today's leading Reformed theologians, who are critical of *The Gospel Under Siege*, have yet admitted in print the facts reviewed in this footnote. Why not?

2We share John Calvin's view of Galatians 6:8 as dealing with the subject of rewards, and does not treat this verse as any kind of "test" of salvation! Let us hear

Calvin on this verse, as he comments on the phrase, "But he that soweth unto the spirit: By `the spirit' I understand the spiritual life, to which they are said to sow who look to heaven rather than to earth and who so direct their lives as to aspire to the kingdom of God. Therefore they will reap in heaven the incorruptible fruit of their endeavours. He calls them spiritual endeavours on account of their end, although in some cases they are external and relate to the body. This is so here, where he is dealing with the support of pastors. If the Papists try, in their usual way, to build on these words the righteousness of works, we have shown elsewhere how easily their absurdities can be refuted. Although eternal life is a reward, it does not follow that we are justified by works or that works merit salvation. The fact that God so honours the works which He grants us freely as to promise them an undeserved reward is itself of grace. "If a more complete solution is required, then first I deny that in us there are any good works which God rewards except those which we have from His grace. Secondly, I say that the good works which we perform by the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit are the freely granted fruits of adoption. Third, I say that they are not only unworthy of the smallest and meanest reward but deserve to be wholly condemned, because they are always spattered and stained with many blemishes; and what agreement have pollutions with the presence of God? Fourthly, I say that even if reward had been promised to works a thousand time, it is due only to the perfect fulfillment of the whole law. And we are all far from that perfection. Now let the Papists go and try to break their way into heaven by the merit of works! We gladly agree with Paul and the whole of Scripture in acknowledging that we can do nothing but by the free

gift of God, and yet the requital made to our works receives the name of reward." Calvin, Comm. Galatians 6:8 (*italics added*). Clearly Calvin's comments are evangelical to the core. We find nothing here of the Reformed doctrine that works test the genuineness of our faith. Indeed, Calvin was insistent that assurance should not be sought in our post-conversion works. Bell nicely summarizes this fact of Calvin's theology: "As a general principle, Calvin emphatically warns against looking to ourselves, that is, to our works or the fruit of the Spirit, for certainty of our salvation. We must turn from ourselves to rest solely on the mercy of God [Institutes 3.19.2]. The Scholastics taught that the Christian should look to works and to the virtues of righteousness as proof of salvation [as does Reformed theology today!]. However, Calvin rejects this exhortation to self-examination as a dangerous dogma [Institutes 3.2.38], and argues that we can never rely on such a subjective basis for assurance, for our sinfulness insures that we shall not find peace in this way. Forgetting the judgment of God, we may think ourselves safe, when, in fact, we are not [Comm. Rom. 5:1]. By placing our trust in works, rather than in God's freely given grace, we detract from his salvific work in Jesus Christ [Institutes 3.14.21; cf. 3.11.11]. If we look to ourselves, we encounter doubt, which leads to despair, and finally our faith is battered down and blotted out [Institutes 3.13.3]. Arguing that our assurance rests in our union with Christ, Calvin stresses that contemplation of Christ brings assurance of salvation, but self-contemplation is 'sure damnation.' For this reason, then, our safest course is to look to Christ and distrust ourselves [Institutes 3.2.23-4]." See Bell, p. 28 (The bracketed references are those of Bell's endnotes,

p. 38). Every one of these complaints drawn from Calvin can be laid at the door of Reformed theology today, which in so many ways is the modern counterpart to the Scholasticism which Calvin vigorously rejected.

3Bruce stresses the eschatological bearing of Galatians 6:8. He writes: "The eternal life is the resurrection life of Christ, mediated to believers by `the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead' (Rom. 8:11)... But its future aspect, with their appearance before the tribunal of Christ, to `receive good or evil, according to the deeds done in the body' (2 Cor. 5:10), is specially implied here. Any one who did not seriously believe in such a coming assessment, or thought that the law of sowing and reaping could be safely ignored, would indeed be treating God with contempt." F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 265.

4Concerning the conditional clause in Colossians 1:23, Lightfoot remarks that the Greek particles (ei ge) "express a pure hypothesis in themselves, but the indicative mood following converts the hypothesis into a hope." J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: MacMillan, 1979; [reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959]), p. 163. Lightfoot's words are as far as the grammar can lead us and those who read more into the clause are misunderstanding the text. Equally plain is the statement of A. Lukyn Williams that, in the phrase ei ge, "the addition of [ge] lays emphasis on the importance of observing the condition, but determines nothing as to whether or not they will do so." See his *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, CGNT (Cambridge: University Press, 1907), p. 60.

5MacLaren's treatment of Colossians 1:22,23 is edifying. He writes: "No matter how mighty be the renewing powers of the Gospel wielded by the Divine Spirit, they can only work on the nature that is brought into contact with and continues in contact with them by faith. The measure in which we trust Jesus Christ will be the measure in which He helps us. 'He could do no mighty works because of their unbelief.' He cannot do what He can do, if we thwart Him by our want of faith. God will present us holy before Him if [italics his] we continue in the faith." Later, connecting vv. 28, 29 with 22, 23 (as we also do), MacLaren has this to say: "We found this same word 'present' in verse 22. The remarks made there will apply here. There the Divine purpose of Christ's great work, and here Paul's purpose in his, are expressed alike. God's aim is Paul's aim too. The Apostle's thoughts travel on to the great coming day, when we shall all be manifested at the judgment seat of Christ, and preacher and hearer, Apostle and convert, shall be gathered there. That solemn period will test the teacher's work, and should ever be in view as he works. There is a real and indissoluble connection between the teacher and his hearers, so that in some sense he is to blame if they do not stand perfect then, and he in some sense has to present them as in his work - the gold, silver, and precious stones which he has built on the foundation." See Alexander MacLaren, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and Philemon* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1897), pp. 107, 144.

6Meanings like "to take," "to take into possession," are found in Matthew 21:38 (NKJV), Luke 14:9, and (according to BGD, p. 423) in secular sources.

7Commentators long ago noticed a word-order problem in 1 Corinthians 15:2, when the verse is taken in the sense of "if you hold fast to the word which I preached to you." The problem is that, in Greek, the phrase "(to) the word which I preached to you" precedes "if you hold fast." (A minor problem is the sense of the Greek word *tini* which precedes "word" and is rendered as "that" by the NKJV and not at all by the NIV.) One solution offered has been to connect the phrase "the word which I preached to you" with the expression "I declare to you the gospel" in verse 1. This yields the sense: "I declare (or, 'make known') to you the gospel... with what (=tini) word which I preached to you." But this connection requires a long leap backward in the text and is quite improbable. The usual solution has been to make the phrase "with what (=that) word which I preached to you" the object of "if you hold fast" which follows it. This is not impossible by any means, but neither is it entirely natural. It would be preferable to connect the phrase "with what word which I preached to you" with something immediately preceding it. In fact this can easily be done with the interpretation we offer in our text. The troublesome *tini* might be taken as an ellipsis for "what word it was which I preached to you" and may be shortened to, "the very word which I preached to you." Thus the text can be read: "... the gospel... by which also you are saved, by the very word which I preached to you, if you take hold of (it) - unless you believed in vain." This is a clean-cut treatment of the Greek grammar and lexicography which avoids the puzzling word-order inversion required by the standard renderings of this passage. But obviously such an interpretation eliminates any reference to perseverance in 1 Corinthians 15:2. For discussions of the problem

covered in this note, see: Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians*, trans. D. Douglas Bannerman, translation rev. and ed. William P. Dickson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), pp. 341-342; and G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, gen. ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 918-919.

8The Greek words are different in each verse (15:2, eike; 15:14, kene; 15:17, mataia) but they are all functionally synonymous here.

9Interestingly, Barrett refers 1 Corinthians 1:8 to the doctrine of justification by faith. The term "irreproachable" (= "blameless," NKJV) is referred to the imputed "righteousness of Christ himself." Paul is thus "stating the doctrine of justification by faith without the use of the technical words he employs elsewhere"! See C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 39-40.

10Very appropriately does Barrett translate "he will suffer loss" as "he will be mulcted of his pay." He subsequently remarks: "The servant of God who uses improper or unworthy materials, though himself saved, will miss the reward he might have had. We have thus already noted the next words, which are clear enough and need little comment: he himself will be saved (it is underlined that salvation is to be distinguished from reward, or pay; it cannot be earned)." One could hardly improve on this. See Barrett, p. 89.

11The hermeneutical issue here is about the "illocutionary force" of Paul's words. The significance of "illocutionary force" is aptly summarized by Hirsch: "Such an attempt at compromise [between intuitionists and positivists] can be discovered in the recent discussions of speech-act theory, based on the posthumous writings of J. L. Austin, who introduced into verbal meaning the concept of illocutionary force... Austin discusses how the very same word-sequence can have a different meaning by virtue of having a different illocutionary force. Thus, 'You are going to London,' could have the illocutionary force of an assertion, a command, a request, a question, a complaint, or an ironic comment on the fact that you are headed towards Bristol." Interpreters ignore this issue at their peril. See E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 25-26.

12The view that Philippians 1:6 has reference to the church's material support of the Gospel is a view with a long history, as Kennedy's comment on "a good work" shows: "De W. [De Wette, 1847!], Lft. [Lightfoot] and others refer this to [koinonia, 'fellowship'] of ver. 5." H. A. A. Kennedy, "The Epistle to the Philippians," in vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, gen. ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 419. Lightfoot on this verse writes: "By this 'good work' is meant their cooperation with and affection for the Apostle. By the workers of this work St. Paul doubtless means the Philippians themselves. Nevertheless it is God's doing from beginning to end: He inaugurates and He completes." J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 4th ed. with additions and alterations (London: MacMillan, 1913), p. 84.

Similarly, C. J. Ellicott, A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians and to Philemon (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), p. 7. Martin, citing Lightfoot, writes: "It is possible to take a good work as an allusion to the Philippians' participation in the apostolic ministry by their gifts..." Ralph P. Martin, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 62 13A truly commendable treatment of the concept of working out our own salvation (Phil. 2:12) is offered by Joseph S. Exell (b. 1849) when he writes:

The working out of salvation: - I. A CHRISTIAN MAN HAS HIS WHOLE SALVATION ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED FOR HIM IN CHRIST AND YET HE HAS TO WORK IT OUT. Notice - 1. The persons to whom these words are addressed. Through applying them to non-Christians they have been perverted to mean: "You co-operate with Christ in the great work of salvation, and you will get grace and pardon." But none save Christians have anything to do with them. They are addressed to those who are already resting on the finished salvation of Jesus Christ. If you have not done so, and are applying them to yourselves, remember that when the Jews came to Christ in a similar spirit, asking Him, "What shall we do?" &c. He said, "This is the work of God that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." The first lesson is not work but faith, and unless there be faith no work. 2. But if salvation be this, How can we work it out? Salvation has four aspects. It means - (1) The whole process by which we are delivered from sin, and set safe on the right hand of God. (2) Deliverance from the guilt, punishment, and condemnation of sin, in which it is a thing past. (3) The gradual process of

deliverance from its power in our own hearts, in which it is a thing present. (4) The final and perfect deliverance, in which it is a thing future. These all come equally from Christ, and depend upon His work and power, and are all given in the first act of faith. But the attitude in which the Christian stands to the accomplished salvation, and that in which He stands to the progressive salvation are different. He has to take the finished blessing. Yet the salvation which means our being delivered from evil in our hearts is ours on the condition of continuous faithful reception and daily effort. 3. The two things, then, are not inconsistent. Work as well as believe, and in the daily subjugation of your spirits to His Divine power; in the daily crucifixion of your flesh; in the daily straining after loftier heights of godliness and purer atmospheres of devotion and love, make more thoroughly your own what you possess, work into the substance of your souls what you have.

See Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Philippians* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952), pp. 121-122. Exell's view is clearly compatible with our own.

14For a fuller exposition of this kind of teaching found in the words of our Lord, see chapter 4 in my book, *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1987). For a definition of saving the life which follows the lines we are suggesting, see R. E. Neighbour, *If They Shall Fall Away* (reprint ed., Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle, 1984), pp. 29-30.

15It is legitimate to wonder exactly what Hort means in his discussion of "salvation of souls" (1 Pet. 1:9), but the present writer may be forgiven for thinking that Hort's ship might be "listing" in our direction, when he writes:

... salvation of souls] In complete generality. Here, again, as I had occasion to say on v. 5, we have to be on our guard against interpreting the language of Scripture by the sharp limitations of modern usage. Salvation is deliverance from dangers and enemies and above all from death and destruction. The soul is not a particular element or faculty of our nature, but its very life (cf. Westcott on John xii. 25). The bodily life or soul is an image of the diviner life or soul which equally needs to be saved, and the salvation of which is compatible with the death and seeming destruction of the bodily life and soul. Here St. Peter means to say that, when the true mature faith possible to a Christian has done its work, a salvation of soul is found to have been thereby brought to pass, the passage from death into life has been accomplished.

See F. J. A. Hort, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, I. 1 - II. 17: *The Greek Text with Introductory Lecture, Commentary, and Additional Notes* (London: MacMillan. 1898), p. 48.

16Cranfield, for example, prefers the view that the phrase "doing good" (literally = "good work") in Romans 2:7 refers to "goodness of life, not however as meriting God's favour but as the expression of faith." But this is wholly gratuitous. The text says nothing at all about faith, much less about works as the "expression" of faith. The context in no way supports this view, and Cranfield is guilty of reading his own theology (which is not Paul's) into the passage. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. I: *Introduction and Commentary on Romans I-VIII*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1975), p. 147.

17Correctly, Charles Hodge writes: "When Paul says the doers of the law shall be justified, he is of course not to be understood as teaching, contrary to his own repeated declarations and arguments, that men are actually to be justified by obedience to the law. This is the very thing which he is labouring to prove impossible. The context renders his meaning plain. He is speaking not of the method of justification available for sinners, but of the principles on which all who are out of Christ are to be judged. They shall be judged impartially, according to their works, and agreeably to their knowledge of duty. On these principles no flesh living can be justified in the sight of God. The only way, as he afterwards teaches, to escape their application, is to confide in Christ, in virtue of whose death God can be just and yet justify the ungodly who believe in him" (*italics his*). This is precisely the view I take of this text! But I also extend it to verses 7 and 10 as Hodge (inconsistently) does not (pp. 46-48). For Paul, eternal life - no less than justification - is God's free gift (Rom. 5:18; 6:23). One can no more earn eternal life by "patient continuance" (that is, "perseverance") in doing good works than one can be justified by keeping the law. The reason? Because "there is none who does good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). For the quotation above, see Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 19th ed. (Philadelphia: James S. Claxton. c1836), p. 49.

18Although his volume bears a nihil obstat and an imprimatur, the Catholic writer Karl Kertelge is on the right track when he writes on 3:9: "Here in verse 9 Paul is dealing in the first place simply with the general guilt of both Jews and Greeks. He now draws the conclusions of his previous argument: Jews as well as Greeks are

guilty. In the preceding discussion, in 1:18-3:10, Paul has accused all, which means that all are under sin. This statement is the conclusion of Paul's whole exposition of human wickedness. That mankind as a whole is under sin, which men have helped to power by their own actions, is a final and conclusive argument for their need of salvation." Precisely! Those who interpret Romans 2:7, 10, and 13 as somehow validating the need for good works for final salvation, have left the stream of Pauline thought entirely and are shipwrecked on the shoals of a modern "scholasticism"! For the quote, see Karl Kertelge, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 44.

19John Calvin himself took Romans 2:13 precisely as we have taken it. He writes: "The sense of this verse, therefore, is that if righteousness is sought by the law, the law must be fulfilled, for the righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works. Those who misinterpret this passage for the purpose of building up justification by works deserve universal contempt. It is, therefore, improper and irrelevant to introduce here lengthy discussions on justification to solve so futile an argument. The apostle urges here on the Jews only the judgement of the law which he had mentioned, which is that they cannot be justified by the law unless they fulfill it, and that if they transgress it, a curse is instantly pronounced upon them. We do not deny that absolute righteousness is prescribed in the law, but since all men are convicted of offense, we assert the necessity for seeking another righteousness" (Comm. Romans 2:13). To argue otherwise in Romans 2 is to seek to reverse the Reformation.

20John MacArthur criticizes me for making these statements. He writes: "As a pastor. I take issue with Hodges' assertion that Paul was unconcerned about the destiny of members of the flocks he pastored."

MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 190. But MacArthur's phraseology employs a rhetorical "trick" by making it sound as if I had painted Paul as a detached and "unconcerned" pastor. The reader may consult the paragraph to which this note is attached to see, on the contrary, that my point is that Paul had "no reason" for such a concern. Dr. MacArthur appears to be reading the modern church situation back into the first century. First, we must remember that none of the Pauline churches were mega-churches on the order of Dr. MacArthur's own. C. R. Gregory once calculated that the church at Rome, to which Romans was written, was probably about 50 people, taking into account the names mentioned in the greetings of Romans 16. In such churches the elders undoubtedly knew each individual and could easily ascertain whether he or she believed the Gospel or not. But, secondly, Paul preached a Gospel in which assurance of salvation was of the essence of saving faith. As I point out in the text, Paul everywhere takes for granted that his readers are Christians and know it. Since MacArthur does not preach a Gospel that offers real assurance at the moment of faith, it is understandable that he should be constantly concerned about the eternal destiny of his membership. With such a theology, both pastors and their flocks must always be beset by uncertainty on this crucial matter.

21Romans 8:14 is best read against the background of 8:12-13. This writer has not found a better discussion of Romans 8:12-13 than the one presented by Anders

Nygren in his *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), pp. 325-326. There he writes:

The Christian has escaped from that ruler, death. But the intention is that he is actually to live. If death has been deposed, we are to let it be deposed in our lives, and no longer shape our lives according to its demand. We here call to mind again the dualism in the Christian life, to which Paul has referred again and again in the foregoing. In the sixth chapter, for example, he declared that the Christian is "free from sin"; and from that he immediately drew the conclusion that the Christian must battle against sin and all that would bind us to it. Out of the indicative, Paul educes an imperative. Through Christ we are free from sin; and for that very reason we are to fight against it... The same dualism emerges here, where Paul speaks of the Christian's freedom from death. Through Christ the Christian has actually been freed from death; but that does not mean that there is no longer any possibility for death to threaten him... The life of the Christian is still lived all the time in the scope of the first creation. He still lives "in the flesh," and there death has its chance to lay hold, when it strives to regain its power over him. Out of the flesh come all sorts of claims on him; and if he were to follow these, the result would be that he would be carried straight back along the way to bondage under death. It is therefore imperative to resist these claims and reject them as unjustified. Just as, in chapter 6, Paul was concerned to show that the Christian is truly free from sin, so that it can no longer come with any warranted claim on him... so he is now concerned to show that, in like manner, the Christian's freedom from death means that the flesh can no longer come with any justifiable claim. "So then,

brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh - for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live" (vss. 12-13). So there are two different way to live. Man can "live according to the flesh" or "live according to the Spirit." As to the former manner of life, it must be said that it is not really life. On the contrary, in its basic nature it is quite the opposite. Therefore Paul says, "If you live according to the flesh you will die." In that case one does not speak of what is properly life. When we hear Paul speaking here about a life that is really death, our thoughts turn automatically to the famous words of Augustine: "*Such was my life - was that life?*" (italics in the original).

Obviously, this splendid exposition enables us to understand what it means truly to live as God's adult sons, who are led in this experience by God's Spirit. Christians who live at the level of the flesh and of death, are operating experientially far below their standing in Christ.

22Despite other grammatical possibilities, the view we have given in the text is precisely the view of the phrase taken by both Cranfield and Murray ("The obedience which consists in faith"). Yet both writers proceed to read their theology into the expression so as to extract from it a call to works. But in doing this, they are no longer exegeting the text at all. The phrase means no more than what it says: "the obedience which is faith." When one believes the Gospel, he has obeyed the Gospel, since the Gospel calls for a response of faith. See Cranfield, pp. 66-67; and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965 [one vol. ed., 1968]), pp. 13-14.

23MacArthur wrote of 2 Corinthians 13:5 that this "admonition is largely ignored - and often explained away³ - in the contemporary church." The footnote number (3) refers to an extended comment about a statement I made on p. 95 of the first edition of this book. In his comment MacArthur notes: "Hodges does not mention 2 Corinthians 13:5 or attempt to explain [*italics added*] what possible second dimension it might have" (MacArthur, p. 190). But this is fair enough. My silence might raise the suspicion that the text was too difficult for me to address. But the fact is, I simply underrated its importance to the discussion. I repair this error by considering the verse in this second edition.

24Although Ironside's view of the text is not quite our own, in its essentials it is extremely similar. Thus he can write: "In replying again to the suggestion that Paul was not a real apostle, he says, 'If you seek a proof of Christ living in me, examine yourselves.' Now if you take this fifth verse out of its connection you lose the meaning of it. Many people take it, as though he meant that we are to examine ourselves to see if we are real Christians, but this is not what Paul is saying." For his full view of the verse, see H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1939), pp. 282-283.

25Baird's treatment of 2 Corinthians 13:5 closely approximates our own when he writes: "In the intense light of the cross, the Corinthians ought to examine themselves (v. 5; see 1 Cor. 11:28). They have been putting Paul to the test when they ought to be testing themselves. The crucial question is, Are you 'in the faith'; is Jesus Christ 'in you'? (NASB). Faith is the original response to the Christian message (Rom 1:16;

3:22), and the believer continues to stand in faith (1:24; 1 Cor. 16:13) and to 'walk by faith' (5:7). This life of faith is characterized as life in Christ or Christ in you - a life conditioned by the redemptive power of God (see Rom. 8:9-11; Gal. 2:20). Though the Corinthians may fail the test, they ought to be able to recognize that Paul has passed; the credentials of his service (11:23-29) are the suffering marks of Christ" (*italics added*). William Baird, 1 Corinthians; 2 Corinthians, Knox Preaching Guides, ed. John H. Hayes (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980). p. 109.

26It should be a major embarrassment to Reformed theologians to discover that their treatment of 2 Corinthians 13:5 was completely unknown to Calvin himself. As we have pointed out elsewhere in these notes (see footnote 2 in this chapter), Calvin did not believe in testing the reality of our salvation by examining our works. Moreover, he regarded such an idea as a dangerous dogma [Institutes 3.2.38]. Naturally he did not find this "dangerous dogma" in 2 Corinthians 13:5! Let us hear his own words:

5. Try your own selves. He confirms what he has just said, that Christ's power has appeared openly in his ministry. He calls them to judge of this by looking into themselves and acknowledging what they have received from Him. Firstly, since there is but one Christ, it is necessary that He should dwell both in minister and people, and if he dwell in the people, how shall He deny Himself in the minister? Further, He had shown His power in Paul's preaching so clearly and unambiguously that the Corinthians could not doubt it, unless they were completely foolish. For how had faith come to them, and Christ and everything else besides? It is with good

reason that they are called to look into themselves, that they may discover there what they despise as a thing unknown. The only true and well founded confidence a minister has is that he should be able to appeal to the consciences of those he has taught for approval of his teaching, so that if they have anything of Christ and of sincere godliness, they may be obliged to acknowledge his faithfulness. This, as we can now see, is Paul's purpose here. But there are two reasons that make this passage worthy of special attention. First, it shows the relationship between the people's faith and the minister's preaching: for the preacher is the mother who conceives and brings forth, and faith is the daughter who ought to be mindful of her origin. Second, this passage serves to prove the assurance of faith [*italics added*], a doctrine which the sophists of the Sorbonne have so corrupted for us that it is now almost uprooted from the minds of men. They hold that it is rash temerity to be persuaded that we are members of Christ and have Him dwelling in us, and they bid us rest content with a moral conjecture, which is a mere opinion, so that our consciences remain perpetually undecided and perplexed. But what does Paul say here? He declares that those who doubt their possession of Christ are reprobates [*italics added*]. Let us therefore understand that the only true faith is that which allows us to rest in God's grace, not with a dubious opinion but with firm and steadfast assurance" [*italics added*]. See Comm. 2 Corinthians 13:5.

It would be hard for Calvin to make any clearer his fundamental theological stance that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. The distortion of Paul's text into an appeal to confirm one's faith because true faith

cannot be verified apart from works, makes a mockery of one of Calvin's most settled convictions. The Reformed treatment of 2 Corinthians 13:5 subverts Biblical assurance no less than did "the sophists of the Sorbonne" against whom Calvin so vigorously protested.

27W. Nicol's statements are commendable for their frankness, if not for their theology, when he writes: "Logically, then, good works must be a condition of justification... " and, "From this it is clear that Paul might say: you must do good works, otherwise in the end God will not justify you." see "Faith and Works in the Letter of James," in *Essays in the General Epistles of the New Testament*, Neotestamentica 9 (Pretoria:The New Testament Society of South Africa, c1975), p.22.

28What we allege here is to be carefully noted. The faith/works synthesis which makes `works' an inherent or implicit part of `faith' so that `works' are indeed a "condition" for salvation (e.g., Gerstner, p. 210), does NOT represent the Reformers' view of faith and works. Even when the Reformers insisted on good works as an outgrowth of faith, they did not make `works' a part of faith or a "condition" for salvation. It might indeed be argued that the Reformers left a measure of tension between their doctrines of faith and works. But Reformed theology's solution to this tension is neither Biblical nor reformational. The Reformers themselves would have been horrified by the resulting theology. For them, good works were never the test of true faith, but rather, good works flowed out of the assurance of salvation which was inseparable from true saving faith. This is precisely the position of this book.

A strong case can be made that Reformed soteriology and "lordship salvation" are nothing more than a return to the Medieval Roman Catholic concept of "formed faith" (*fides formata*), in which faith is not effective for justification apart from works. See Paul Holloway, "A Return to Rome: Lordship Salvation's Doctrine of Faith," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 4(2, 1991): 13-21.

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Repentance

Peter repented. We can only hope that so did the Laodiceans. In fact, the call to repent is also issued to the church at Ephesus (Rev 2:5), to the church at Pergamos (2:16), and to the church at Sardis (3:3).

On another occasion, the Christians at Corinth repented. Paul describes their repentance like this:

For though I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle has made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing (2Co 7:8-9; italics added).

In all probability Paul is speaking here about his rebuke to the church (1Co 5:1-13) for allowing a case of incest to go unjudged. Second Corinthians 7:12 seems to refer to this case, which the Corinthians have now apparently dealt with as Paul desired.

But whatever the precise reference, one thing is clear: New Testament repentance is not confined to the unsaved or to the moment of conversion. It may take place repeatedly within Christian experience, whenever there is a need for it.

Perhaps it is not too surprising, therefore, that both Martin Luther and John Calvin, the great Reformers, perceived repentance to be a way of summarizing Christian experience.

Luther wrote: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying `Repent ye, etc.,' willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance."¹ And in a striking passage from the Institutes, Calvin says: "In one word I apprehend repentance to be regeneration, the end of which is the restoration of the Divine image within us."² Shortly thereafter, the Reformer states:

Wherefore, in this regeneration, we are restored by the grace of Christ to the righteousness of God, from which we fell in Adam.... And this restoration is not accomplished in a single moment, or day, or year.³ And he adds that the Lord renews His people's senses to purity so that "they may employ their whole life in the exercise of repentance, and know that this warfare will be terminated only by death."⁴ These observations are extremely valuable, and we will return to them later in this chapter. But just now we must also point out that neither Calvin nor Luther treated repentance as a condition for eternal salvation.⁵ Both stood firmly for the great Reformation insight expressed in the words *sola fide*-"faith alone."

No other position is biblical or truly evangelical. Faith alone (not repentance and faith) is the sole condition for justification and eternal life.

Of all the New Testament writers, Luke speaks the most frequently about repentance. Yet, in one of Luke's most famous stories, a badly shaken Philippian jailer inquires of Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The answer they give to him is the only answer the Bible knows to such a question: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Ac 16:31). There is not a word here-not a

syllable!-about repentance. Paul and Silas did not say, "Repent and believe," but simply, "believe."

Lordship salvation teachers are in dire straits with a text like this. They are reduced to trying to extract their doctrine from this passage by way of implication.⁶ But it is not there, and no amount of theological casuistry can put it there.

As we have already seen, the effort to find the concept of repentance and surrender in the word "believe" is totally without linguistic foundation. The word "believe" means "believe"-both in English and in Greek.

Indeed, John Calvin long ago rejected the notion that repentance and faith could be identified. He wrote:

For to include faith in repentance, is repugnant to what Paul says in Acts [20:21]-that he testified "both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;" where he mentions faith and repentance, as two things totally distinct.⁷ It is an extremely serious matter when the biblical distinction between faith and repentance is collapsed and when repentance is thus made a condition for eternal life. For under this perception of things the New Testament doctrine of faith is radically rewritten and held hostage to the demand for repentance. No wonder that one scholar in the writings of Calvin has been moved to assert:

Those who teach that repentance precedes faith, and make faith and forgiveness conditional upon repentance, fail to see that theirs is a position parallel to the Roman doctrine of penance which Calvin so strongly opposed.⁸ There can be no compromise on this point if we wish to preserve and to proclaim the biblical truth of sola fide.

To make repentance a condition for eternal salvation is nothing less than a regression toward Roman Catholic dogma.

"But," someone will say, "does not the Bible also declare God's demand for repentance?" Indeed it does, and perhaps nowhere more forcefully than in Acts 17:30 where Paul declares: "And these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent"(italics added).

Can this declaration be harmonized with sola fide-"faith alone"? Yes, it can, since the Bible is never internally contradictory. And the harmonization is really very easy and natural. How?

Simply put, we may say this: the call to faith represents the call to eternal salvation. The call to repentance is the call to enter into harmonious relations with God.

If the issue is simply, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Ac 16:31). If the issue is the broader one, "How can I get on harmonious terms with God?" the answer is "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ac 20:21).

Moreover, if a person is ready for faith-as the Philippian jailer was-that person can take this step immediately. Thereafter they can be taught what things they need to repent of if they are to walk with God. Along the course of Christian life, the believer will need to repent many times as the Scriptures clearly attest. But no one will be saved more than once.

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. But the fact still remains that God demands repentance from all and He conditions their fellowship with Him on that.

Let us explore this concept in God's Word.

The Meaning of the Original Words

The main words in the Greek New Testament for repentance are the noun *metanoia* ("repentance") and the verb *metanoeo* ("to repent"). Originally, these Greek words 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.⁹ In general use, the Greek verb and noun had come to be roughly equivalent to the English words "to repent" and "repentance."¹⁰ In the Septuagint, or Greek Old Testament, the Greek verb translates a Hebrew word meaning "to regret," "to repent."¹¹ It follows that the translation of these words in our English Bibles is generally satisfactory, and the discussion in this chapter will take that fact for granted.

12

Repentance and John's Gospel

One of the most striking facts about the doctrine of repentance in the Bible is that this doctrine is totally absent from John's gospel. There is not even so much as one reference to it in John's twenty-one chapters! Yet one lordship writer states: "No evangelism that omits the message of repentance can properly be called the gospel, for sinners cannot come to Jesus Christ apart from a radical change of heart, mind, and will."¹³ This is an astounding statement. Since John's gospel does omit

the message of repentance, are we to conclude that its gospel is not the biblical gospel after all?

The very idea carries its own refutation. The fourth evangelist explicitly claims to be doing evangelism (John 20:30-31). It is not the theology of the gospel of John that is deficient; it is the theology found in lordship salvation. Indeed, the desperate efforts of lordship teachers to read repentance into the fourth gospel show plainly that they have identified their own fundamental weaknesses.¹⁴ Clearly, the message of John's gospel is complete and adequate without any reference to repentance whatsoever.

In fact it is even plain that John the evangelist avoids the doctrine of repentance at a point where it could have been introduced with ease. The point in question is found in the very first chapter, for it is in this chapter that the fourth evangelist reports a dialogue between John the Baptist and a delegation from the religious leadership of Jerusalem. After listening to John deny that he is either the Christ or Elijah, or "the Prophet," the delegation hears him identify himself as simply a "voice of one crying in the wilderness" (1:19-23).

Exasperated, they pose a new question: "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (Jn 1:25).

As everyone who has read Matthew, Mark and Luke knows, John the Baptist preached a "baptism of repentance" (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3; see Mt 3:11). At this critical moment in his dialogue with this influential delegation of Jews, we expect John to announce the purpose of his baptizing ministry in terms of repentance.

But this he doesn't do. Instead, he simply says:

I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose (1:26-27).

