

## *Lordship Salvation*

### **Introduction**

The issue of lordship salvation is one that must be approached with particular care for several reasons. First, since we are talking about the nature of the gospel proclamation itself, we must be very careful to be biblical. At the same time, we must beware of causing others to feel that they do not understand the gospel clearly enough to articulate it in evangelism.

Second, many of the participants on all sides of the debate have been overly aggressive in their criticisms, resorting to name-calling and false characterization. It is understandable that such an important discussion would quickly become both personal and emotional, but we need to be extremely careful not to damage the cause of Christ.

Third, it is very common for individuals to be placed in one of two categories: "lordship" or "free grace." This simplified approach to the issue reflects immature thinking and actually makes the problem even more confusing than it really is. We would suggest that there are a number of potential positions in this debate, some more extreme than others.

### **The Essence of the Debate**

The lordship salvation debate centers on the relationship between a profession of faith and a lifestyle of obedience. Two major questions are involved:

- Does genuine conversion necessarily result in the fruit of a changed life? Stated another way, are justification and sanctification, as the Reformers said, "distinct, but inseparable?" To what extent does the apparent absence of fruit invalidate an individual's profession of faith?
- As we do evangelism, to what extent do we ask individuals to commit themselves to a lifestyle of obedience?

These questions have been answered in a variety of ways by evangelical theologians. As a result, several positions may be identified along a continuum.

1. Commonly labeled "decisionism," this position maintains that salvation comes through faith alone and that all that is necessary for assurance of genuine conversion is the act that accompanies it. Pray the prayer, walk the aisle, or be baptized—just do it, and you're in! We might all be able to think of examples of this (as when missionaries in refugee camps baptized thousands of "converts," who were hoping that they could come to America if they were baptized), but few, if any, individuals would claim to be decisionists.
2. A second position, known by its proponents as the "free grace" position, argues that salvation comes through faith alone and that sincere profession is the only requirement for full assurance. When the term "Lord" is used in biblical examples or commandments

concerning evangelism, the convert is asked to affirm the deity of Jesus Christ. Salvation and discipleship are regarded as distinct, and the presence of works (though expected) is irrelevant to the reality of one's faith. The most well-known representative of this position is Zane Hodges.

3. A third position maintains that salvation comes through faith alone, and understands repentance to be a change of mind with regard to Jesus Christ. This position also understands "Lord" to mean deity and distinguishes between salvation and discipleship (though not as strongly as Hodges). It is expected that works will follow legitimate conversion, but they may not be evident to all observers at any given time. One representative of this position is Charles Ryrie. (It should be noted that this distinction between Ryrie and Hodges results more from the relative emphasis they place on various points, particularly while engaging the biblical text, than from any obvious differences in doctrine.)
4. A fourth position also maintains that salvation comes through faith alone, but has a stronger understanding of repentance, regarding it as turning to God from sin. This position emphasizes the authority of Christ with the term "Lord," but focuses primarily on His authority to save. This position would not distinguish sharply between salvation and discipleship, as those who come to Christ must have an interest in more than just forgiveness for sins previously committed. Works demonstrate the legitimacy of faith, but believers can and do fall into serious sin and they may die in that condition. These notes will attempt to defend this position.
5. A fifth position, generally referred to as "lordship salvation" maintains that salvation comes through faith alone, but virtually identifies salvation and discipleship. This position stresses the idea that works must be present if genuine faith is present. Further, submission to the authority of Christ in repentance should be made clear as part of the gospel proclamation. The most visible representative of this position is John MacArthur, Jr.
6. For the sake of balance, one may envision a sixth position that would demand a perfectionistic level of obedience on the part of the new convert. All who legitimately come to Christ experience a radical change of lifestyle that demonstrates the reality of their profession.

*Those who would oppose position #2 often describe it as if it were position #1. In the same way, those who would oppose #5 often describe it as if it were #6. Such false characterizations have brought a great deal of confusion to the debate.*

It's important to note that all of the participants in this debate are vitally concerned with biblical truth and with individual believers' assurance of salvation. All desire for their hearers to not be deceived, but to truly appropriate the gift of the gospel, and all would insist that they believe in justification by grace through faith alone.<sup>1</sup> Erickson is correct in his summary of the attitude the

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, xiii (all quotations come from the first edition unless otherwise noted). It is particularly common for opponents of MacArthur's position to accuse him of teaching "faith plus works." While he strongly denies that charge, DeWitt has a point when he writes, "If I must conjure up some commitment of obedience to Christ as Lord of my life, then I am no longer depending completely on the blood of Christ, i.e., His substitutionary act of dying to pay for my sins, as the means of salvation. The plan of salvation is my receiving what He did in the past, on the cross, as payment for my sin. It is not my making a commitment to what I will

main participants have toward the issue:

To the free grace thinkers, the issue is the purity of grace. In their understanding, the lordship salvation people are mixing a requirement of works with faith, thus perverting the pure grace of the gospel. To the lordship salvation theologians, the free grace teachers are guilty of cheapening the gospel, so that what they offer is not merely free grace, it is cheap grace. It is not difficult to see, therefore, why each sees the debate as crucial, and views the teaching of the other with alarm. They believe the very nature of the gospel to be at stake. In addition, both sides feel that Scripture clearly favors their own view, as does the historic belief and practice of the church.<sup>2</sup>

We should also note that the lordship salvation debate is not about dispensationalism. Each of the individuals noted above regards himself to be a dispensationalist. As noted above, the lordship salvation debate concerns the relationship between one's profession and one's lifestyle. This focus is necessary in light of the problem of hypocrisy.

### **Different Perspectives on a Common Problem**

Most students of contemporary Christianity lament the presence of great hypocrisy in the churches. For example, Chuck Colson writes,

Pollsters tell us that 50 million Americans say they are born again. Evangelicals have come out of the closet in recent years, accompanied by a surge of Christian books, records, celebrities, and candidates.