Not a word-not a syllable-about repentance. And if ever there was a perfect place for the evangelist to inject this theme into his gospel, this is the place.

But his silence is deafening!

Many Bible scholars have thought-no doubt correctly-that the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist who is mentioned in John 1:35-40 was none other than the fourth evangelist himself. But if the evangelist was a personal "pupil" of the Baptist before he attached himself to this new Teacher, his silence on the theme of repentance is made all the more amazing.

The silence of chapter one persists to the very end of the book. The fourth gospel says nothing at all about repentance, much less does it connect repentance in any way with eternal life.

This fact is the death knell for lordship theology. Only a resolute blindness can resist the obvious conclusion: John did not regard repentance as a condition for eternal life. If he had, he would have said so. After all, that's what his book is all about: obtaining eternal life (Jn 20:30-31).

Repentance in the Gospel of Luke

In striking contrast to the gospel of John, however, are the two books written by Luke. Out of nearly sixty New Testament occurrences of the noun or verb for repentance, twenty-five are found in either the gospel of Luke or the book of Acts.

Repentance, therefore, is a theme which the third evangelist especially has stressed.

If for the moment we pass over Luke's references to this theme in the preaching of John the Baptist (Lk 3:3, 8; Ac 13:24; 19:4), we come to the first mention of repentance in the ministry of Jesus (Lk 5:32) where the striking charge is found that Jesus has fellowship with sinners!

In his narrative Luke tells us that, at Levi's feast for our Lord, the scribes and Pharisees complained to His disciples. And they said: "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (Lk 5:30; italics added). But, of course, the charge was really directed at Jesus. Why did He eat and drink with such people? The Savior's response is familiar and much loved:

Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call [= invite] the righteous, but sinners, to repentance (Lk 5:31, 32).

"I am here," says our Lord, "to bring spiritual health to those who are sick with sin. I have come to invite sinners to the banquet of repentance."

That is what repentance is all about. It is all about the sinner finding spiritual health. It is all about the sinner "sitting at the table"-having fellowship-with God.

In thinking of matters this way, it is obvious that this is exactly what Luke's story of the prodigal son is all about as well.

No doubt Luke 15 is the greatest chapter on repentance in the entire New Testament, perhaps in the entire Bible. But here, too, the three parables on repentance spring directly out of a question about Jesus' table

fellowship with sinners. The opening words of Luke 15 set the stage for our Lord's teaching about repentance:

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Lk 15:1-2; italics added).

"How can this man sit down with people like that?" say the self-righteous religious leaders. "How can He have table fellowship with the dregs of society?"

How? The answer was to be found in the heart of God. Like a loving and generous father, He waited to throw His arms around the returning sinner. But accepting that sinner hack was not all the Father had in mind. A banquet of joyous fellowship was also a part of His plan.

And that is the story of the prodigal son. out in the far country, reduced to desperation by his profligate lifestyle, this young man repents. The prodigal son's repentance is recounted by our Lord in these words:

And when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants" (Lk 15:17-19).

"I want to live at home," the prodigal son is saying to himself, "so I will go back and offer my services to my dad in exchange for room and board." In effect, the young man decided, "I want to repair the breach between me and my dad. Maybe I can put things right with an apology and by working for him."

This was a good decision. But it was flawed. His father was not interested in making the bargain his son was thinking about. His dad was prepared to receive him freely. His love for his prodigal boy was not conditioned on any kind of pledge to serve on the farm. Restoring harmony with his father was going to be ever so much easier than he had imagined.

The story of the prodigal son therefore is not simply a story about salvation. It is a story about how a long-separated father and son were reunited. It is a story about a dad who did much more than take his boy back. In fact it is a story about how a father lavished his love on an erring son and sat down with him, in fellowship, at a splendid and joyous banquet.

Unmistakably, the story of the prodigal son is the story of the sinner's restoration to fellowship with God our heavenly Father. But repentance is always about that, even when the repenting sinner is already a Christian!

Let us reconsider the words of Jesus to the Laodicean Christians:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me (Rev 3:19-20; italics added).

Repentance, dining with Jesus, fellowship-such are the intertwining threads which the Bible uses to weave this tapestry of truth. Harmony-fellowship-between a sinful humanity and a forgiving God must always be based on repentance, just as justification must always be based on faith alone.

To be sure, the prodigal son can represent an unsaved man whose repentance gets him turned in the right direction. Many an unsaved person has found salvation very much like that. Dissatisfied with a wasted earthly life, the unsaved sinner decides to "go home" to God, seeking harmony with his Maker. And though he may at first have the mistaken notion that he must work for God's acceptance, in time he will meet a forgiving Father whose love is utterly unconditional and whose salvation is absolutely free.

But the prodigal son can also represent a Christian who has drifted far away from fellowship with the Father and who likewise decides to "go home." Perhaps the Christian even plans to "make up" for failure by working extra hard for God. But on returning, once again there is the encounter with that same forgiving love first experienced at the moment of salvation-whether that moment was recent, or in the distant past.

It is always the same-whether we are coming to God for the first time or for the hundredth time. The Father is there with open arms and with an open heart.

"Take heed to yourselves," Jesus said to His disciples on one occasion. "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" (Lk 17:3-4; italics added).

And why should the disciples of Jesus do that? Because that is exactly what God does for them-for us-every day!

The story of the prodigal son, therefore, is a story which repeats itself-in principle-over and over again in every Christian's life. It is far from exhausted by our initial

experience of harmonious contact with God, and those who limit it to that have not really understood it.

And so the Reformers were basically right. It is essentially correct to say that "our Lord and Master Jesus Christ... willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance." For without repentance, repeated whenever the need for it exists, there is no fellowship with God.

Repentance in Acts

In his two-volume work, sometimes referred to as Luke-Acts, Luke has chosen to stress the theme of harmony between God and man. But Luke was evidently writing to a Christian audience as his prologue to Theophilus (Lk 1:1-4) suggests. His subject matter then is chosen for the benefit of Christians.

The theme of harmony-fellowship-with God was an appropriate one for Luke to emphasize, especially to believing readers of the first century. For one of the burning issues of Luke's day was the question of table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. How difficult this issue could become is clearly reflected in Galatians 2:11-21, where Paul had to stand alone for the right of Gentiles to eat at the same table with Jews.

But obviously, if God the Father Himself could have fellowship with repentant sinners, so could any Jewish believer. And this could be done even if the repenting sinner was a Gentile.

Like Cornelius! Indeed, there is a sense in which Cornelius is the "prodigal son" of the book of Acts.

It is important to observe, therefore, that Luke's narrative about Cornelius plays much the same role in

Acts as the story of the prodigal son plays in Luke. And just as Luke highlights the prodigal's experience, so he also highlights the experience of Cornelius. For the story of the prodigal son is by far the longest of the three parables about repentance in Luke 15, and it is one of the longest stories in the entire third gospel. The story about Cornelius is also one of the longest stories in the book of Acts.

And here, too, we meet the issue of table fellowship. Indeed, when the apostle Peter went up to Jerusalem after his encounter with Cornelius, he ran into a firestorm of criticism. Thus we are told:

And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" (Ac 11:2-3; *italics added*).

Does this sound familiar? This was precisely the criticism that the scribes and Pharisees made about Jesus Himself. It was also the spirit of the elder brother of the prodigal son. In fact, in the concluding section of our Lord's narrative in Luke 15, the father of the repentant boy goes out to the older brother to invite him to the banquet inside.

But the self-righteous older brother rudely rejects the opportunity for fellowship with his father and with his younger brother. His words are indignant:

Lo these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time, and yet you never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots,

you killed the fattened calf for him (Lk 15:29-30; italics added).

"How could you do this?" the older brother complains sullenly. "How can you have a big party for this profligate brother of mine?"

How? Because God desires fellowship with repenting sinners. And He desires this even if those sinners are Gentiles like Cornelius.

No wonder, then, that when Peter finished his account about God's acceptance of Cornelius and of Cornelius's friends, the critics' mouths were stopped. And so we read:

When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life" (Ac 11:18; italics added).

"Repentance to [or, unto] life"! Repentance that led to life-such was Cornelius's actual experience.

Let these words not be misread. Emphatically they do not say, "repentance unto eternal life." Instead, they are the reflection of that "coming to life" which is always the end result of repentance whether it be the repentance of a Christian or the repentance of the unsaved.

For even to Christians, Paul could say: "For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if you through the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Ro 8:13; italics added).

Or, to put it into the words of the father of the prodigal son, "It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found" (Lk 15:32; italics added).

The truth embodied in this declaration is profound. Whether it is a Christian or a non-Christian who wanders off into sin, such a person is a lost and straying sheep, cut off from the experience of real life which can only be "tasted" and enjoyed in the presence of God Himself-in fellowship with Him.¹⁵ Thus to repent is to rediscover our direction and to experience true "life" in harmony with our Maker. But repentance is not the means by which we acquire eternal life. Luke's testimony on this point is crystal clear: "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Ac 13:48; *italics added*). Not, let us note, "repented and believed." Simply, "believed."

What must I do to be saved? The answer of Paul and Silas is the answer of Luke as well: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Ac 16:31). And for that, repentance is not a condition. Indeed, Luke never says that repentance is a condition for salvation any more than John the Evangelist says that it is. Eternal life is by faith alone-sola fide!

Of course, Cornelius was unsaved when Peter reached his house. But the angel had promised Cornelius that Peter "will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Ac 11:14). However, when Peter came he did not preach repentance. Why? Because Cornelius needed to be saved. He had already repented!

Nothing is more evident than this fact. Cornelius had turned from his paganism to seek the God of Israel. To that end he "gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Ac 10:2). This was nothing more nor less than Cornelius's search for God and for harmonious relations with his divine Creator. Thus his

prayers were directed toward the discovery of how he might find true peace with the God of Israel. The coming of Peter was the answer to those prayers.

This point is made clearly in the words Cornelius himself spoke when the apostle arrived:

And Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, `Cornelius your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter'" (Ac 10:30-32; italics added).

"Your prayer has been answered," the messenger announced. "You will hear words by which you and all your household will be saved" (Ac 11:14).

What words were those? They were not words about repentance at all. Instead, they were words about faith. Thus Peter says to the crowd assembled in Cornelius's house: "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Ac 10:43; italics added).

The results were instantaneous. No sooner are these words out of Peter's mouth than salvation occurs. The Holy Spirit is poured out on his believing hearers (Ac 10:44).

We have already suggested that Cornelius is the "prodigal son" of the book of Acts, and so he is. Living as he did in the "far country" of gentile paganism, this centurion-like the prodigal-"came to himself." He decided, as it were, to "go home" to the true and living God.

Just as a journey separated the prodigal son from his father's farm, so a "journey" was undertaken by Cornelius as well. This journey took time, but Cornelius traveled it with alms, with prayers, and with fasting. And at the end of the road he made precisely the same discovery that the wayward prodigal boy made: He found a loving Father who accepted him freely and who lavished His love on him by pouring out the gift of His own Holy Spirit. Shortly thereafter, Cornelius was baptized and he had fellowship not only with God but with God's servant Peter, whom he asked "to stay a few days" (Ac 10:48).

Who will deny that many people find Christ in very much this way? Like the prodigal son, and like Cornelius himself, they awaken one day to their need for God. At that point they repent and begin to seek their Creator.

Perhaps they start going to church. Perhaps they take up prayer and Bible reading. Perhaps they begin to give some of their money to God. Perhaps they try to clean up their lifestyle. Such people are under the drawing and convicting power of God's Holy Spirit. But they are not saved by any of the things they do in their search for God. They are not saved by their repentance.

Instead, in such cases, their repentance gets them on the road back to God. It moves them in the right direction, for it moves them to seek harmony with their Maker. But God must always disclose Himself to such people. And indeed He always does, for the Bible declares, "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb 11:6).

Somewhere on the road of our search, God meets the repentant sinner. But God's self-disclosure is always the

revelation of His full and unconditional love for us. It is always the disclosure of a loving Father who grants everlasting salvation, to anyone who wants it, on the basis of faith alone.

At the end of the search, therefore, the sinner always confronts the divine *sola fide*!

Ready to Believe

We can see, therefore, how God can use repentance to draw men to saving faith in Christ. But He does not need to. He may use gratitude instead.

The man born blind who was healed by our Lord (Jn 9) is a classic case in point. Our Lord specifically disassociates this man's condition from any sin on either his or his parents' part (vv. 2-3). Not once in His own interaction with this man does our Lord even intimate that He is concerned about the man's sin. By contrast, the legalistic and unbelieving Pharisees accuse him harshly (v. 34). But when the blind man meets the Savior again, the one and only issue between them is faith: He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" (v. 35). The blind man replies: "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" (v. 36).

"I only need information," this man is saying. "I am ready to believe if you'll just tell me who that Person is."

Our Lord's answer is revelatory: "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you" (9:37).

The blind man's response is immediate: "And he said, 'Lord, I believe!' And he worshiped Him."

It would be a true piece of theological casuistry to find repentance in a story like this. It simply is not there.

Unlike the prodigal son who was drawn back to his father by his own empty life in the far country, the blind man is drawn to Jesus by sheer gratitude. Here was the Man who had opened his eyes. He was as ready to believe as a person can get.

And when someone is ready to believe, they can do so immediately. There is no need to preach repentance to such a person at that point. Like the former blind man, they should be invited to believe right then and there.

But as surely as God can use gratitude to bring us to faith, He can also use fear. Such, in fact, was His method with the Philippian jailer. Terrified by the obvious divine intervention in his prison house, shaken no doubt by his own close brush with death (Ac 16:27-29), the jailer is ready-even eager-to be saved. All he needs to be told, therefore, is to believe.

Or again, God may use inward dissatisfaction-our own inner thirst-to bring us to faith in Christ.

This is what He did with the woman at the well of Sychar, whose life had been scarred by a dissatisfying round of unhappy marriages (Jn 4:17-18). Jesus said to her:

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water (Jn 4:10).

"You are thirsty," Jesus is saying. "So much so, in fact, that if you only knew who I am and the kind of water I can give you, you would already have requested it. That's how thirsty you are!"

Not a word to this woman-not a syllable!-about repentance. She is not even asked to leave her present

illicit relationship (Jn 4:18). Why? Didn't Jesus care about that? Of course He cared about how she lived. But that was not the issue at that specific time. The issue right then was eternal life.

Repentance could come later-for this woman, for the Philippian jailer, and for the man born blind. If they were to experience fellowship with their heavenly Father, it would have to come-not once, but many times. Repentance was indispensable to effective Christian living.

But it was not a condition for eternal life.

We must beware of trying to confine God to a "box" of our own devising. To be sure, God saves every man and woman in the same way-by faith alone. But His methods for bringing people to the moment of faith are rich and varied.

God may use repentance. But He may also use gratitude, or fear, or dissatisfaction, or any number of other powerful incentives. God is sovereign. He works with each soul precisely as His own wisdom ordains. But the words of invitation stand irrevocably true: "Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17).

God has only one way of giving this water. He gives it freely. But God has many ways of making people want the water He gives.

Other Passages on Repentance

If we will keep carefully in mind the things we have considered thus far, we will be able to understand many other biblical statements about repentance, and thus avoid much confusion and error.

The call to repentance is the call to harmonious relations with God. And that is precisely what it was when John the Baptist preached repentance to Israel (Mt 3:2, 8, 11; Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3, 8). It was a call to the nation to repair its relationship with the God who had selected them out of all the families of the earth, to be His people.

In John's preaching, repentance played precisely the role it had in the life of Cornelius. It was designed to prepare the nation for faith in the Coming One. Paul states this clearly in Acts 19:

Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people [= Israel] that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus" (Ac 19:4).

Here we see once more that repentance and faith are not the same thing. Rather, repentance was to prepare Israel for faith, exactly as it also prepared Cornelius the Gentile for faith.

Moreover, many of the threats voiced against unrepentant Israel have in view the national calamities that would overtake them if they remained out of harmony with God. John the Baptist spoke, for example, of the ax of judgment that was laid at the root of the trees and which would cut down every fruitless tree so that it could be cast into the fire (Mt 3:10; Lk 3:9). Yet this should by no means be read as a threat of eternal damnation, but rather as a warning about the fiery holocaust which engulfed the nation in A.D. 70 and resulted in thousands upon thousands of deaths.

This fact should be evident when we closely consider the additional words which the Baptist spoke:

His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Mt 3:12; *italics added*).

Every farmer in John's audience understood this analogy perfectly well. Chaff was completely burned up by the fires to which it was consigned. In short, the chaff was destroyed.¹⁶ This can only refer to temporal judgment and physical death. The unsaved are not "burned up"-they are not "destroyed"-in hell! In that place, the "worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mk 9:44, 46, 48). But in the national tragedy of A.D. 70 the physical lives of many thousands were cut down and destroyed.

To the same effect are the words of Jesus in Luke 13: "but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (13:3, 5). Here the word "perish" is a perfectly good Greek word which can simply mean "die."

And transparently, Jesus is talking about physical death. The "Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (Lk 13:1) had died. The "eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell" had been "killed" (Lk 13:4; *italics added*).

"You're going to die, too," says our Lord, "unless you repent." No doubt many of His hearers did die in the devastation the Romans brought to Palestine in A.D. 70. But those who repented-who repaired their relationship with God-would survive.

Let there be no mistaking this principle. The end of the road for any unrepentant sinner is death.¹⁷ This is true even if the unrepentant sinner is already saved and certain of his or her destiny in heaven. Apart from

repentance the sinning Christian is headed toward an untimely death under the chastening hand of God.

That is what James had in mind when he urged his Christian brethren to turn one another from any sinful path:

Brethren, if anyone among you should wander from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins (Jas 5:19-20; italics added).

"Be concerned," James is saying, "to seek your brother's repentance whenever you see him going astray. When you do that, you can save his life!"¹⁸

Conclusion

From what we have seen in this chapter, we must conclude that the call to repentance is broader than the call to eternal salvation. It is rather a call to harmony between the creature and His Creator, a call to fellowship between sinful men and women and a forgiving God.

If we keep this fact firmly in mind, we will never make the mistake of thinking that repentance is a condition for eternal salvation.

Thus it will be with full comprehension that we read words like these:

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk 24:46-47; italics added).

This, of course, is the Lucan form of the Great Commission. And like Matthew's expression of this mandate (Mt 28:18-20), it focuses on the broad call into a vital experience with God.¹⁹ In Matthew, that experience is described as discipleship to Jesus Christ our Lord (Mt 28:19) and involves obedience to His commands (28:20). In Luke, that experience is presented as the fellowship with God into which we enter by means of "repentance and remission of sins." Indeed-not surprisingly-Luke's form of the Commission immediately follows another instance of table fellowship between the disciples and their now risen Lord (Lk 24:42-43).

In contrast to Matthew and Luke, however, stands the gospel of John. Whereas Matthew and Luke focus on the experience with God into which people are called, John focuses on a more narrow topic: how to get eternal life. And since that topic was in his mind, John the Evangelist had no need to discuss repentance.

Of course, the words "repentance and remission of sins" (Lk 24:47) are a summary statement. They do not express all the details of Luke's theology. Instead, as we have seen, Luke agreed with John that eternal life-eternal salvation-is by faith alone.

But clearly, the words "repentance and remission of sins" are programmatic for the book of Acts. In fact, repentance and remission of sins are at the core of the preaching that is done there. To begin with, John the Baptist's call to Israel to repent is repeated in the opening chapters of Acts (2:38; 3:19; 5:31). As was true also in John's preaching, this repentance was to be expressed in baptism (Ac 2:38).

Especially noteworthy is Acts 5:30-31, which picks up, in reference to Israel, the theme of Luke (24:47). Thus, speaking to the Jewish leadership, Peter declares:

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you killed by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted with His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins(Ac 5:30-31; italics added).

So the early preaching in Acts, which begins at Jerusalem (Lk 24:47), is a repeat of the call made by John the Baptist to Israel to repair their disastrous breach with God. And if matters were serious in John's day, they were far worse now. For now the nation had crucified the One whom God had made both Lord and Christ (Ac 2:36).

In grim reality, the dreadful fires of A.D. 70 were now that much closer to being kindled.

As Israel rejects this call, however, the invitation to "repentance and remission of sins" moves outward "to all nations" (Lk 24:47). The book of Acts is our only biblical record of the spread of God's truth into the gentile world.

In his account of this spread, therefore, Luke selects the story of Cornelius as the centerpiece of his narrative. As we have seen, Cornelius was a striking example of repentance, as he is also an example of the forgiveness of sins, which Cornelius received by faith (Ac 10:43-44).

Cornelius, then, is Luke's prototype and model for Gentiles everywhere, to whom Paul would preach "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ac 20:21).

Paul, of course, was Luke's hero. He is the commanding figure of Luke's narrative. And as Paul's sometimes traveling companion, Luke understood Pauline theology as well as anyone ever has. Luke knew, for example, that if Paul were asked what a man must do to be saved, the answer would be simple and direct: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Ac 16:31).

And what about justification? Luke knew that in Pauline theology this, too, was by faith alone. In fact, Luke quotes Paul on this subject in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia: "And by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Ac 13:39; *italics added*).

Not a word here-not a syllable!-about repentance. And how utterly like the book of Romans are such words. And why not? The words are Paul's in both places.

But Luke also knew that Paul preached a broader message. That message consisted of a call to men-both Jews and Greeks-to enter into vital fellowship with God Himself. And in this broader message, repentance played a prominent role.

In his sterling defense before King Agrippa and the Roman procurator Festus, Paul declares the full scope of his proclamation to men:

Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works suitable to repentance (Ac 26:19-20; *italics added*).

"I preach holiness," Paul is saying. "I preach the kind of religious experience that turns people to God and produces good works."

But Paul is not saying, as lordship theology alleges, that one cannot be saved without repentance or that one cannot go to heaven unless a life of good works is lived. Paul never said that! The Bible never says that. What Paul and the Bible do say is clear:

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (Ro 4:5; italics added).

Putting this another way, if you could have inquired of Paul what you needed to do to be eternally saved, he simply would have said: "Believe!"

Yes, the Reformers got it right after all. The inspiring insight of Reformation thought is altogether biblical and true: *Sola fide!*

Return to the Repentance Menu

Notes

(After the first reference to an author's work, later references to the same work often use a shortened form and the reader is referred back to the initial reference for full bibliographic details.)

Chapter 12

1See Luther's and Zwingli's Propositions for Debate: The Ninety-Five Theses of 31 October 1517 and the Sixty-Seven Articles of 19 January 1523, in the original version and contemporary translations, with a new English translation, introduction, and bibliography by Carl S. Meyer (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), pp. 2-3.

2Institutes III.III.9.

3Ibid.

4Ibid.

5Both Reformers treated repentance as a fruit of faith. Cf. Institutes III.III.1. And note this interesting discussion by Luther:

In the first place, they [the Romanists] teach that contrition takes precedence over, and is far superior to, faith in the promise, as if contrition were not a work of faith, but a merit; indeed, they do not mention faith at all. They stick so closely to works and to those passages of Scripture where we read of many who obtained pardon by reason of their contrition and humility of heart; but they take no account of the faith which effected this contrition and sorrow of heart, as is written of the men of Nineveh in Jon. 3 [:5]: "And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, etc." Others again, more bold and wicked, have invented a so-called "attrition," which is converted into contrition by the power of the keys, of which they know nothing. This attrition they grant to the wicked and unbelieving, and thus abolish contrition altogether. O the intolerable wrath of God, that such things should be taught in the church of Christ! Thus, with both faith and its work destroyed, we go on secure in the doctrines and opinions of men, or rather we perish in them. A contrite heart is a precious thing, but it is found only where there is an ardent faith in the promises and threats of God. Such faith, intent on the immutable truth of God, makes the conscience tremble, terrifies it and bruises it; and afterwards, when it is contrite, raises it up, consoles it, and preserves it. Thus the truth of God's threat is the

cause of contrition, and the truth of his promise the cause of consolation, if it is believed. By such faith a man "merits" the forgiveness of sins. Therefore faith should be taught and aroused before all else. Once faith is obtained, contrition and consolation will follow inevitably of themselves.

A paragraph later, he adds:

Beware then, of putting your trust in your own contrition and of ascribing the forgiveness of sins to your own remorse. God does not look on you with favor because of that, but because of the faith by which you have believed his threats and promises, and which has effected such sorrow within you. Thus we owe whatever good there may be in our penance, not to our scrupulous enumeration of sins, but to the truth of God and to our faith. All other things are the works and fruits which follow of their own accord. They do not make a man good, but are done by the man who is already made good through faith in the truth of God. Even so, "smoke goes up in his wrath; because he is angry he shakes the mountains and sets them on fire," as it is said in Ps. 18 [: 8,7]) [sic]. First comes the terror of this threatening, which sets the wicked on fire, then faith, accepting this, sends up smoke-clouds of contrition, etc.

Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Luther's Works, vol. 36: Word and Sacrament II, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), pp. 84, 85.

6For the idea that the word "Lord" here implies "lordship" doctrine, see our discussion of Acts 16:31 in chapter 13.

7Institutes III.III.5.

8See M. Charles Bell, p. 39 n. 208 (bibliographic data: chap. 2, n. 8).

9See the Bauer-Gingrich-Danker lexicon, pp. 511-12 (bibliographic data: chap. 2, n. 4).

10The concept of "sorrow" or "remorse" is frequently implied by the English word, though by no means always implied. In this regard, the English context is decisive for the English word, just as the Greek context is for the Greek word. "Remorse" cannot always be presupposed in either English or Greek, so that the idea is often softened to the level of "regret." See the lexicon cited in the previous note.

11The Hebrew word is *niham*. It is not appropriate to say, as J. Goetzmann does, that "the New Testament does not follow LXX usage but employs *metanoeo* to express the force of *sûb*, turn around." (See article on *metanoia*, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:357. On the contrary, the New Testament word for "turning around" is the verb *epistrepho* (noun = *epistrophe*). There is no good reason to think that the Septuagint translators and the New Testament writers did not share the same understanding of *metanoeo* as a functional equivalent to *niham*.

12Many very fine expositors of the New Testament who preach a completely free salvation hold the view that "to repent" means simply "to change one's mind." They then affirm that in salvation contexts the call to repent means basically nothing more than the change of mind involved in moving from an attitude of unbelief to one of faith in Christ. For such expositors, repentance becomes almost a synonym for faith. Or, at least, it is the opposite side of

the coin since some change of mind is necessarily involved in coming to faith. I certainly respect this point of view even if I cannot agree with it. It is a view that maintains the integrity of the gospel offer. For a scholarly discussion from this perspective, see Robert Nicholas Wilkin, *Repentance as a Condition for Salvation in the New Testament* (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985).

13MacArthur, p. 167.

14Astoundingly, MacArthur finds repentance implied in Nicodemus's questions, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (p. 40) and in our Lord's reference to the brazen serpent story of Numbers 21 (p. 46). But in both cases, repentance has scarcely ever been detected in either case in the Johannine narrative. MacArthur's efforts to extract it from John's text will be seen by any fair-minded person to be a counsel of desperation.

15The reader is referred again to Anders Nygren's excellent discussion of Romans 8:12-17 (see chap. 6, n. 3). Particularly appropriate here are these words by Nygren (p. 326):

So there are two different ways to live. Man can "live according to the flesh" or "live according to the Spirit." As to the former manner of life, it must be said that it is not really life. On the contrary, in its basic nature it is quite the opposite. Therefore, Paul says, "If you live according to the flesh you will die" [*italics in the original*].

Shortly after these words, alluding to Romans 8:10 ("if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin"),

Nygren writes (p. 327), "With his `mortal body' the Christian lives in an order where death reigns. It is here-in his mortal body-that the Christian must carry on his battle against the flesh and death." Sin, then, involves an experience that cannot truly be called "life." It is, in fact, a species of "death." All repentance, therefore-whether by the unsaved or the saved-is like an awakening from a state of "death" to an experience of "life" with God.

16The Greek verb for "burn up" is intensive and is normally applied to things which are fully consumed by fire (see Ac 19:19; 1Co 3:15; Heb 13:11; Rev 8:7). Of course, the contextual imagery of chaff makes the force of the verb plain in Matthew 3:12. The same verb is also used in the parallel passage in Luke 3:17. Even in the case of the darnel (= "tares") in Matthew 13:30, 40, the metaphor suggests complete destruction. The reference in Matthew 13 will then be to the eschatological judgments of the end-times, which result in such widespread destruction of life that the extinction of the human race is threatened (Mt 24:22). The reference to "unquenchable fire" in Matthew 3:12 (and Lk 3:17) means, of course, that the fire is irresistible and cannot be extinguished until the chaff is destroyed. The fires of hell are also unquenchable (Mk 9:44, 46, 48), but they do not consume, or "burn up," the lost.

17Of course, if an unrepentant attitude deters a person from seeking or accepting God's free and unconditional salvation, he will not only die but also end in hell. No doubt, the rich man of our Lord's well-known narrative was a case in point (Lk 16:19-31). But we should not look for theological sophistication in this man who has just awakened in Hades (16:23). He is mistaken about

the possibility of receiving relief from Lazarus (16:24-26), and he is also mistaken about the impact Lazarus could have on his five living brothers (16:27-31). But at least he does know that his brothers need to get right with God, and it was natural for him, as a Jew, to indicate this need by a reference to repentance (16:30). But we are certainly not to infer that he awakened in hell with a clear-cut theology of salvation by grace through faith!

18Paul is close to James in describing the Corinthians' sorrow and repentance as leading "to salvation [or, deliverance], not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2Co 7:10; italics added). The Corinthians have chosen a life-saving path (see v. 11).

19Not surprisingly, the apostle Peter refers to this broader call from God in 2 Peter 3:9 when he writes, "The Lord... is longsuffering toward us, not desiring that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Repentance is God's universal desire for people. Not only does He not wish that any man undergo eternal judgment, but also He wants every man to repent. That is, God desires harmony and fellowship with all, and He desires the damnation of none.

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The NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament

The NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament by Zane Hodges, Arthur Farstad - Available at Christian Books Hodges and Farstad, 1982. Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982; 2nd edition 1985.

In this Greek text Hodges and Farstad present the majority readings of the numerous medieval manuscripts (from data provided in von Soden 1913) in a critical edition, with a sparse apparatus of "Byzantine" and "Alexandrian" variants. The readings of Aland et al. 1979 and of an edition of Mill's text (see Mill 1707) are indicated in the margin. A genealogical method is used for the book of Revelation, and so the readings there are not strictly majority readings, but rather early "Byzantine" readings. The "Alexandrian" readings typical of modern critical texts are set aside as products of a deviant manuscript tradition of Egypt. Hodges and Farstad maintain that the majority readings are most likely to be the original readings because the earliest readings would be the most widely distributed and frequently copied, while later deviations would tend to be localized. They spend little time on such general explanations of theory and method in the Introduction; it is understood that Pickering 1977 gives a full exposition of their views. For a similar text, founded on similar principles, see Pierpont and Robinson 1991. The Hodges and Farstad text is reprinted and provided with an interlinear translation in Farstad 1993.

The Purpose of Tongues

The Purpose of Tongues

Zane C. Hodges

No question is more crucial or determined for a proper understanding for the gift of tongues than the problem of the basic purpose of this gift. It should be clear that the issue of whether miraculous speaking in tongues is a genuine modern-day charisma or not will be decided largely by whether or not its scripturally revealed purpose is likewise a divine purpose for the day in which we live.

The Principle of Temporary Gift

Too often it is incorrectly assumed that the existence of a given spiritual phenomenon in the days of the primitive Church must automatically presuppose that the same phenomenon should be apparent today. But no matter how often this assumption may be made, it is patently false. Strangely enough, its falseness can be demonstrated from the case of the supreme charisma — the spiritual gift *par excellence* — the gift of an apostle. That to be an apostle was itself a spiritual gift is clearly revealed in such passages as Ephesians 4:7-12 and 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, although through inattention to these Scriptures apostleship is often thought of as though it constituted a category entirely separate from the other spiritual gifts. But the inclusion of apostles along with prophets, teachers, miracles, and tongues in a list of charismata like that of 1 Corinthians 12:28 can leave no ground for question on this point. Accordingly inasmuch as Protestant theology generally has clearly

recognized the cessation of the apostolic gift in the first century, at the same time that it rightly denies any form of apostolic succession, all such Protestant theology becomes basically committed to the principle of temporary gift. For clearly the apostleship was itself temporary, and, if the principle be established, it is perfectly legitimate to inquire whether there may not be other first-century gifts which were likewise temporary.