No doubt about it, religion is up. But so are values unremittingly opposed to the truth of Christianity: One out of every two marriages shatters in divorce; one out of three pregnancies terminates in abortion. Homosexuality is no longer considered depravity, but an 'alternative lifestyle.' Crime continues to soar—in 'Christian' America there are 100 times more burglaries than in 'pagan' Japan.

That is the great paradox today: Sin abounds in the midst of unprecedented religiosity. If there are so many of us, why are we not affecting our world?<sup>3</sup>

All of the participants in the lordship salvation debate are concerned about this situation, and some have unfairly suggested that their opponents are largely responsible for it.<sup>4</sup> MacArthur regards this as one of the motivating factors behind the writing of his first book, and others have acknowledged that the recent scandals in evangelicalism have given lordship salvation a rather

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do in the future." (David A. DeWitt, "An Evaluation of the Position Commonly Known as Lordship Salvation," publication data unavailable, p. 9.)

<sup>2</sup>Millard J. Erickson, "Lordship Theology: The Current Controversy," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (Spring 1991): 5. Note Erickson's division of the participants into two camps. He fails to recognize the complexity and diversity of the various positions.

<sup>3</sup>C. Colson, "Playing it Safe is Just Playing," *Christianity Today* (October 17, 1986); quoted by Earl D. Radmacher, "First Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James' by John F. MacArthur, Jr.," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 35.

<sup>4</sup>Other answers have been suggested as well. Bill Bright regards it as a failure to understand the nature of the Spirit-filled life. Theonomists regard it as a departure from the law of Moses. Charismatics regard it as a neglect of the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Bible churches think of the problem as a failure on the part of liberal denominations to preach the word. While some of these solutions may have some legitimacy, the real problem is probably the depravity of mankind and the deceitfulness of sin.

magnetic appeal to many.<sup>5</sup> In response to the tie between the problem of anemic Christianity and the promotion of lordship salvation, Pickering writes, "None of us are happy with shoddy, fleshly, and disobedient Christians. But the remedy for this condition is not found in changing the terms of the gospel."<sup>6</sup>

*Just what are the terms of the gospel, and how should we expect it to change our lives?*

## **The Presentation of the Gospel: Selected Issues**

### **The Meaning of "Lord" – Acts 16:30,31**

*... he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

*And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your whole household."*

MacArthur comments on this passage, "No promise of salvation is ever extended to those who refuse to accede to Christ's lordship. Thus there is no salvation except 'lordship salvation.'"<sup>7</sup>

What is meant by the term "Lord" in this context? Darrell Bock argues quite persuasively that Luke is emphasizing Christ's authority to forgive sins, that the focus is on His power, not on the convert's personal state of devotion. He writes,

In Acts 2, 10, and 16— passages that present the most material about salvation in the Book of Acts— what one confessed was that Jesus was the Lord in that He was the divine Mediator of salvation with the total capacity and authority to forgive sins and judge men. He is the Lord over salvation to whom men come to find salvation because they have turned away from themselves or their own merit to the ascended Lord. He is the divine Dispenser of salvation.<sup>8</sup>

Lanier Burns makes the same point: "He is Lord regardless of 'how much of us' He has. 'Lord' is His rightful claim and title."<sup>9</sup>

Bock argues that this conclusion has good news and bad news for both sides on the debate. For those who emphasize Jesus as Savior, he suggests that they can and should emphasize Jesus' power and authority more than they do. For those who emphasize Jesus as Lord, Bock notes that they tend to focus too much on the state of the hearer. He writes, "If one presents the gospel with a clear description of the Person who saves, a saving faith commitment will represent a turning to and a reliance solely on the work of God through the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>10</sup>

*Individuals are called upon to believe in Jesus Christ as the only one who has the power and authority to provide salvation, but what does it mean to "believe?"*

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<sup>5</sup>MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 16; Cocoris, 2.

<sup>6</sup>Ernest Pickering, *Lordship Salvation*, 7.

<sup>7</sup>MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 28. He notes that he does not like the term "lordship salvation," but uses it for the sake of argument.

<sup>8</sup>Darrell Bock, "Jesus as Lord in Acts and in the Gospel Message," 151.

<sup>9</sup>J. Lanier Burns, unpublished personal letter, April 20, 1990.

<sup>10</sup>Bock, "Jesus as Lord in Acts and in the Gospel Message," 152.

## The Meaning of "Believe"

Cocoris emphasizes that to "believe" is to "trust."<sup>11</sup> MacArthur regards that to be virtually indistinguishable from "mental acquiescence," and he attacks those who regard faith as a "passive, fruitless, intellectual exercise."<sup>12</sup> He maintains that faith is a divinely imparted gift that brings God's nature to expression in good works.<sup>13</sup> Here MacArthur seems to be confusing the consequence of faith with the nature of faith. Cocoris, Hodges, and others are by no means attempting to say that faith is a purely intellectual act, an acknowledgment of Christ's work that involves no personal involvement and produces no fruit. They are simply trying to say that faith receives—it does not initiate. It is passive in that it depends on the works of another. It will bear fruit (see the discussion on perseverance below), but that is not the focus at the time of conversion. The focus at conversion is on the person of Christ and His ability to save as a consequence of His death and resurrection. When we trust in His work in place of our own ability to obtain salvation, we are expressing faith.

## The Meaning of Repentance

It was argued in the preceding lesson that repentance should be regarded as one of several terms that describe *conversion* with different emphases. "Come," "rest," "receive," "turn," "believe," "have faith in," "trust," and "repent" are all acceptable metaphors for the gospel message, for all refer to the same experience. No single expression should be regarded as the technical term to describe the human response at conversion.