No problem arises in the minds of most Christians as to why apostles should appear only in the beginning stages of Christianity and not in its subsequent years. For however desirable their modern presence might conceivably seem to be, the fact remains that the purpose for which apostles were originally given has been fulfilled. It is evident, for example, from Ephesians 2:20, where that spiritual dwelling which is the Church is said to be constructed on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets," that the apostolic gift belongs to the initial, foundational aspect of the divine building. To the apostles and prophets was committed the responsibility of laying the all-important groundwork upon which in succeeding ages the superstructure might be reared until the whole sublime and holy temple has been completed. Having laid this groundwork, and the Scriptures being committed to the Church, the apostles passed permanently off the spiritual scene. The building, however, has continued to rise through the centuries and will not be complete until the return of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. But the special gift of an apostle is no longer given for the simple reason that the purpose for it no longer exists.

Quite naturally, therefore, it follows from this fact that the same consideration may well apply to the question of

the continuance or cessation of the gift of tongues. If the biblically revealed purpose of this gift be an agelong purpose, it is proper to look for tongues as an agelong spiritual manifestation. If, on the other hand, the biblically revealed purpose of the gift be temporary, we shall have reason for regarding the gift itself as temporary and will be forced to view modern claims to its possession as actually lacking in basic biblical credibility.

The Sign Significance of Tongues

It is just here that a consideration of the passage in 1 Corinthinans 14:20-22, becomes imperative, for it is within this passage that there is to be found the only direct and specific scriptural statement regarding the purpose of the gift of tongues. The occasion for the Pauline statement here, within the larger context of chapters 12 through 14 of the Corinthian Epistle, is the well-known problem of the disorders attending the exercise of spiritual gifts in the assembly at Corinth. Anticipating not a few modern-day advocates of tongues, the Corinthian Christians were guilty of overrating the spiritual significance of this gift as well as of misusing it. Appropriately the Apostle places it last in his own list of charismata (1 Cor. 12:28) and makes plain by a series of questions that by no means was it to be expected that all should speak with tongues any more than that all should be apostles (1 Cor. 12:29-30) — a caveat quite frequently ignored by modern tongues movements. Then, after setting forth the surpassing excellence of love over any and every spiritual gift (1 Cor. 13), he proceeds in chapter 14 to extol the principle of edification (a thing quite naturally desired for others where love is

operating) as the paramount object to be sought in the assembly exercise of gifts. "Let all things be done unto edifying" (14:26) is here the guiding thought.

Accordingly, verses 1-19 of chapter 14 are primarily occupied with the unprofitableness of speaking in tongues not known to others in the assembly for the simple reason that edification cannot result from utterances which cannot be understood. The Apostle himself would rather speak five words in the assembly that could minister edification than ten thousand in an unknown tongue (14:19). This prepares us for the special point dealt with beginning at verse 20.

By way of preface to his crucial remarks to follow regarding the true purpose of tongues, the Apostle cautions against any childishness in thinking about these matters. By so much, therefore, the hint is given that to exalt the gift, while overlooking the purpose for which God gave it, is to betray an immaturity which is inappropriate to spiritual adulthood. (The Greek word for "men" in verse 20 is *telioi*, i.e., "mature.") The all too conspicuous lack of serious and careful consideration of this pivotal section among present-day advocates of tongues, therefore, hardly speaks well for the maturity of understanding achieved by the modern movements claiming this gift.

Then follows in verse 21 an Old Testament quotation from which the Apostle draws a deliberate conclusion in verse 22. The Greek word "hoste" (v. 22), rendered "wherefore" in the AV, makes plain that the statement to follow is the result of a legitimate deduction from the Scripture just presented. "So that," says Paul, "the tongues are for a sign..." The phrase "eis semeion" (AV, "for a sign") involves a frequent Greek idiom expressing

purpose and indicates with “hoste”, that the Apostle discovered the true intent of this miraculous phenomenon in the Old Testament passage just quoted. The use of the definite article with the Greek word for “tongues” “hai glossai” does not appear in the AV of this verse but must not be overlooked. Inasmuch as the article gives to the word “glossai” pointed specifically, it further confirms that Paul finds this particular phenomenon to be the thing referred to by the Scripture he has cited. It is not simply “tongues” in general to which Isaiah of old refers, but “the tongues” of which the Apostle has been speaking throughout. (An examination of the context in which Isaiah 28:11 occurs will strongly suggest that the Holy Spirit is looking forward to Messianic times. This becomes especially plain in Isaiah 28:6 which is a famous Messianic prophecy)

Taken at face value, therefore, the Old Testament (specially Isaiah 28:11-12) is here alleged by Paul to have prophesied the gift of tongues as a God-given sign to the Jewish nation—for the expression “this people” in its Old Testament setting, refers to no other — and to have foretold as well the unbelieving rejection which in spite of all, would be forthcoming from that same nation. Accordingly, directed as it is to an unbelieving people, the true function of the gift is “for a sign to unbelievers” “eis semeion ... tois apistois.” The Greek adjective construction, “tois apostois,” rendered by the AV, “them that believe not,” here is not distinguished by the English version from the preceding participial construction “tois pistevousin,” “them that believe,” but they are not identical. The fact that either two participial constructions, or two adjectival ones, could

have been used if precise, exact opposition of the two expressions were intended points to the conclusion that a certain shade of difference existed in the Apostle's mind. The adjective "apistos" under these circumstances would—in contrast to a participial form—express pure description as over against the action of believing involved in the foregoing participle. Thus "apistos," as a description, is more static and hence more inherent in tone. Accordingly, even this grammatical nicety seems emphatic with the spirit of the Isaiah prophecy which deplores a condition of unbelief so tragically fixed that not even the sign-gift of tongues can arouse the nation from it. "And yet for all that they will not hear Me, saith the Lord." Apparently, taking everything into consideration, the whole Pauline thought in verse 22 arises directly and specifically from the Scripture presented in verse 21. It is important and essential to see this.

The Real Nature and Use of Tongues

The Real Nature and Use of Tongues

Zane Hodges

Through the gracious permission of Dr. John Walvoord, Editor, Bibliotheca Sacra, we are able to make available to our reader's this article by Zane Hodges (Dallas Assembly) which appeared first in that periodical. The article presents the problem relative to speaking in tongues and indicates a proper biblical approach. We trust that other articles in future numbers will provide help that some feel necessary in this matter.

If it should be urged that, despite all that has been thus far said, the passage nevertheless does not confine the sign to an unbelieving Jewish nation but refers to all unbelievers, two remarks can be made by way of reply. First, the expression "this people" clearly delineates the concept of the Old Testament passage and the assumption that on this point Paul departs from the thought of his proof text is entirely gratuitous and without foundation in the context. But second, and just as decisively, unless the phrase *tois apistos* be taken as a reference to the Jewish people distinctly referred to in verse 21, it is difficult indeed to comprehend the thought of verses 23-25 which follow. For in these verses the Apostle plainly teaches that the average unbeliever who enters the assembly, upon hearing them all speak with tongues, will say that the Christians are mad (v. 23). Indeed, he goes on to assert, it is prophecy which will bring to such an one the conscious realization of the presence of God in their midst. But if the tongues be truly a sign to the generality of "them that believe

not" (v. 22), it is hard to perceive why it should not have been the specially appropriate gift to exercise on any occasion when an unbeliever might be present. The solution to this apparent contradiction in thought is most naturally found by adhering faithfully to the precise significance of the Apostle's citation from the Old Testament. Tongues were given as a sign to the Jewish people only, from which it follows that the average heathen visitor to the Christian assembly (far more likely to be a Gentile than a hostile Jew) would be exposed to a phenomenon never intended for him in the first place. On the other hand, the intelligible use of prophecy for the edification of the assembly, perfectly understandable to a Gentile visitor, would be likely to have powerful side effects, searching him, and begetting within him the fear of God.

The Real Nature and Use of Tongues

Right here it is necessary also to observe that it is a highly fallacious view of the nature of the so-called glossalalia of the New Testament which supposes that tongues consisted of anything other than known languages of the world (If the expression "tongues of men and of angels" (1 Cor. 13:1) be appealed to, it is sufficient to note that the first three verses of the chapter have a pronounced hyperbolic character. While angels no doubt have languages of their own, the Apostle no more implies that he expects the readers to use them than that he expects them to give their bodies to be burned v. 3). The word unknown frequently coupled with the word tongue in the Authorized Version is italicized to indicate that there is nothing in the original to correspond to it and, indeed, its insertion by

the translators was infelicitous in the extreme. For the Greek word *glossa* ("tongue") meant no more in such a setting to the Greek reader than does our English word "language." If, then, at every occurrence of the word tongue or unknown tongue the English reader will simply substitute the word language, a much clearer concept of this spiritual gift will be achieved. There is no trace of scriptural evidence that to the Jews, for whom the gift was intended, tongues were ever heard as incoherent, incomprehensible, babbling. It is evident that on the Day of Pentecost, for example, to the great Jerusalem multitude all that was being said was perfectly intelligible — without an interpreter — for these Jews exclaim: "And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born? ... we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:8, 11).

If all the evidence of Scripture is carefully put together certain conclusions concerning the gift of tongues will become apparent. From the very first this charisma consisted of languages known and spoken by Jews of the dispersion, so many of whom were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:8-11). The prominence of the gift in the Corinthian assembly is easily accounted for by the fact that Corinth was at this time a thriving commercial centre where there was also an appreciable Jewish element (cf. Acts 18:1-17) (Cf. also article on "Corinth," *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 252). Obviously, due to the natural Jewish aptitude in commercial affairs, Corinth would be just such a city as would exhibit a polyglot Jewish community many of whom might be resident only for a time in connection with specific ventures. (What seems to be a predictable Jewish

practice of planning a year's residence in some city to "buy and sell and get gain" is alluded to (James 4:13). If, then, as is natural to suppose the affairs of commerce in Corinth resulted in Jews of various linguistic backgrounds flowing in and out of the city, no surprise is occasioned by the fact that many languages — unknown to the average Greek Corinthian who might visit the assembly — were supernaturally present there that they might be properly utilized in the gospel witness to the race for whom they were a sign. (That the gift of tongues was capable of having limited evangelistic results is sufficiently proved by the three thousand converts on the Day of Pentecost, while the mass of the city fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy and remained in unbelief.)

Obviously, as in the case of any other spiritual gift, the possessor of the gift of tongues could utilize this gift at will. Accordingly, in addition to its primary function in witness to Jewish visitors or inhabitants at Corinth, the gift might be employed in prayer (1 Cor. 14:14-16) or simply in speaking in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:2, 27, 39 etc). But here also lay the danger of its abuse for, outside of its proper Jewish context, the average believer in the assembly might not know "the meaning of the voice" and might be unedified when the gift was used (cf. 1 Cor. 14:6-11). Indeed, so used, the gift might be no more than a means of vain display. However, once the Apostle has placed the gift in its proper perspective by reminding the Corinthians of its basic purpose (vv. 20-22), he is then prepared to restrict its use in the assembly and to stipulate its nonuse there altogether unless there were an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27-28). A sign-gift for an unbelieving nation had indeed its proper sphere, but the controlling principle within the Church

was the building up of the saints. To this end, tongues would have to be harnessed and directed if they were to be employed in the Church at all, “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:25).

Conclusion

It remains then only to inquire whether, in view of its biblical purpose, the gift of tongues is still being given to the Church today. The question is, is God still giving signs to the Jewish people or has the gift, like that of an apostle, been withdrawn by virtue of having fulfilled its function? That its purpose has ended and it has therefore been withdrawn, is the conclusion which is forthcoming from such a passage as Luke 21:20-24. From this Scripture it is clear that the destruction of Jerusalem (accomplished in A.D. 70) was to signalize the fact that God’s attention was being directed to the Gentiles until their times (Greek *kairos*, “seasons” or even, “times of opportunity”) should be fulfilled. The agelong treading down of the holy city constitutes a visual lesson in history that, so long as it continues, God’s purposes with the Jews as a nation are in abeyance and His purposes with the nations are predominant. That the period between the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and the prophesied destruction of the city in which He died was so long, is but a tribute to the matchless patience and forbearance of God toward His ancient and erring people. The temporary flourishing of the sign-gift of tongues during this period in accordance with Old Testament prophecy—so to speak, a final gracious effort to rouse the nation to repentance—can only be rightly understood if it is seen as a parting token

of Jehovah's love for the earthly seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The failure of the modern tongues movement to display any discernible consciousness of the plain biblical purpose of this gift stands as a powerful argument against the movement's genuineness and validity.

The Rich Young Ruler

Rich fools, however, do not appear only in parables. They also appear in real life.

On one notable occasion Jesus met one. He was a wealthy young man, and his interview with our Lord is both familiar and classic. It was an interview that plainly disclosed the Savior's striking capacity to probe beneath the issues men raise--in order that He might reach the issues they should have raised.

The disciples as usual were with Him. And they stood to profit immensely from the exchange, which they are allowed to overhear. Indeed, Jesus makes sure that they do profit by His direct dealing with the problems which the encounter raised for them. In the process He achieves -as He so often did- a double result.

On the one hand, He softens the ground in the young man's heart in order to prepare it for the seed of the simple gospel of His saving grace. On the other hand, He drives home to the disciples important truths about heavenly treasure.

The Young Man's Question

According to the account given in the Gospel of Mark, the interview began when the ruler reached Jesus on the run. Though he is only called "young" by Matthew (19:22), the eagerness of youth is apparent in this hasty form of approach. Perhaps, then, there was a breathless quality to his words when he said, Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? (Mark 10:17).

The question plainly reflects the typical Jewish perspective. According to common Jewish theology of that time, eternal life was a privilege that belonged to the age to come. Moreover, it could be acquired only by those whom God deemed worthy to have it. The man's choice of the word "inherit" simply underscored this perception of things. That was a word which the rabbis often used to describe the meritorious acquisition of bliss in the future world.¹ No wonder, then, that the young man thought he must do something to get eternal life. In fact, in Matthew's account the adjective "good" is added to the question: "What good thing must I do...?" (Matt. 19:16.)

The Jewish outlook was both right and wrong. It was quite true that when eternal life was perceived as an acquisition in the age to come it could only be meritoriously obtained. In that respect Jewish thought was not misguided. But that was only half the story.

There remained a severe problem. Man was a sinner. He stood under divine condemnation. If he could acquire eternal life only at some future day -and only on the basis of his merits- then his situation was hopeless. He could, in fact, never acquire it at all.

But the coming of Jesus Christ into the world shed light on this issue in a fresh way. As Paul was later to say, He "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). What was always latent in the Old Covenant revelation -what was there in shadowy form- was now brilliantly illuminated by the incarnation of the Son of God and by the gospel message which He proclaimed.

Now it was possible -such was the Savior's message- for a man to acquire the life of the age to come immediately. And not on the basis of merit at all, but as a free gift!

What else, indeed, did the Son of God mean when He declared, Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24; emphasis added)?

Or again, when He went on to state,

Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live (John 5:25; emphasis added)?

Staggering revelation! Resurrection, spiritually, at once! The life of the age to come possessed right here and now -by faith and nothing more!

But of this the rich young ruler knew nothing. His was not a wrong question to ask -it just wasn't the primary one. But that first question was one which he could not even guess.

No One is Good But God

How then could he be moved in the right direction? What could deflect him from his preoccupation with merit? The response of Jesus could do that, if the young man would rightly hear it.

That response, however, must have sounded initially as if it had no connection whatever with the rich man's inquiry. No doubt he was even taken aback when Jesus replied:

Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God (Mark 10:18).

But nothing could have been more to the point. It was precisely the issue on which this man needed to focus.

He had addressed Jesus as "Good Teacher." No doubt it was glibly said no matter how respectfully it was intended. But was He really good? In the definitive sense of that word, He could not be "good" if He was a mere mortal man. The Old Testament bore witness to that fact (and Paul appealed to it!) when it affirmed, "There is none who does good, no, not one" (Ps. 14:3; cf. Rom. 3:12).

Only God was good and that could mean only one thing. Jesus could not be good unless He was also God. The young man perceived Him to be a teacher, and such He was. But He was very much more than that! And until the rich young ruler could hear His voice as the voice of the Son of God, eternal life -whether here or hereafter- lay beyond his reach.

But there was more. The young man himself was not good. Only God was good. But this perception also had not truly dawned on him, as his response to the Savior's next statement painfully shows.

His concept of "good" was therefore precisely his problem. That concept clouded his perception of Jesus, and it clouded his perception of himself. Until these perceptions were corrected, he was very far from God's Kingdom indeed.

You Know the Law

How could such correction take place? Ideally, it ought to have taken place by means of the law. Here, again,

was the divinely appointed schoolmaster whose role was to lead men to Christ. By the law one could normally acquire the knowledge of his sin.² Jesus says, therefore:

You know the commandments: "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not bear false witness," "Do not defraud," "Honor your father and your mother" (Mark 10:19).

To this list Matthew reports that Jesus even added, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:19).

It ought to have been convicting. But it wasn't! Indeed, it actually elicits one of the most sanguine replies in all of religious history. The young man says:

Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth (Mark 10:20).

Had he? Of course not! What child is there who has always honored his father and mother? Where is the man who loves his neighbor as himself from his youth and upwardly?³ Even if he had avoided the grosser sins on the list, he had certainly not avoided them all.

He was not good of course. But he was self-righteous! And like all self-righteous people he had lowered the standard of good to the level of his own imagined attainments. His darkness seems impenetrable.

One Thing you Lack

Yet there follows one of the loveliest statements of Scripture:

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him... (Mark 10:21).

How or why Jesus loved him is beyond our ability to fathom. But so is His love for all men -and for us. That

love is mysterious, it is marvelous. It is not called forth by our deluded claims to goodness, nor is it deflected by our arrogant self-righteousness.

But it is our ultimate resource, "for God so loved the world that He gave... "!

It is, therefore, Jesus' love for this blind young inquirer which motivates our Lord's next words:

One thing you lack (Mark 10:21).

What was that? The answer should be obvious to every Christian with a New Testament in his hands. The one thing he lacked was faith -saving faith!⁴ No doubt it will be objected to this that it does not at all accord with the words of Jesus which follow immediately. But in fact it does accord with those words, properly considered. But not in the explicit one-to-one form which some readers inappropriately expect.

Here, too, the eclipse of grace casts its shadow over the interpretation of Scripture. Can anyone suppose that selling all and giving to the poor are really conditions for going to heaven? Were they even really conditions for this particular man? And if they are, or were, how can that conception of things be harmonized with the simple offer of a free gift of life to needy men?

"Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17) is far from being identical with "sell whatever you have and give to the poor." Such declarations are manifestly not saying the same thing. Casuistry alone can reduce them to some form of equivalence.

No, this man lacked saving faith, just as does every unsaved man. He lacked the simple spirit of trust so

characteristic of the little children Jesus had just received (see Mark 10:13-16). But the young man was not prepared just now to have his deficiency explicitly stated. He was much too self-righteous to feel the need for a Savior. After all, had he not said, "What must I do"?

Jesus did not believe in pouring water down a clogged hole. This man must be prepared to comprehend the thing he really needed. Shock treatment was clearly in order.

Thus it is that Jesus' challenge takes the form it does:

Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me (Mark 10:21).

Clearly, this is a call to discipleship. It is an invitation to the utmost self-denial in the form of unstinting generosity.⁵ Its outcome, Jesus declares, will be heavenly treasure.⁶ Was the young man prepared for this? Naturally not. In fact he goes away saddened since his wealth was considerable. But why did he go away? Above all, because he had more faith in his money than he had in Jesus.

Indeed, our Lord subsequently points this out to His disciples when He tells them:

Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! (Mark 10:24; emphasis added).⁷ Let there be no mistake about it. The man lacked saving faith. No doubt when he asked what he might do to inherit eternal life, he suspected that his wealth might be tapped for some act or acts of benevolence. But it had not entered his mind that Jesus might ask him to surrender everything!

That he was unprepared to do, for then he would be surrendering the very thing in which he trusted: his money! He was clearly not ready to give up all that just on the bare word of this Teacher. And so he went sorrowfully away.

Life and Treasure

And that was a mistake. But it was a mistake Jesus knew he would make and which, in fact, conditioned the form of His challenge.

This man was confused about who was good. He himself was not good and his response to Jesus proved it. He was selfish, as are all sinners. For if he truly loved his neighbor as himself (as he had claimed to do from his youth), it would not have mattered to him whether he himself had his money or his neighbor. But it did matter. The rich young ruler was not good.

But Jesus was good, since He was God. If he were not God, His demand to give up all for Him was both fantastic and egotistical. Could a mere human Teacher talk like that and still be sane? How could a mere man offer eternal treasure to his followers on no other authority than his own? Would it not be foolish to trust an offer like that?

Ordinarily it would be. But not where Jesus was concerned. Yet such a leap of faith required the rich young ruler to adopt a much higher view of this rabbi than he currently held. Indeed, it required him to reach the conclusion that Jesus was exactly who He had hinted He was -a divine Person! And that meant that He was the Christ, the Son of God. But to reach that conclusion

was to be born again, as the Gospel of John so plainly declares (John 20:30-31).

Did the rich young ruler ever reach it? He probably did, because Jesus "loved him" and had designed His words to meet this man at the very point where his spiritual progress was blocked.

All the implications were there. He now had reason to suspect that his own goodness was far less than he thought. And he had received unmistakable clues about the dignity of the Person to whom he had come.

All that remained was to believe in Him. That would have brought him the free gift of eternal life. Then he could take up the Lord's challenge to become a disciple. And that would have brought him treasure in heaven!⁸

Aftermath and Surprise

The ruler was gone now, thwarted and dismayed by Jesus' words. Now it was the disciples' turn to be startled. Jesus says to them:

How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! (Mark 10:23.)

And, to the disciples' amazement, He adds:

Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:24-25).

The disciples are dumbfounded by these words, and they reply, Who then can be saved? (Mark 10:26.)

Naturally, the disciples shared the common Jewish view that God enriched and prospered the righteous. There

were many Old Testament examples of this: Abraham, Solomon, and Job, to name only a few. If salvation was hard for people like that, must it not be nearly impossible for those less signally blessed?

For a few moments the disciples themselves are tempted to lose their grip on the gospel of divine grace. (They were certainly not the last to be swayed in this way.) But there were no grounds for their perplexity if they considered Jesus' words with care.

Salvation was hard for the rich man precisely because he trusted in his own riches. He found it difficult, therefore, to feel totally dependent on Another, particularly on Jesus. The exchange with the rich young ruler had certainly demonstrated that!

It followed that a rich man was very much like an ungainly camel. He was too big, too self-sufficient, to pass through the minuscule entryway into the realm of eternal bliss. That, of course, was the narrow gate all over again. Only this time the image had undergone impressive miniaturization!

But the disciples need not worry, Jesus assures them. Salvation was always a miracle of God in any case. That which man could never bring to pass in the humblest of sinner, God could accomplish even in a rich man:

With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible (Mark 10:27).

It was an important point. If we were to judge from the attitude of that wealthy young man, we might easily have said: "That man will never get saved!" From all appearances he was much too big a camel -much too

proud a man- to ever become "small" enough to pass through the needle's eye by a childlike act of faith.

But it would be wise not to write him off entirely. Nor, for that matter, any other man of wealth. For what was truly impossible for human means to accomplish, God could do. Indeed, the masterly skill with which Jesus had handled the young ruler had no doubt set this miraculous process in motion. The camel had gone away smaller -less self-assured- than when he arrived. There was hope!

Life More Abundant

That ought to have set the disciples' minds at rest. Perhaps it did. In any case the focus of the conversation changes swiftly. Peter is the catalyst:

Then Peter began to say to Him, "See we have left all and followed you (Mark 10:28).

According to Matthew, he also added:

"Therefore what shall we have?" (Matt. 19:27.)

It was an appropriate question. After all, Jesus had offered the rich young ruler treasure in heaven if he left all. Was this promise applicable to the disciples as well?

No doubt there is a temptation to censure Peter for greed. But why? Already the disciples had been specifically taught to store up eternal wealth (Matt. 6:19-21; Luke 12:32-34). It is not selfish to take an interest in matters Jesus Himself has told us to be concerned about. It is not wrong to seek what He tells us to seek.

It is wrong not to seek. It is, in fact, a sin to refuse to lay up heavenly treasure when we are explicitly commanded

to do it. Moreover, the effects on our hearts of not doing it will be calamitous. For where our treasures are, there our hearts will be also!

The rich young ruler's heart was on earth. The thought of losing his earthly treasures saddened him. But Peter and the other disciples had abandoned everything for Jesus. It was only natural that they should be curious about their heavenly reward.

Our Lord's answer to this query is memorable:

Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time -houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions- and in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

The answer was rich, exciting, and sobering. There were compensations to be experienced in the present age - along with its troubles- and there was compensation in the age to come as well.

With regard to the present age, the reward was to come in the form of rich personal relationships. And how often the servants of Christ have proved the truth of that guarantee! Leaving behind their earthly families, traveling often to the remote quarters of the globe, they have discovered new relationships created by the shared gospel of Jesus Christ. In those souls, therefore, whom they have won to Christ, in those to whom they have ministered the truth, they have found new brothers and sisters, new mothers and children. Homes have been opened to them and lands laid at their service as though they owned them themselves. And the depths of the

spiritual communion established in this way with men have often seemed to be indeed a hundredfold more rich than those ties which Christ's servants have left behind. No doubt, in fact, it was in the spirit of these very words of Jesus that Paul greets "Rufus... and his mother and mine" (Rom. 16:13)!

But if obedience to Jesus enriched a man's temporal lot, it equally enriched his eternal one. And here the reward was... "eternal life"!

Yes, a reward! Plainly presented as such. But a reward belonging to the future age, not to the present one.

And thus Jewish theology was right -in part. Eternal life would be awarded meritoriously in a future day. What that theology failed to perceive was that, for such a reward to be within man's reach, eternal life must first be received as a gift.

Eternal life, be it understood, is no static entity, no mere fixed and unchanging object. Eternal life is the very life of God Himself, and as such its potentials are without limit. Had not Jesus Himself affirmed:

I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly (John 10:10; emphasis added).

Yes, the possibilities were as infinite as the life itself. But to have that life more abundantly, one must first have it. To receive the enrichment of that life as a future reward, one must first accept it as a free gift.

The rich young ruler had put the cart before the horse. He had asked how to earn life before receiving it. He had inquired about God's rewards, before seeking His gift. Jesus had sought to push him back to the proper

starting point, but one thing remained true. Leaving all for Christ did lead to heavenly treasure after all.

The rich young ruler was by no means ready to do that yet. The disciples had already done it. It was well for them, therefore, to hear about it. It was needful for them to discover that both present and future experience would be enriched and enhanced by their loyalty and commitment to Christ.

There was no need, then, to envy the rich young ruler at all. Perhaps he seemed to be far ahead of them in all respects. But the balance sheets of eternity could reverse that appraisal.

After all, Jesus assures them, "many who are first will be last, and the last first"! (Mark 10:31.)

Return to Rich Young Ruler Menu

Notes

(After the first reference to an author's work, later references to the same work use a shortened form and the reader is referred back to the initial reference for full bibliographic details.)

1 For a discussion of the rabbinic perspective, see William E. Brown, *The New Testament Concept of the Believer's Inheritance* (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), pp. 34-40.

2 Very appropriately it has been said, "in the greatly misunderstood incident of the rich young ruler, it is striking that every commandment quoted by our Lord is from the Second Table of the Law; not because in the observance of these social laws men could earn eternal life, but in order that the young man might be tested by

his own claims of moral perfection and come to see himself as a sinner whose only hope is in what God can do (Matt. 19:19-26)." Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 1959)." p. 290. Ray Summers also observes that, "In his response, Jesus led the young ruler to see that not even a sincere effort at obedience to the law could give life. All the law could do was point him to his need and reflect his inability to keep it. The young man's downfall was in relation to the tenth command, 'You shall not covet.'" Ray Summers, *Commentary on Luke* (Waco, Tx.: Word Books, 1972), p. 214.

3 The phrase "from my youth" may be a reference to his twelfth year, at which time Jewish youths assumed responsibility for obedience to the law's commands. See William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 366. Lane cites the Mishnah (Berachoth II. 2) and Luke 2:42.

4 Summers, *Luke*, p. 215 (see note 2, this chapter), thinks that the one thing which the young man lacked was love. This, too, would emphasize his failure and sinfulness. But since the young man's need for eternal life could not be met by any conceivable expression of love, it is more likely that our Lord is pointing to his most basic deficiency -faith.

5 Naturally, some have tried to put Jesus' interview with the rich young man into the service of a doctrine of Lordship salvation. This is explicitly done by Walter J. Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970). For an effective critique of Lordship teaching, see G. Michael

Cocoris, Lordship Salvation - Is It Biblical? (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1983).

6 Lane is not correct to observe that, "The assurance of 'treasure in heaven' reflects an idiom that was current in Judaism, which allowed Jesus to enter the thought-world of his contemporaries. Here, however, it is stripped of its customary associations of merit (as if selling one's property and giving the money received to the poor will earn a significant reward), since the promised treasure signifies the gift of eternal life or salvation at the revelation of the Kingdom of God." Lane, Mark, p. 367 (see note 3, this chapter). It is entirely gratuitous to read into Jesus' words the concept of "the gift of eternal life." Rather, our Lord stands fully within the contemporary Jewish "thought-world" in associating "treasure in heaven" with meritorious behavior.

7 The statement quoted from Mark 10:24 is not found in two famous ancient manuscripts: the Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph). A few other witnesses also support the omission. But the longer text is overwhelmingly attested in the vast majority of the surviving Greek manuscripts of Mark. The accidental omission of a "colon" (sense-line) in a common ancestor of Aleph and B is perhaps the source of the omission. The adoption of the omission as the original reading by many modern editors and translators reflects an inappropriately high regard for the two manuscripts in question. But even so, the truth affirmed by Mark 10:24 is self-evident when the story is reflected on properly.

8 "Jesus believed that heaven will be richer for one who has used earthly riches in good stewardship to God and

compassion for needy men." Summers, Luke, p. 215 (see note 2, this chapter).

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What is a Dead Faith? James 2

“Faith without works is dead.”

So spoke James in the second chapter of his epistle. His statement has been appealed to many times to support the idea that works are necessary for eternal salvation.

Sometimes the claim is made that unless faith is followed by good works, the believer loses eternal life. At other times, a more subtle approach is taken. If a professing Christian does not manifest good works, he was never a true believer to begin with. Whatever James is saying, however, it can be neither of these ideas.

Dead Faith Is Like A Corpse:

It Was Once Alive

The second view, just mentioned, is so forced and artificial that if it were not maintained by obviously sincere men, it might be called dishonest. According to this view, a dead faith cannot save. Therefore, if a man lacks the crucial evidence of good works, it shows that this is all he has ever possessed - a dead faith.

This flies directly into the face of the text. In James 2:26 the writer affirms:

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

No one who encountered a dead body, whose life-giving spirit had departed, would ever conclude that the body had never been alive. Quite the contrary. The presence of a corpse is the clearest proof of a loss of life. If we allow this illustration to speak for itself, then the

presence of a dead faith shows that this faith was once alive.

Nor is there anything at all in the entire passage to support some other conclusion. As elsewhere in the epistle, it is Christian brothers who are addressed (2:14; cf. 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5; 3:1, 10, 12; etc.). There is absolutely nothing to suggest James believed that if a man's faith is pronounced dead, it must therefore always have been dead. The assumption that a dead faith has always been dead cannot be extracted from James's text. It is nothing more than a theological idea read into the passage.¹ It is also a desperate expedient intended to salvage some form of harmony between James and the doctrine of Paul.

But by distorting the true meaning of the text, this idea has given rise to immense confusion. This confusion has had a harmful impact on men's comprehension of the Gospel of God's saving grace.

James Believed in the Free Gift of Life

We should carefully observe that James, like all the inspired writers, believed eternal life was the gracious gift of God. This is made plain in a splendid passage in his first chapter:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:17, 18).

Anyone who is familiar with the words of Jesus, as

James certainly was, can surely hear an echo of our Lord in a statement like this. New birth is a sovereign act of

God. It is one of His good and perfect gifts which comes down from above.

In fact, in the expression “from above,” James employs exactly the same word that Jesus used when He told Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). The Greek adverb is *anōthen* and means both “again” and “from above.” No doubt our Lord deliberately selected it for His discourse with Nicodemus. The supernatural birth which He was describing is both a rebirth and a birth from above. The play on words which this involves is an effective one.

In James’s statement about our rebirth there is also a strong emphasis on the sovereign will of God. “Of His own will He brought us forth...” James insists. This perspective recalls Paul’s statement found in 2 Corinthians 4:6:

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Here, too, the sovereign act of God is stressed.