It was also argued that repentance seems to consist of more than just a change of mind about Christ (Ryrie's position) but that one's commitment to life change cannot be measured. MacArthur goes too far in his descriptions of repentance when he falls into quantitative language in emphasizing his point. Here are several examples:

*"One may 'accept' [Christ] and still fall short. The individual who responds positively but not wholeheartedly risks being lost and damned forever."*<sup>14</sup> What constitutes wholeheartedness? Is this not a measure of absolute devotion that no fallen human can muster, regenerate or otherwise?

*"He will not respond to the beckoning of a heart that cherishes sin, nor will He enter into partnership with one who loves to fulfill the passions of the flesh."*<sup>15</sup> Is this not the struggle that all believers continue to contend with until their glorification?

*"It is full commitment, with nothing knowingly or deliberately held back."*<sup>16</sup> Even here, where the convert's devotion is limited to conscious issues, one wonders what would become of the man who said to Jesus, "I do believe; help me in my unbelief" (Mk. 9:24).

Such statements lead one to ask a practical question about evangelism. Should evangelists encourage individuals to search out every area of their lives in bringing each thing before Christ, or should they instead discourage this process, fearing that the persons might discover a previously unconscious area of rebellion, thus preventing or postponing their conversion?

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<sup>11</sup>G. Michael Cocoris, "John MacArthur, Jr.'s System of Salvation," 10.

<sup>12</sup>MacArthur, "Faith According to the Apostle James," 14-15, 24.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>16</sup>MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 197.

As MacArthur attempts to set boundaries in his rigid style, he demonstrates that it is exceedingly difficult to draw lines in this area. Few (if any) would disagree with him when he says that Jesus "will not heed the plea of a rebel who simply wants Him to enter and by His presence sanctify a life of continued disobedience."<sup>17</sup> However, when he attempts to describe more realistic situations, MacArthur's quantitative language inevitably fails. Again, how much is "as small as a mustard seed"?

### **The Meaning of Discipleship – Matthew 28:19,20**

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Here "disciple" is actually the only finite verb in the commandment, and it appears to stand for the entire evangelistic enterprise, including both conversion ("baptizing them") and follow-up ("teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"). Is this another metaphor for belief in Christ?

MacArthur writes,

Every Christian is a disciple. . . . Disciples are people who believe, those whose faith motivates them to obey all Jesus commanded. The word *disciple* is used consistently as a synonym for *believer* throughout the book of Acts (6:1,2,7; 11:26; 14:20,22; 15:10). Any distinction between the two words is purely artificial.<sup>18</sup>

MacArthur is largely correct in his observations from Acts. The passages he cites refer to the entire body of believers as "disciples." It is interesting to note that 15:10 applies the term to Gentile converts in the context of excluding them from the Old Testament law – the disciples in Acts are those who have been "saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (15:11).

Harrison agrees with MacArthur's analysis of these examples, but he maintains that the term means something different in Luke 14:26-27, where Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Here Harrison argues that the term refers to "one who demonstrates the reality of his allegiance to Christ by his readiness to make sacrifices to Him."<sup>19</sup>

What Harrison is arguing is that "disciple" is not always a technical term that refers simply to believers. Can that conclusion be supported?

In the gospels, "disciples" generally refers to the twelve (as in Matt. 10:1; 11:1; 13:36, etc.). Just as the disciples of John remained by him (Matt. 9:14; 11:2), these individuals followed after Jesus and learned from Him (as in Matt. 9:19).

When the term applies only to the twelve, it is important to note that an unbeliever (Judas) is included in the company. This is even more obviously the case when the term is applied to a wider group. As even MacArthur recognizes, at times "disciple" seems to denote those casual followers of Christ who were not really saved. In John 6: 60, 61, 66, many of Jesus' disciples

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>18</sup> MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 196.

<sup>19</sup>E. F. Harrison, "Must Christ be Lord to be Savior?" *Eternity* (September 1959), 14.

grumbled against Him and finally withdrew and walked with Him no more because they were unhappy with His teaching. The twelve remained because, in the words of Peter, "we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." (Peter thought he was speaking for Judas as well, but the Lord clearly excludes him from the group of "believers" in verses 70 and 71.)

Another example may be found in Matthew 8: 21, where "one of the disciples" asked Jesus if he could first bury his father before following Him. Here is an individual who is already counted as a "disciple," but he has evidently not yet "counted the cost." In verse 23, when Jesus went on, His disciples (i.e., the twelve) went with Him. This same sort of shift between the general reference of the term (denoting the larger group of followers) and the specific reference (denoting the twelve) may be observed in John 4: 1, 2, where Jesus' disciples (the twelve) are said to be making and baptizing more disciples (the many). It is apparently some of this larger group that eventually drifted away from Him.

In John 8, Jesus spoke to those who had believed in Him and told them, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of mine" (v. 31; cf. 15:8). Of the group of learners who followed after Him, only those who continued in His teaching were regarded as His true followers.<sup>20</sup>

Even in Acts, where MacArthur argues that "disciple" is synonymous with "believer," it is apparent that it referred to a broader group of individuals who were "learners," or "followers." In Acts 19, Paul came across a group of "disciples" and discovered that they were not yet "Christians." In that transitional period they may have been "believers" in the Old Testament sense of the word, but they had only been baptized into John's baptism and had not yet heard the complete gospel. (This example may compare to John 2:11, 22, where Jesus' disciples "believed in Him" as they saw His miracles – they were already His followers, but they did not yet know or believe much about Him.)

It appears as though "disciple" denotes a follower, or learner, and cannot be regarded as a technical term that describes only those who are saved. So then, if it is possible for an unbeliever to be a disciple, at least an apparent disciple, of Christ, is it possible for a believer, a saved person, to NOT be a disciple?

John 8:31 may seem to support such an idea, since Jesus told "those Jews who had believed Him" that they would demonstrate their discipleship by remaining in His word. However, the response of His audience in the verses which follow demands that one question the level of their "belief."<sup>21</sup>

No other passages in which the term "disciple" is used suggest that believers have the option of not being disciples. It appears as though disciples may or may not be believers, but all believers are disciples. In support of this same idea, Chafer writes,

The word *disciple* means no more than a pupil, a learner, or a follower, and is not equivalent to the terminology *believer* or *Christian*. . . . All believers are disciples in the sense that they are being taught of God through the indwelling Spirit and whatever instrumentality the Spirit may employ. . . . The term *disciple* implies no more of a relation

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<sup>20</sup>Obviously this raises the issue of "perseverance" once again. See comments below and in the notes on Eternal Security.

<sup>21</sup>Some have suggested that one may "believe" some of Jesus' message without believing in Him (Blum, *BKC*). It is also possible that others in the crowd responded to a message that was not directed toward them (cf. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 39), but the text implies otherwise with the use of "they" in v. 33.

to God than that of learner. One revelation may come by means of the Spirit even to the unsaved, and that the way of salvation being revealed through the gospel.<sup>22</sup>

What are the implications of this conclusion with regard to the present debate? First, MacArthur overstates his case when he attempts to make "disciple" synonymous with "believer." At the same time, he is correct in his assertion that all believers are disciples. Hodges has emphasized the idea that discipleship is a special, conditional relationship between the believer and Christ.<sup>23</sup> Though time and space do not allow a more detailed examination of his arguments here, his conclusion does not appear to be warranted.

With regard to specific passages, it appears as though the calls to discipleship in the gospels are "hard sayings" that occasionally "weed out" those who are tagging along after Jesus purely in the hopes of personal gain. In Luke 14, for example, "great multitudes were going along with Him," and He told them that there was also a cost to being one of His followers. It might mean divisions within one's family (v. 26; cf. Matt. 10:34-37), or even death (v. 27; cf. Matt. 10:38-39). Following Christ could not be taken lightly, particularly in a culture in which his disciples were cast out of the synagogue and even killed (John 9:28, 34; Matt. 10:24-33).

Other examples are similar. The hard saying of Matthew 16:24-26 is addressed to the large group of disciples (not just the twelve—cf. Mk. 8:34), and is part of Jesus' response to Peter's rebuke. He had just prophesied His own death, and Peter rejected the idea, saying, "This shall never happen to You!" Jesus not only quieted Peter, He also applied His example of dedication to the will of God to the entire company of His followers: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (v. 24).

With these words Jesus challenged the believers in the crowd to follow Him with greater dedication, and He challenged the unbelievers to recognize that He does not promise a life of ease. Such "hard sayings" certainly *complement* the preaching of the gospel, but they do not *constitute* the preaching the gospel.

How then does all of this relate to the Great Commission of Matthew 28? Jesus commands us to "make disciples" of all the nations, presenting the gospel message and teaching new converts His words in such a way that they may actually be regarded as followers of Christ. He commissions His disciples (28:16) to multiply themselves throughout the earth. Does this mean preaching the hard sayings about discipleship? Certainly those are included in "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you," but so are the statements that say nothing about counting the cost (such as John 5: 24; 11: 25, 26). The Great Commission calls us to balance.

### **The Lordship Debate: A Need for Balance**

On the basis of the comments made above, it should be apparent that I am advocating one of the mediating positions between Hodges and MacArthur. There are some errors on both sides of this debate, and my hope is that these remarks will put the issue in perspective.

#### **The Use of the Gospels in Soteriology**

In his first book, MacArthur desires to present "the gospel according to Jesus," and that means that he focuses on the four gospels in his examination of soteriological issues. We would not want to go as far as to say that the message of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John was not

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<sup>22</sup>Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:120-21.

<sup>23</sup>*The Gospel Under Siege*, chapter 4.



the gospel, but it was clearly not the *complete* gospel. Ryrie writes,

The basis of salvation is always the death of Christ; the means is always faith; the object is always God (though man's understanding of God before and after the incarnation is obviously different); but the content of faith depends on the particular revelation God was pleased to give at a certain time.<sup>24</sup>

During the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, the content of the gospel message was not yet complete. MacArthur attempts to acknowledge this, noting that "Jesus' gospel was not yet fully completed until His death and resurrection." However, he then says that "the elements of it were all clear in His preaching."<sup>25</sup> What "elements" were present?

In 1 Corinthians 15: 1-6, Paul describes the gospel as including the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Were these "elements" present in the preaching of Christ? They do not seem to have been clearly proclaimed as facts to be trusted in for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Rom. 10:9). By treating the earthly ministry of Christ as our normative example for ministry after Pentecost, MacArthur obscures the fact that the message at that time was inherently incomplete.

In the same way, much of what Jesus did say was not immediately understood. In John 7, He said, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" After Pentecost, the disciples recognized that "this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39; cf. 2:22; 14:20; 16:4, 12). MacArthur's approach seems to deemphasize the importance of Pentecost in the progressive revelation of the gospel.