Neither Paul nor James intends to deny the necessity of faith. But faith, as we see it in the simple, direct statements of the Bible about salvation, is nothing more than a response to a divine initiative. It is the means by which eternal life is received.

Since this is so, it is proper that God Himself should be viewed as the sovereign Actor at the moment of conversion. It is He who wills to regenerate. It is His Word that penetrates our darkness. Salvation, we may say, occurs when the sufficiency of Christ for my eternal

need dawns on my darkened heart. At this moment of believing illumination, I become a Christian.

So there is no reason to doubt that James and Paul were in harmony about the way eternal life is received. For both of them it is the gift of God, graciously and sovereignly bestowed. Only when we take this unity for granted can we really begin to understand the meaning of James's instruction about works.

Exposition of James 2:14-26 (1) Works and Grace Cannot Be Mixed The place to start is where James starts. In James 2:14 his famous discussion is opened with the words:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Faith cannot save him, can it? (Greek.)

The translation just given is based on the original Greek and is crucial to a correct interpretation. The form of the question which James asks in the last part of the verse is one which expects a negative response. The expected answer, from James's point of view, would be: "No, faith cannot save him."

Anyone who holds that faith and works are both conditions for reaching heaven will find no problem with a question like this. In that case the question simply means that faith by itself is not enough. In fact, this is precisely what James says in verse 17: "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

But the problem comes when we try to harmonize this idea with the Apostle Paul's clear denial that works are a condition for salvation.

For Paul, the inclusion of works would be a denial of grace. He is emphatic on this point:

And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work (Rom. 11:6).

It is hard to quarrel with this point of view! In fact it is impossible to do so. Paul's point is that once works are made a condition for attaining some goal, that goal can no longer be said to be attained by grace.

But in James 2, James plainly makes works a condition for salvation. The failure to admit this is the chief source of the problems supposedly arising from this passage for most evangelicals. We ought to start by admitting it. And we ought then to admit that James cannot be talking about salvation BY GRACE!

But instead of admitting these points, many interpreters dodge them. This is frequently done by trying to translate the question, "Can faith save him?" (2:14), by "Can that [or, such] faith save him?" But the introduction of words like "that" or "such" as qualifiers for "faith" is really an evasion of the text. The Greek does not at all verify this sort of translation.² Support for the renderings "such faith" or "that faith" is usually said to be found in the presence of the Greek definite article with the word "faith." But in this very passage, the definite article also occurs with "faith" in verses 17, 18, 20, 22 and 26. (In verse 22, the reference is to Abraham's faith!) In none of these places are the words "such" or "that" proposed as natural translations.

As is well known, the Greek language often employed the definite article with abstract nouns (like faith, love,

hope, etc.) where English cannot do so. In such cases we leave the Greek article untranslated.

The attempt to single out 2:14 for specialized treatment carries its own refutation on its face. It must be classed as a truly desperate effort to support an insupportable interpretation.

James's point is really quite plain: faith alone cannot save!³ (2) Salvation for the Believer's Life But what are we left with? A contradiction between James and Paul? This is what many have candidly thought, and it is easy to see why.⁴ If James and Paul are talking about the same thing, they do contradict each other.

But are they talking about the same thing?

In the opening chapter of the epistle, shortly after declaring his readers to be the offspring of God's regenerating activity (1:18), James writes:

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (Jam. 1:21, 22).

That this passage is analogous to 2:14 is easy to see.

Here, too, James is affirming the necessity of doing something, and he clearly means that only if his readers do God's Word will it be able to "save their souls."

At first glance, this seems only to repeat the problem already encountered. But in fact it offers us the solution. The reason we do not see it immediately is due to the fact that we are English speakers with a long history of theological indoctrination. To us, the expression "save

your souls” can scarcely mean anything else than “to be delivered from hell.”

But this is the meaning least likely to occur to a

Greek reader of the same text. In fact the expression “to save the soul” represents a Greek phrase whose most common meaning in English would be “to save the life.” In the New Testament it occurs in this sense in parallel passages Mark 3:4 and Luke 6:9 (see also Luke 9:56). Among the numerous places where it is used with this meaning in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the following references would be especially clear to the English reader: Genesis 19:17 and 32:30; 1 Samuel 19:11; and Jeremiah 48:6. Perhaps even more to the point, the phrase occurs again in James 5:20, and here the words “from death” are added.

By contrast, the expression is never found in any New Testament text which describes the conversion experience!

The natural sense of the Greek phrase (“to save your lives”) fits perfectly into the larger context of James 1. Earlier, James was discussing the consequences of sin. He has said, “Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (1:15). Sin, states James, has its final outcome in physical death. But obedience to God can defer death and “save” or “preserve” the life. This truth is echoed also by Paul (see Rom. 8:13).

This understanding of James 1:21 agrees completely with 5:19, 20, where James says to his fellow Christians:

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who

turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

On this attractive note of mutual spiritual concern among the brethren, James closes his letter. But in doing so, he manages to emphasize once again that sin can lead to death.⁵ It has been observed that the Epistle of James is the New Testament writing which most clearly reflects the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The theme of death as the consequence of sin is an extremely frequent one in the book of Proverbs. A few illustrative texts can be mentioned:

The fear of the Lord prolongs days,

But the years of the wicked will be shortened (Prov. 10:27).

As righteousness leads to life,

So he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death (Prov. 11:19).

In the way of righteousness is life,

And in its pathway there is no death (Prov. 12:28).

The law of the wise is a fountain of life,

To turn one away from the snares of death (Prov. 13:14).

He who keeps the commandment keeps his own soul [i.e., his life!], But he who is careless of his ways will die (Prov. 19:16).

It is clear that this is the Old Testament concept which furnishes the background for James's thought. A recognition of this fact clarifies a great deal. "To save the soul" (= "life") is to preserve the physical life from an untimely death due to sin.

(3) The Development of James's Thought in 1:21-2:26

It is best to regard James 1:21-2:26 as a single large section in the development of the epistle. James 1:21 sets the theme. The readers, who are born-again Christians (1:18), need to lay wickedness aside and receive the Word of God as the agent capable of saving their lives. But they must understand (1:22-25) that this will only occur if they are doers of the Word and not mere hearers. To be a mere hearer is to commit the folly of looking into the divine mirror of truth and forgetting what it tells us about ourselves. Only the man who is a "doer of work" (1:25, Greek) can expect God's blessing on his life.

There follows in 1:26-2:13 some specific information about what a "doer of work" actually does. He controls his tongue, is charitable to the needy, and keeps himself pure from worldly defilement (1:26-27). Moreover, he rejects the spirit of partiality and favoritism which is so common in the world (2:1-13). That spirit is wholly inconsistent with his faith in the Lord of glory (2:1).

Instead of partiality, therefore, there should be true obedience to "the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (2:8). In fact, love and its handmaiden, mercy, are standards by which the lives of believers will be assessed at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2:13). They should therefore "so speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (2:12). The reference back to 1:25 is obvious in the phrase "law of liberty."

In referring to judgment, of course, James does not contradict the declaration of John 5:24 that the believer does not come into judgment. There is no judgment for

the regenerate person if by that term is meant a weighing of his merits in terms of heaven or hell. There is not even any charge that can be brought against the redeemed believer. He is justified before the bar of eternal justice, as Paul so plainly states (Rom. 8:33, 34). Thus there cannot be any trial at all to determine the believer's eternal destiny. God declares that a settled matter when He justifies.

But the New Testament does teach an assessment of the believer's earthly experience in connection with rewards, or the loss of these. (See 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10.) More will be said of this in a later chapter.

James 2:14-26 is the final subsection of the larger unit, 1:21-2:26. At 2:14 James returns to the thought expressed in 1:21 about "saving the life." Since he has insisted that "saving the life" is only possible when one is actually a "doer of work"[!], he wishes now (2:14) to oppose the idea that faith can substitute for obedience and accomplish the same saving result he had mentioned earlier (1:21).

(4) "Dead" Faith Cannot Keep A Christian Alive (2:14-17)

Keeping in mind the concept of "saving the life by obedience," we can now look more closely at James 2:14-17. James writes:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled", but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (Jam. 2:14-17).

Can the fact that a man holds correct beliefs and is orthodox “save” him from the deadly consequences of sin? Of course not! The very thought is absurd. That is like giving your best wishes to a destitute brother or sister when what they really need is food and clothing (2:15-16). It is utterly fruitless!

As a matter of fact, this kind of callous conduct on the part of one Christian toward another is precisely what James has been warning against (see 1:27; 2:2-6)! It superbly illustrates his point. Such idle words are as “dead” (ineffectual) as a non-working faith! So James says, “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:17).

It needs to be carefully considered why James chose the term “dead” to describe a faith that is not working. But the moment we relate this term to the controlling theme of “saving the life,” everything becomes plain. The issue that concerns James is an issue of life or death. (He is not discussing salvation from hell!) The truth which he has in mind is that of Proverbs: “As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death” (Prov. 11:19).

Can a dead faith save the Christian from death?

The question answers itself. The choice of the adjective “dead” is perfectly suited to James’s argument. Just as the idle words of some ungenerous believer cannot save his brother from death in the absence of life’s necessities, no more can a non-working faith save our lives from the deadly consequences of sin.

(5) An Objector Speaks (2:18,19)

In 2:18-19 James introduces the words of an imagined objector.⁶ The entirety of these verses belong to the objector. The response of James only begins in verse 20. This is shown by the words, "But do you want to know, O foolish man..."⁷ The literary format James uses here was familiar in ancient times from the Greek diatribe. The diatribe was a learned and argumentative form of communication. The two phrases ("But someone will say" [verse 18], and "But do you want to know, O foolish man" [verse 20]) clearly show that the diatribe format is being employed. These two phrases bracket the words of the objector in verses 18, 19. Elsewhere in the New Testament, this same format appears in 1 Corinthians 15:35, 36.⁸ Since the statements in verse 19 about the belief of men and demons are the words of the objector - not of James! - their use by commentators to make a theological point is totally misguided. But what does the objection mean? Since most Greek manuscripts read the word "by" in place of the familiar word "without" in verse 18,⁹ the objector's statement may be given as follows:

But someone will say:

"You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith from your works, and I will show you, from my works, my faith. You believe that there is one God; you do well. The demons also believe, and tremble" (Jam. 2:18, 19, Greek).

The argument which these words express appears to be a *reductio ad absurdum* (a reduction to absurdity). It is heavy with irony. ¹⁰ "It is absurd," says the objector, "to see a close connection between faith and works. For the sake of argument, let's say you have faith and I have

works. Let's start there. You can no more start with what you believe and show it to me in your works, than I can start with my works and demonstrate what it is that I believe." The objector is confident that both tasks are impossible.

The impossibility of showing one's faith from one's works is now demonstrated (so the objector thinks) by this illustration: "Men and demons both believe the same truth (that there is one God), but their faith does not produce the same response. Although this article of faith may move a man to 'do well,' it never moves the demons to 'do well.'¹¹ All they can do is tremble. Faith and works, therefore, have no built-in connection at all. The same creed may produce entirely different kinds of conduct. Faith cannot be made visible in works!"

No doubt James and his readers had heard this argument before. It was precisely the kind of defensive approach a man might take when his orthodoxy was not supported by good deeds. "Faith and works are not really related to each other in the way you say they are, James. So don't criticize the vitality of my faith because I don't do such and such a thing."

James's reply (2:20) may be paraphrased: "What a senseless argument! How foolish you are to make it! I still say that without works your faith is dead. Would you like to know why?"

Verses 21-23 are James's direct rebuttal of the objection. This is made clear in the Greek text by the singular form of "do you see" in verse 22. This shows he is addressing the objector. Only with the "you see" of verse 24 does James return to the plural and to his readers as a whole.

(6) Justification By Works (2:20-24)

In refuting the objection he has cited, James selects the most prestigious name in Jewish history, the patriarch Abraham. He selects also his most honored act of obedience to God, the offering of his own son Isaac. Since in Christian circles it was well known that Abraham was justified by faith, James now adds a highly original touch. He was also justified by works!

James writes:

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God (Jam. 2:20-23).

Earlier in this discussion we said that we can best understand James's point of view by recognizing his harmony with Paul. That is extremely relevant here. James does not wish to deny that Abraham, or anyone else, could be justified by faith alone. He merely wishes to insist that there is also another justification, and it is by works.

Of course there is no such thing as a single justification by faith plus works. Nothing James says suggests that idea. Rather, there are two kinds of justification.

This point is confirmed by a careful reading of the

Greek text of verse 24. When he returns to his readers generally, James says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not only [justified] by faith." The

key to this understanding is the Greek adverb “only,” which does not simply qualify the word “faith” but the whole idea of the second clause. James is saying: Justification by faith is not the only kind of justification there is. There is also the kind which is by works.¹² Somewhat surprisingly, to most people, the Apostle Paul agrees with this. Writing at what was no doubt a later time than James, Paul states in Romans 4:2, “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God.” The form of this statement does not deny the truth of the point under consideration. The phrase, “but not before God,” strongly suggests that the Apostle can conceive of a sense in which men are justified by works. But, he insists, that is not the way men are justified before God. That is, it does not establish their legal standing before Him.¹³ In responding, therefore, to the kind of person who tried to divorce faith and works in Christian experience, James takes a skillful approach. “Wait a moment, you foolish man,” he is saying, “you make much of justification by faith, but can’t you see how Abraham was also justified by works when he offered his son Isaac to God?” (2:21). “Is it not obvious how his faith was cooperating with his works and, in fact, by works his faith was made mature?” (2:22). “In this way, too, the full significance of the Scripture about his justification by faith was brought to light, for now he could be called the friend of God” (2:23).

The content of this passage is rich indeed. It is a pity that it has been so widely misunderstood. The faith which justifies - James never denies that it does justify! - can have an active and vital role in the life of the obedient believer. As with Abraham, it can be the

dynamic for great acts of obedience. In the process, faith itself can be “perfected.” The Greek word suggests development and maturation. Faith is thus nourished and strengthened by works.¹⁴ It would hardly be possible to find a better illustration of James’s point anywhere in the Bible. The faith by which Abraham was justified was basically faith in a God of resurrection. Referring to the occasion when that faith was first exercised, Paul wrote:

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform (Rom. 4:19-21).

Abraham had confidence that the God he believed in could overcome the “deadness” of his own body and of Sarah’s womb. But it was only through the testing with Isaac that this faith becomes a specific conviction that God could literally raise a person from the dead to fulfill His oath. Accordingly, the author of Hebrews declares:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Heb. 11:17-19).

Thus the faith of Abraham was strengthened and matured by works! From a conviction that God could overcome a “deadness” in his own body (=inability to beget children), he moved to the assurance that God could actually resurrect his son’s body from literal,

physical death. In the process of carrying out the divine command to sacrifice his beloved boy, his faith grew and reached new heights of confidence in God.

In this way, too, the Scripture that spoke of his original justification “was fulfilled.” That statement (Gen. 15:6) was not a prophecy, of course. But its implications were richly developed and exposed by the subsequent record of Abraham’s obedience. Abraham’s works “filled it full” of meaning, so to speak, by showing the extent to which that faith could develop and undergird a life of obedience. Simple and uncomplicated though it was at first, Abraham’s justifying faith had potential ramifications which only his works, built on it, could disclose.¹⁵ And now he could be called the “friend of God,” not only by God Himself, but also by men (cf. Isa. 41:8; 2 Chr. 20:7). This is in fact the name by which Abraham has been known down through the centuries in many lands and by at least three religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam). Had Abraham not obeyed God in the greatest test of his life, he would still have been justified by the faith he exercised in Genesis 15:6. But by allowing that faith to be alive in his works, he attained an enviable title among men. In this way he was also justified by works!

When a man is justified by faith he finds an unqualified acceptance before God. As Paul puts it, such a man is one “to whom God imputes righteousness without works” (Rom. 4:6). But only God can see this spiritual transaction. When, however, a man is justified by works he achieves an intimacy with God that is manifest to men. He can then be called “the friend of God,” even as Jesus said, “You are My friends if you do whatever I

command you" (John 15:14).¹⁶ (7) James's Concluding Words (2:24-26)

Leaving the imagined objector behind, James returns in verses 24-26 to address the readership directly. Rahab furnishes him with his final Biblical example of justification by works. James says:

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (Jam. 2:24-26).