MacArthur's work also seems to confuse the distinction in dispensations with the coming of Christ. While the incarnation may be regarded as to some extent a transitional period due to the presence of Christ on earth (Matt. 12:28), Ryrie is correct when he says that the law remained operative until the crucifixion of Christ:

Of course it is not difficult to show that Christ lived under the law and that He expected His hearers to follow its teachings too. When He cleansed the leper He told him to present himself to the priest "and offer the gift that Moses commanded . . ." (Matt. 8:2-4). He further exhorted the people to obey the commands of the law as they were taught them by the scribes and Pharisees, but not to follow the examples of their lives (Matt. 23:2-3).<sup>26</sup>

Again, by regarding the Lord's messages as normative for Christian evangelism, MacArthur seems to place too much emphasis on submission to the law. The fact is that individuals who trusted in the message of John the Baptist or in the preaching of Christ prior to the crucifixion were believers in the Old Testament sense of the word. They were expected to maintain the law, and they were not yet given the complete message about grace in Christ extending even to the Gentiles, which was revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit according to Ephesians 3. MacArthur demonstrates little sensitivity to this issue.

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<sup>24</sup>Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 130.

<sup>25</sup>MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 214.

<sup>26</sup>Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 34.

### Perseverance: A Separate Issue

The “Lordship” and “free grace” camps are arguing over two different issues, but they both err by regarding them as a single issue. The first is the Calvinistic idea that justification and sanctification are distinct, but inseparable (a doctrine that contributes to the Reformed concept of the perseverance [or “preservation”] of the saints), and the second is the idea that repentance consists of a wholehearted commitment to the lordship of Christ at the moment of conversion (a belief that we have described as “dedication conversion”). While the issues both pertain to the relationship between profession and lifestyle, they are separate questions. The idea behind the first is that true faith will be manifested in a changed life—believers will show the fruit of good works. The idea behind the second is that believers must make a commitment to that process at the time of conversion in order to be truly saved.

In attempting to defend lordship salvation, MacArthur frequently instead defends the necessity of sanctification. For example, in his analysis of the parables of Christ and in his discussion of the church's historical position on lordship salvation, MacArthur demonstrates that both the parables and the church's historical teaching maintain that true faith will bear fruit. That is a *widely* (if not universally) recognized doctrine, but it only constitutes half of the “lordship” debate. The same may be said for his article, “Faith According to the Apostle James.”<sup>27</sup> MacArthur's thesis is that James teaches “lordship salvation.” What he proves is that James believes in the inseparability of justification and sanctification. Failing to see this distinction, MacArthur observes that Ryrie agrees with him on the fruitfulness of faith in James, and he chides Ryrie for sounding like an advocate of lordship salvation.<sup>28</sup>

### The Problem of Quantitative Language

Even those of us who believe in the inseparability of justification and sanctification cannot draw a distinct line between the apostasy of false profession and the stumbling of a genuine believer. Quite honestly, it is often difficult to tell the difference. MacArthur writes, “Professing Christians *utterly* lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance of salvation.”<sup>29</sup> That may be true, but how does one tell whether such evidence is *utterly lacking*? Might a burning ember remain unseen? He says, “We may sin (1 John 2:1)—we *will* sin—but the process of sanctification can never stall completely.”<sup>30</sup> MacArthur implies that one can fall “almost completely,”<sup>31</sup> but when does one conclude that the process is *completely* stalled? MacArthur says, “A true Christian might temporarily fear to stand up for the Lord but would never willingly sell Him out.”<sup>32</sup> I assume Peter provides us with an example of the former, but what constitutes “willingly selling Him out?” Where do we draw the line?

Of course, we must acknowledge the fact that believers can and do sin. Even MacArthur readily admits this point. However, we should also note that that sin can result in severe consequences from which the believer may never recover in this life. The Corinthians who became ill and died

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<sup>27</sup>See bibliography below.

<sup>28</sup>MacArthur, “Faith According to the Apostle James,” 24. It should be noted that MacArthur is not alone in this misunderstanding. Stott made the same error (“Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior?” 18), as does DeWitt (“An Evaluation of the Position Commonly Known as Lordship Salvation,” 2). Hodges goes even further, tying *both* of these issues to the idea of salvation by works.

<sup>29</sup>MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 29 (2nd edition, emphasis mine).

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>31</sup>*Faith Works*, 191.

<sup>32</sup>*The Gospel According to Jesus*, 105.

as a result of abuses of the Lord's Supper were apparently believers (1 Cor. 11:30), as were Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). (If they were unbelievers infiltrating the congregation, might they have entered through the apostles preaching "easy-believism?")

The **expectation** is that believers will demonstrate their justification through continuing growth in the Lord, but occasionally (frequently?) they will continue to act like unbelievers in varying degrees. We might even act like the divisive, proud, and immoral Corinthians, whom Paul described as "saints by calling" (1 Cor. 1:2). "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Cor. 2:3). Quantitative language has a very difficult time explaining such situations.

### The Means of Assurance

By calling a life of obedience "the only possible proof that a person really knows Jesus Christ," MacArthur links perseverance too strongly with assurance.<sup>33</sup> Harrison writes,

The ground of assurance of salvation is endangered if surrender to Christ's lordship is a part of that ground. Instead of looking to the sufficiency of Christ and His work of redemption, one is compelled to look within to see if he has yielded himself to the Son of God. If he is conscious of times in his life when he has denied the lordship of the Master (and who has not?) then he must logically question his standing before God. What a wretched condition of uncertainty would then rule instead of the settled peace which is ours when we know that we are Christ's because He died to make us His.<sup>34</sup>

Here Hodges has also overstated his position by maintaining that belief in the doctrine of perseverance removes the possibility of assurance at conversion.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, Chafer held quite plainly to the idea that salvation was to be tested by its fruits while also arguing that believers could have assurance of salvation from the moment of conversion.<sup>36</sup> This issue will be discussed further in the lesson on eternal security, where it will be argued that the fruit of a changed life enhances our assurance, but that our confidence is based primarily on our trust in the promises of the gospel.

### Front-loading the Gospel

MacArthur is correct in saying that all believers will demonstrate a changed life (as Ryrie says, "somewhere, sometime, somehow"<sup>37</sup>). However, he errs when he places that expectation at the front end of the gospel message.<sup>38</sup>

MacArthur believes that his opponents are denying the the moral demands of the New Testament. For example, he writes, "Those who think they can simply affirm a list of gospel facts and continue to live any way they please should examine themselves to see if they are really in the faith."<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere he says, "Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 194.

<sup>34</sup>Harrison, "Must Christ be Lord to be Savior?" 16.

<sup>35</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 1-2.

<sup>36</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (7 vol. edition), 3:297.

<sup>37</sup>Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 54.

<sup>38</sup>Saucy addresses this same point when he argues that we should separate the question of the nature of saving faith from the question concerning the actual content of the gospel presentation ("Second Response to John F. MacArthur, Jr.," 45).

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. 197.

an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners."<sup>40</sup> Of the hundreds of believers who have been trained by Ryrie and Hodges, it is doubtful that any are that antinomian. Harrison writes, "We are not pleading for an easy, soft salvation or a superficial preaching. We are far from advocating any neglect of the dedicated life. We are pleading only that salvation be preserved for what it is – God's free gift."<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

The Bible promises eternal life to those who view Jesus Christ as the only source of salvation and trust in Him to forgive their sins on the basis of His death on the cross. This gift is offered freely to all who believe, but it is never regarded cheaply.

Conversion involves repentance and faith, and it is the beginning of a process of discipleship and progressive sanctification. Those who believe will manifest the fruit of the Spirit in varying degrees, but this change of life will not be the primary means of one's personal assurance.

Specific cases are always difficult to categorize, and, since quantitative language makes that even more difficult, it should be avoided. The gospel must be discussed with as much clarity as possible, not with exaggerated and intimidating rhetoric.

All of the participants in this debate are involved in it because of their zeal for the gospel and for the work of evangelism. For that reason, undoubtedly the saddest consequence of this discussion may be that some persons may fail to present the gospel at all. When MacArthur says, "Above all, make sure that the message you share with unbelievers is truly the gospel of Christ,"<sup>42</sup> he may silence those whose understanding of the gospel has been clouded by this issue (2 Cor. 11:3). For this reason, it is appropriate to close with a reminder of the simplicity of our message and our method.

- a. The Spirit's work of pre-evangelism includes reproof for sin (Jn. 16). An understanding of sin is foundational for one's comprehension of the gospel.
- b. Preach forgiveness as a free gift based on the death of Christ on our behalf.
- c. Expect those who believe in the gospel to bear the fruit of the Spirit.
- d. Where fruit is lacking, it may be legitimate to question an individual's personal salvation, though only the Lord really knows for sure. Whether the problem is the absence of the Spirit or the absence of trust in Him, more adequate guidance needs to be provided within the body of Christ.<sup>43</sup>

*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom; preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.*

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>41</sup>Harrison, "Must Christ be Lord to be Savior?" 48.

<sup>42</sup>MacArthur, "Getting the Gospel Right," 10.

<sup>43</sup>It should be noted here that Campus Crusade's materials, which endure regular and sarcastic criticism in MacArthur's book, always question the salvation of those who did not show fruit before giving instruction regarding the spiritual life.

*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

2 Timothy 4

### **For Further Reading**

Alderson, Richard. *No Holiness, No Heaven! Antinomianism Today*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986.

Belcher, Richard P. *A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy*. Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990.

*Fails to adequately distinguish between Hodges, Ryrie, and Chafer, demonstrating a lack of careful thinking in that regard, but has some helpful summaries of the two major positions (Hodges and MacArthur).*

Bell, William E., Jr. Review of *The Gospel according to Jesus*, by John F. MacArthur, Jr. In *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (Fall 1989): 198-200.

Bing, Charles C. "Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response." Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991.

*This dissertation contains a clear defense of the "Free Grace" position in reaction to MacArthur and other "lordship" advocates. It is clearly argued and contains ample documentation, but Bing seems to misrepresent his opponents on certain issues.*

Blauvelt, Livingston, Jr. "Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (January-March 1986): 37-45.

*Fairly good review of the debate and its critical issues, but quite brief and lacking in balance.*

Bloesch, Donald G. "The Lordship of Christ in Theological History." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (Spring 1991): 26-34.

*Deals primarily with the lordship of Christ in its relationship to human government instead of in relationship to individual conversion.*

Bock, Darrell. "Jesus as Lord in Acts and the Gospel Message." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (April-June 1986): 146-54.

*This article is very helpful in attempting to understand the use of the term "Lord" in the evangelism of the early church. Bock then applies his conclusions to this debate.*

\_\_\_\_\_. "A Review of *The Gospel according to Jesus*." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (January-March 1989): 21-40.

Boice, James Montgomery. *Christ's Call to Discipleship*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

Buis, Harry. Review of *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, by Zane C. Hodges. In *Reformed Review* 44 (Autumn 1990): 71.

Cocoris, G. Michael. "John MacArthur Jr.'s System of Salvation: An Evaluation of the Book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*." Unpublished paper written in 1989.

*Fairly thorough response to MacArthur by one of the individuals who came under attack in *The Gospel According to Jesus*. He discusses specific passages in the gospels and evaluates MacArthur's argument, but unfortunately falls into some of the same patterns of exaggerated and sarcastic rhetoric.*

Davis, John Jefferson. "The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991): 213-228.