It should be carefully observed that he does not say, "Was not Rahab justified by faith and works"! As already mentioned, such an idea is foreign to James. He is talking about exactly what he says he is talking about: justification by works!

Rahab, however, is superbly suited to tie his thoughts together. The passage had begun, as we have seen, with a reference to his theme of "saving the life" (2:14; 1:21). Not surprisingly, Rahab is selected as a striking example of a person whose physical life was "saved" precisely because she had works.

With James's words the statement of the writer of Hebrews can be profitably compared. In 11:31, that author writes of her:

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

Notice that the author of Hebrews points to her faith and lays the stress on the fact that she "received" the

spies. James, on the other hand, points also to the fact that “she sent them out another way.” This has considerable significance for James’s argument.

Although Rahab’s faith began to operate the moment she

“received the messengers,” she could not really be justified by works until she had “sent them out another way.” The reason for this is obvious when the story in Joshua 2 is carefully considered. Up until the last moment, she could still have betrayed the spies. Had she so desired, she could have sent their pursuers after them.

That the spies had lingering doubts about her loyalty is suggested by their words in Joshua 2:20, “And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath...” But the spies’ successful escape demonstrated that Rahab was truly a “friend of God” because she was also their friend. In this way, Rahab was justified by works.¹⁷ And in the process, she saved her own life and her family’s! Her faith, therefore, was very much alive because it was an active, working faith. Though she was a harlot - and both inspired writers remind us that she was - her living faith triumphed over the natural consequences of her sin. While all the inhabitants of Jericho perished under the divine judgment which Israel executed, she lived because her faith lived!

James therefore wishes his readers to know that works are in fact the vitalizing “spirit” which keeps one’s faith alive in the same way that the human spirit keeps the human body alive (2:26). Whenever a Christian ceases to act on his faith, that faith atrophies and becomes little more than a creedal corpse. “Dead orthodoxy” is a

danger that has always confronted Christian people and they do well to take heed to this danger.¹⁸ But the antidote is a simple one: faith remains vital and alive as long as it is being translated into real works of living obedience.

Summary

Does James contradict Paul's doctrine of free grace, or John's insistence on faith as the single condition of eternal life? Far from it. But neither does he offer support to the widespread notion that a "dead faith" cannot exist in the life of a Christian. Ironically, that is exactly what he is warning against. Thus, a misunderstanding of his words has not only promoted confusion about the terms for eternal life, but it has also deprived the Church of a much-needed warning.¹⁹ The dangers of a dead faith are real. But these dangers do not include hell.²⁰ Nothing James writes suggests this. Nevertheless, sin remains a deadly enemy to Christian experience which can prematurely end our physical lives. The wisdom of the Old Testament and James are agreed about this. So, if Christians are to be "saved" from that result, they will need more than faith.

They will also need works.²¹

ENDNOTES

ABBREVIATIONS

AB | The Anchor Bible

BGD | A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd edition
Revised and Augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and
Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer's Fifth Edition,
1958 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

BNTC | Black's New Testament Commentaries

BSC | Bible Study Commentary

CGNT | Cambridge Greek New Testament

Comm. | Stands exclusively for the commentaries of John Calvin which are always quoted from the series Calvin's Commentaries, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, various dates).

Herm | Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible.

HNTC | Harper's New Testament Commentaries

ICC | International Critical Commentary

Institutes | John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, always quoted from the 2 vol. translation by John Allen (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1935).

MNTC | Moffatt New Testament Commentary

NIC | New International Commentary

NIGNTC | New International Greek New Testament Commentary TNTC | Tyndale New Testament

Commentaries WBC | Word Biblical Commentaries WC | Westminster Commentaries Chapter 3 1Gerstner (p.

229) seeks to counter this point when he writes: "James 2:26 makes the point of the passage perfectly clear. All that James says is that, just as you cannot have a man without a body and spirit together, so you cannot have a Christian without works and faith together."

But what impartial reader would ever get this idea out of James's text? In no way does James say that one does not "have a man" simply because his spirit has left his

body. What we have in fact is a dead man - which is exactly James's point. A dead man is produced by the departure of his spirit from his physical body. Just so, a person's faith dies (becomes like a 'dead man') when it ceases to be invigorated by good works.

Surely Gerstner would admit that if a physical body is dead, it was clearly once alive. But he wishes not to draw any theological comparison with faith at this point because that would contradict his theological premises. My point still stands: The idea that a dead faith can never have been alive cannot be extracted from the text of 2:26 or of 2:14-26 as a whole. It is pure and simple theology, unsupported by evidence. In view of 2:26, the text might indeed be read just as I read it.

2A.

T. Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James* (Nashville: Broadman, n.d.), p. 94 n. 2, assigns to the article "almost the original demonstrative force." But this is extremely unlikely here when it is not even true later in the passage where the article appears with faith at 2:17, 20, 22(twice), and 26. Any student of the original language can examine James's text and see for himself that the article occurs with faith only when faith is a subject or has a possessive word qualifying it (as in verse 18). Otherwise there is no article. There is no subtle significance to the article in 2:14! Quite rightly Dibelius rejects the special stress on the article: "Here Jas uses the article before 'faith'..., but this is not to be read 'this faith', as many interpreters from Bede to Mayor have argued. Jas is not speaking of any particular brand of faith... The only attributive which is expressed. .. is this: faith which 'has' no works. But this

is still the Christian faith and not an 'alleged, false faith.'
" So much for building theology on an undetectable grammatical nuance! See Martin Dibelius, James, rev. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Michael A. Williams, ed. Helmut Koester, Herm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, Eng. ed. 1976), p. 152.

3Lorenzen writes: "The original Greek makes it clear... that the rhetorical question calls for a negative answer: No! Faith without works cannot save! Works are necessary for salvation." Thorwald Lorenzen, "Faith without Works does not count before God! James 2:14-16," Expository Times 89(1978):231.

4Lorenzen, p. 234, holds that Paul and James cannot be reconciled. He is not alone in this view.

5This point is also made by Ropes, who writes of 5:20: "Note how here, as in 1:15, death is the result of sin." See James Hardy Ropes, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916), p. 315.

6The importance of a correct view of these verses is hard to overstate. Sanguine indeed is the opinion of Cantinat that, though verses 18-19 are very difficult - perhaps the most difficult in the New Testament - these difficulties do not greatly affect our comprehension of the text! The exact opposite is the case: these difficulties, if left unresolved, significantly block our understanding. Jean Cantinat, *Les Epitres de Saint Jacques et de Saint Jude* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1973), p. 10.

7The evident unity of verses 18-19 as constituting the words of a single speaker is strongly attested in the literature on this passage. Many of those who have accepted this unity, however, have regarded the speaker

not as an objector but as a pious ally who takes James's point of view. But this explanation is rightly dismissed by Davids because "no one has yet been able to find a case where this common stylistic introduction did not introduce an opposing or disagreeing voice." Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 124. Among those treating the two verses as a unity are: Robert Johnstone, *Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, c1888), pp. 188-190; R. W. Dale, *The Epistle of James and Other Discourses* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), pp. 70, 71; so apparently R. J. Knowling, *The Epistle of St. James*, WC (London: Methuen, 1904), pp. 56-59; Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of James*, 3rd ed. (London: MacMillan, 1910; reprint ed., Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1977), p. 101; and Christiaan E. Donker, "Der Verfasser des Jak und sein Gegner: Zum Problem des Einwandes in Jak 2 18-19," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 72(1981):227-240; and Francois Vouga, *L'Épître de Saint Jacques* (Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1984), p. 87.

8Note this same format also in Romans 9:19, 20:

(Objector) "You will say to me then, 'Why does...?'"

" (Response): "But indeed. O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed...?" The use of such structural markers as "but someone will say" and sharp-toned epithets directed at a senseless or ungodly interlocutor are well-known features of the diatribe style so prevalent in James's and Paul's day. For references see Mayor, pp. 99 and 102; Ropes, pp. 208 and 216; Davids, pp. 123 and 126 (bibliographic data in nn.5 and 7).

9See also the author's "Light on James Two from Textual Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120(1963):341-350. As can be seen from nn. 7 and 8 above, the decision to treat verses 18, 19 as the words of a single speaker is not based on whether "by" or "without" is to be read in verse 18.

10The use of the challenge to "show me" in an ironical sense is well documented by Dibelius, pp. 154-155 n. 29. Especially parallel to James is a passage from *Ad Autolycus* 1.2, in which the apologist Theophilus writes: "But even if you should say, 'Show me your God', I too might say to you, 'Show me your Man and I also will show you my God.'" But this same ironic and unfulfillable demand is frequent in Epictetus, for example in the scorn of *Discourses* 3.22.99: "Who in the world are you? The bull of the herd or the queen of the beehive? Show me the symbols of your rulership!" For additional examples see Dibelius.

11The

Greek phrase (*kalos poieis*) is taken by us in the sense of "do good," "do right," which seems the most appropriate sense in Matthew 5:44; 12:12; Luke 6:27. It is also viable in Acts 10:33 ("you did the right thing to come") and even in James 2:8 ("If you keep the royal law... you are doing what's right"). Attention should be given also to the secular examples cited by Mayor, p. 101. In Hellenistic Greek one would be unwise to insist pedantically on the good/well differentiation so dear to strict English grammarians!

12The word "alone," or "only," in Greek is adverbial in form and ought not to be taken as a modifier of "faith" in the sense of "by faith alone." This point is often ignored

by writers. However, Lange grants that the Greek word for “alone” might be connected with the word “justified” in the sense, “ ‘not only by faith but by works a man is justified’,” but he argues that in fact it ought to be joined “adjectively” with the word “faith.” But in the New Testament, when the word *monos* (“alone”) modifies a noun it normally has formal concord with the noun. The adverbial use is the only natural one here, i.e., “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not only (justified) by faith.” See J. P. Lange, *The Epistle General of James in his A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1869). p. 87.

13Some have indeed sought a reconciliation between James and Paul in terms of differing concepts of works. Some time ago Lenski expressed a distinction that has often been asserted in one form or another. He states: “Paul and James deal with different kinds of works. Paul deals with law-works, which have nothing to do with true Gospel-faith... James deals with Gospel-works, which ever evidence the presence of Gospel-faith...” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938), p. 587. But this distinction is without foundation and has been effectively criticized by Douglas J. Moo in “ ‘Law’, ‘Works of the Law’ and Legalism in Paul,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45(1983):73-100. As we have already seen (chapter 1 n.2) Calvin encountered this same argument from the “sophists” and rejects it (*Institutes* III.xi.14).

14About the statement in verse 22 (“by works faith was made perfect”), Adamson aptly observes: “The force of the statement seems to be that faith is fulfilled, strengthened, and matured by exercise.” James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, NIC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 130.

15Hort explains “the Scripture was fulfilled” (verse 23) as follows: “The Divine word spoken is conceived of as receiving a completion so to speak in acts or events which are done or come to pass in accordance with it. The idea of filling, or giving fullness to, is always contained in the biblical use of fulfilling, though not always in the same sense.” See Fenton John Anthony Hort, *Expository and Exegetical Studies: Compendium of Works Formerly Published Separately: The Epistle of James* (reprint ed., Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1980), p. 64. See also the stimulating discussion of Adamson, pp. 130-132.

16One must note Darby’s comment on this passage: “James, remark, never says that works justify us before God [*italics his*]; for God can see the faith without its works. He knows that life is there. It is in exercise with regard to Him, towards Him, by trust in His word, in Himself, by receiving His testimony in spite of everything within and without. This God sees and knows. But when our fellow creatures are in question, when it must be said ‘shew,’ then faith, life, shows itself in works.” J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Colossians - Revelation*, new ed. rev. (reprint ed., New York: Loizeaux, 1942), p. 361. This also is essentially the view of Calvin (see n.21 in this chapter).

17An indirect testimony to the depth of Rahab's vindication before men is to be found in the significant role Rahab played in Jewish legend. For specifics, see Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* HNTC (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 137. Thanks to James, her name lives on in Christianity as a challenging role-model for every born-again believer who, though already justified by faith, also aspires to be justified by works.

18The view that James is talking about a false, spurious faith has nothing to commend it. Even though he holds that final salvation is in view in James 2, Nicol is absolutely correct when he writes: "James's point is not that faith without works is not faith; as faith he does not criticize it, but merely stresses that faith does not fulfill its purpose when it is not accompanied by works." See W. Nicol, "Faith and Works in the Letter of James," in *Essays on the General Epistles of the New Testament*, Neotestamentica 9 (Pretoria: The New Testament Society of South Africa, c1975), p. 16. See his whole discussion here, especially the statement (pp. 16, 17): "Our conclusion is that in this pericope James is not discussing different kinds of faith - as the Reformed scholars we have cited assert; he emphasize that those who believe must do good works."

See also Plummer, who writes: "But St. James nowhere throws doubt on the truth of the unprofitable believer's professions, or on the possibility of believing much and doing nothing." Alfred Plummer, *The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1905), p. 137.

19Strikingly on target are the remarks of Dibelius (p. 178) who writes: "But in all of the instances [in James] which have been examined thusfar what is involved is the faith which the Christian has, never the faith of the sinner which first brings him to God... The faith which is mentioned in this section can be presupposed in every Christian... [James's] intention is not dogmatically oriented, but practically oriented: he wishes to admonish the Christians to practice their faith, i.e., their Christianity, by works" (*italics his*). As far as it goes a better statement cannot be found in the literature on James.

20James

2:14-26 is also treated as unrelated to the question of eternal destiny by R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), pp. 170-172, 207-217. Although Kendall relates 2:14 to the saving of the destitute poor person described in verses 15, 16, his perspective on the passage is not very dissimilar to the view I have taken.

21A word should be said about John Calvin's own treatment of James 2:14-26. To the surprise of some, perhaps, we do not find in Calvin anything that reflects the theological tangle into which Reformed theology has fallen, In two critical points, Calvin agrees with the present writer against Reformed theology. The two points are these: (1) justification by works does not refer to our justification before God, but rather before men; (2) our good works are not the basis of our assurance of salvation.

Calvin says these things plainly: "So when the sophists set James against Paul, they are deceived by the double

meaning of the term 'justification'. When Paul says we are justified by faith, he means precisely that we have won a verdict of righteousness in the sight of God. James has quite another intention, that the man who professes himself to be faithful should demonstrate the truth of his fidelity by works. James did not mean to teach us where the confidence of our salvation should rest - which is the very point on which Paul does insist. So let us avoid the false reasoning which has trapped the sophists, by taking note of the double meaning: To Paul, the word denotes our free imputation of righteousness before the judgment seat of God, to James, the demonstration of righteousness from its effects, before men; which we may deduce from the preceding words, *Shew me thy faith, etc.* [italics in the text]. In the latter sense, we may admit without controversy that man is justified by works, just as you might say a man is enriched by the purchase of a large and costly estate, since his wealth, which beforehand he kept out of sight in a strongbox, has become well-known" (italics added except in the case specified). Calvin, Comm. James 2.21.

Neither does Calvin fall into the hopeless quagmire of talking about a "spurious" faith which simulates the real thing so that true faith can only be recognized by works (see quotation from Dabney in chapter 2 n. 1.) Calvin will not give the name of faith to those whom he considers James to be attacking. He writes, for example: "He [James] is speaking of false profession, and his words make this certain. He does not start, 'If a man has faith', but 'If a man says he has faith...' Plainly he implies that there are hypocrites who make an empty boast of the word, when they have no real claim on it." A few sentences later, he says. "Just remember, he is not

speaking out of his own understanding of the word when he calls it 'faith', but is disputing with those who pretend insincerely to faith, but are entirely without it" (on 2:14; italics added).

Although I might quarrel with Calvin's exegesis here, at least he is consistent with the fundamental premises of his own theology. Since, for Calvin, assurance was of the essence of saving faith, he does not ascribe this "false profession" to any who have found that assurance, but describes those without works as insincere pretenders who make a false claim to faith. Thus he will also ascribe to such people only "an indifferent and formal understanding of God" (on 2:14) or "a certain uninformed opinion of God" (on 2:19) or "a bare and empty awareness of God" (on 2:23). This is a far cry from his own definition of faith as "a steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence toward us" which is "founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ" (Institutes III.ii.7; quoted in full in chapter 2 n. 5). Calvin does not hold that faith must be subjectively verified to ourselves by works, but objectively verified before men.

To be sure, Calvin expected good works to be produced in the life of the justified, but so do I.

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