- Dillow, Joseph C. "Abiding is Remaining in Fellowship: Another Look at John 15:1:6." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (January-March 1990): 44-53.
- Dillow, Joseph C. *Reign of the Servant Kings*. Miami Springs: Schoettle Publishing, 1992.
- Erickson, Millard J. "Lordship Theology: The Current Controversy." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (Spring 1991): 5-15.  
*What seems to be a concise analysis of the debate comes up short as Erickson fails to distinguish between mediating positions in the debate. For example, he refers to Bock as a representative of the "free grace" position, failing to note Darrell's obvious disagreement with Hodges.*
- Gentry, Kenneth L. "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy." *Baptist Reformation Review* (Spring, 1976): 49-79. [this is reputed to be something of a classic on the topic]
- Gerstner, John H. *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*. Brentwood: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, 1991.
- Hatfield, Stephen G. "The Lordship of Christ: A Biblical Analysis." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (Spring 1991): 16-25.  
*Fairly good linguistic analysis of relevant terms, but rather perplexing in that the stated conclusions of the article do not appear to be derived from it!*
- Hodges, Zane C. *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. Dallas: Redención Viva; Grand Rapids: Zondervan (Academie), 1989.  
*Another one of the central books in the debate. Very clear articulation of Hodges's views.*
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Calvinism Ex Cathedra: A Review of John H. Gerstner's *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*." *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 4 (Autumn, 1991): 59-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works*. Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981. (2nd ed., 1992)  
*One of Hodges's earlier books, but still the focus of considerable attention in this debate. Deals primarily with the question of perseverance.*
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards*. 2nd ed. Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1987.
- Hunt, Boyd. Review of *The Gospel according to Jesus*, by John F. MacArthur, Jr. In *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (Fall 1990): 63-64.
- Johnson, Jr., S. Lewis. "How Faith Works." *Christianity Today* (September 22, 1989): 21-25.
- Kent, Homer. Review of *The Gospel according to Jesus*, by John F. MacArthur, Jr. In *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (Spring 1989): 67-77.
- Lane, Anthony N. S. "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance." *Vox Evangelica* Issue 11 (1979): 32-54.
- Laney, J. Carl. "Abiding is Believing: The Analogy of the Vine in John 15:1-6." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (January-March 1989): 55-66.
- Lewellen, Thomas G. "Has Lordship Salvation Been Taught throughout Church History?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (January-March 1990): 54-68.  
*The title is somewhat misleading, because this article deals with more than just a historical*

survey. In addition, the focus of this article is more on the relationship between works and assurance than on dedication at conversion, so Lewellen continues the confusion that has been evident on both sides between the issue of perseverance and the issue of initial dedication.

MacArthur, John F., Jr.. "Faith According to the Apostle James." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 13-34.  
*This is a pretty good defense of the doctrine of perseverance based on James, but MacArthur evidences his continuing confusion between that doctrine and the degree of dedication required at conversion.*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*. By John F. MacArthur, Jr. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993. 272 pp., \$17.99 (cloth).  
See the review at the end of this bibliography.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Getting the Gospel Right." *Masterpiece* (Fall 1988): 6-9.  
*This little article is very similar to MacArthur's book, evidencing the same strengths and errors in a format that is particularly sarcastic in its treatment of opposing views.*

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan (Academie), 1988.  
*This book is presently the central focus of the lordship debate.*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Saved Without a Doubt: How to be Sure of Your Salvation*. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992.

Miles, Delos. "The Lordship of Christ: Implications for Evangelism." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (Spring 1991): 43-49.  
*This article doesn't deal with the issue that one might expect it to, the methodology of evangelism and its relationship to belief in lordship salvation. Instead, Miles discusses the submission of individuals and structures to the lordship of Christ.*

Morrison, John D. Review of *The Gospel according to Jesus*, by John F. MacArthur, Jr. In *Fundamentalist Journal* 8 (March 1989): 45.

Nettles, Thomas J. Review of *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, by Zane C. Hodges. In *Trinity Journal* 11 (Fall 1990): 242-247.

Packer, J. I. "Understanding the Lordship Controversy." *Table Talk* 15 (May 1991): 213-228.

Paulien, Jon. Review of *The Gospel according to Jesus*, by John F. MacArthur, Jr. In *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 28 (Spring 1990): 98-99.

Peterson, Robert A. "The Perseverance of the Saints: A Theological Exegesis of Four Key New Testament Passages." *Presbyterian Covenant Seminary Review* 17 (Fall 1991): 95-112.

Pickering, Ernest. *Lordship Salvation*. Minneapolis: Central Press, n.d.  
*Concise response to MacArthur in booklet form with some helpful criticisms.*

Radmacher, Earl D. "First Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James' by John F. MacArthur, Jr." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 35-42.  
*This response includes some fairly good criticisms of MacArthur's article, and Radmacher clearly recognizes the greater complexity of the debate better than MacArthur and many participants.*

Rosscup, James E. "A Review and Response to Michael Cocoris's 'John MacArthur, Jr.'s System of Salvation." Unpublished paper written in 1989.

*This paper is interesting in that Rosscup openly disagrees with MacArthur on occasion, but generally defends his system. It includes a fairly detailed analysis of passages from the gospels in response to Cocoris, but is written in a very awkward outline style.*

Ryrie, Charles C. *So Great Salvation: What it Means to Believe in Jesus Christ*. USA: Victor Books, 1989.

*Excellent exposition of one of the mediating positions with Dr. Ryrie's typical clarity of style.*

Saucy, Robert L. "Second Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James' by John F. MacArthur, Jr." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 43-48.

*Very good criticisms of MacArthur with clear understanding of important tensions in the debate.*

Stott, John R. W. and Everett F. Harrison. "Must Christ be Lord to be Savior?" *Eternity* (September 1959): 13-16, 36, 37, 48.

*This is dated, but more focused than many current expressions of the debate.*

Trull, Joe E. "The Lordship of Christ: A Challenge for Ministers." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (Spring 1991): 35-42.

*Helpful challenge in the area of personal ethics, which is frequently ignored in the heat of the debate.*

Wilkin, Robert N. "An Exegetical Evaluation of the Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints." Th. M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1982.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The High Cost of Salvation by Faith-Works: A Critique of John F. MacArthur, Jr.'s *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*." *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 6 (Autumn, 1993): 3-24.

Zuck, Roy B. "When Must the Savior Also Be Lord?" *Moody Monthly* (November 1989): 46-49.  
*Brief review of the three critical books by Hodges, Ryrie, and MacArthur.*

***Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*. By John F. MacArthur, Jr.  
Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993. 272 pp., \$17.99 (cloth).**

In this sequel to *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Zondervan: Academie Books, 1988), John F. MacArthur, Jr. reexamines the "lordship salvation" controversy, this time from the perspective of Acts and the epistles. Those who may have been put off by the tone of the first book will find *Faith Works* to be generally more irenic. Here MacArthur is not issuing a warning to the church as much as he is providing a careful explanation of the warning he has already given. Unlike *The Gospel According to Jesus*, this book answers more questions than it raises.

MacArthur begins with a description of his own position, which he summarizes by saying, "The gospel call to faith presupposes that sinners must repent of their sin and yield to Christ's authority" (p. 23). He articulates the view in a number of specific points and contrasts them to the writings of his chief critics. These introductory summaries are thoroughly documented (unlike the comparative charts in the appendices), but they lack the precision that one might expect in the context of such a heated debate. MacArthur paraphrases his opponents rather than quoting them, and this approach may unintentionally distort some of their positions. For example, he summarizes one aspect of Charles Ryrie's view by saying, "A true Christian can completely cease believing" (p. 27). The critical word here is "completely," yet Ryrie himself does not use it. Since even MacArthur acknowledges that true believers can turn away "almost completely" (p. 191), it



appears as though he may be exaggerating the difference between his position and Ryrie's.

As MacArthur realizes through his own unhappiness with the term, "lordship salvation," labels supplied by one's opponents are not usually fair. Here the practice continues as he reacts to what he calls the "no-lordship" position (represented by Ryrie) and the "radical no-lordship" position (represented by Zane Hodges). While one may not care for the labels, it is encouraging to see through such distinctions that MacArthur recognizes theological diversity among his opponents.

That diversity highlights the fact that MacArthur's own view basically consists of two beliefs. The first is the idea that justification and sanctification are distinct but inseparable. In other words, true believers will bear spiritual fruit as their Christian faith is manifested in a changed (and changing) life. This concept, which contributes to the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, seems readily defensible both biblically and historically. The second component of MacArthur's view is his belief that repentance consists of a wholehearted commitment to the lordship of Christ at the moment of conversion. He answers some opponents by distinguishing between this concept and salvation by works while also defending the idea that repentance involves a change of heart with regard to sin. At the same time, the absolute language employed in his discussions of repentance (particularly in the first book) makes this aspect of "lordship salvation" considerably more difficult to defend than the first. Perhaps because of the absence of support from the apostles, MacArthur retreats to earlier arguments from the gospels when defending the idea of dedication at conversion (p. 204).

Since MacArthur's understanding of "lordship salvation" seems to consist of these two distinct ideas, his opponents may disagree with one or both of them. Hodges disagrees with MacArthur on both points, while others disagree only on the issue of repentance. Ryrie's statement that "unproductive faith cannot save, because it is not genuine faith" causes MacArthur to suggest that he "sounds like an advocate of 'lordship salvation'" (pp. 149-50). Actually, Ryrie is simply affirming the inseparability of justification and sanctification while disagreeing with "lordship" advocates on repentance.

Many readers will be more sympathetic toward this book, which deals primarily with the inseparability of justification and sanctification, than they were to the first book, which focused on the issue of dedication at conversion. The more careful articulation of MacArthur's position is also helpful, particularly as he describes the Christian life. He acknowledges that a true believer may turn away "almost completely" (p. 191), "experience more failure than success" (p. 189), and commit "prolonged and heinous sin" (p. 171), but he expects such an individual to feel remorse and not become *completely* or *permanently* indifferent to spiritual things.

An abidingly difficult question, of course, is determining when one's carnality has become complete. Though he acknowledges that "no individual can judge another's heart" (p. 191), MacArthur appeals to Matthew 18:17 in saying that an individual who rejects the final phase of church discipline is to be regarded as an unbeliever and pursued "evangelistically as if he or she were utterly unsaved" (p. 192). This approach seems to lack balance in light of 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15, where Paul urged the church to not associate with a disobedient member "so that he may be put to shame" but to continue to "admonish him as a brother." Paul's description of such individuals as "so-called brothers" (1 Cor. 5:11) suggests that sinful behavior may cause others within the church to have serious doubts about the legitimacy of one's profession (cf. Tit. 1:16), but such human judgments are always tentative.

The same point may be made with regard to the assurance of one's own salvation. MacArthur calls for a balance between "objective" and "subjective" grounds of assurance (pp. 166-67). He regards the former as "doctrinal" (answering the question, "Do you believe?") and the latter as "moral" (observing the presence of spiritual fruit to answer the question, "Is your faith real?").

This common distinction may be somewhat artificial, but MacArthur seems correct in arguing that assurance is not really complete without both elements. Our present experience of the Spirit provides a secondary measure of assurance and reinforces our confidence. Even so, the apparent lack of fruit cannot provide conclusive evidence of an unregenerate condition, as MacArthur seems to imply (p. 173).

MacArthur adds an appendix explaining the connection between the "lordship" debate and dispensationalism, focusing on Lewis S. Chafer and his theology. He looks appropriately at the distinction between law and grace while recognizing the historical context of Chafer's teaching on repentance, but this provides only a limited explanation of the debate itself. As Chafer reacted against the Oxford Movement and certain aspects of American revivalism, so has MacArthur reacted against Chafer and certain of his followers. As the pendulum continues to swing, might not a mediating position be preferred?

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