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THE REVIEW

A Perfect Man

Vic Perry, Moderator IBFNA

I have enjoyed a song that says, "Something beautiful, something good; all my confusion He understood. All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife, but He made something beautiful of my life."

It seems like life is full of trials and troubles, but there is much we can learn from Job, which illustrates the truth of the above lyrics. Job was "perfect and upright" (Job 1:1), a man who had ten children (Job 1:2), and he was a very rich man. Job, unlike many parents today, was concerned enough for his children to pray continually for them, even during party times they may have had (Job 1:5).

But then there was Satan, whom God allowed to test Job with the requirement to spare Job's life (Job 2:6). Satan attempted everything he could to get Job to curse God (Job 1:11). He took Job's family, his wealth, his health—all in a day, but Job blessed the name of the Lord (Job 2:21), even though Satan attempted to destroy him without cause (Job 2:3). Satan endeavored to make life so difficult for Job that he would turn away from God.

Even Job's wife turned on him and suggested that Job curse God and die (Job 2:9). Some "friends" (probably other wealthy men with whom Job associated for business) eventually came alongside of Job, but they were not any comfort to him. These friends were like politicians, who use Scripture to make themselves sound good, educated persons who think that they have all the answers. Such a "friend" wasn't one. They were "super spiritual friends," who pretended they had the mind of God. These friends wasted their breath and time coming to Job's side.

The question we often face is, "Why does the godly person suffer?" We have all been there, or will be, at one time or another. Interestingly, after the four friends addressed Job, God speaks in Job 38-42, but he doesn't answer why Job went through all he did. Instead, God brought Job back to think about His creation, reminding Job that He sustains His creatures, which may seem good, or at times bad, from their perspective.

In all of Job's loss and suffering, he never lost his trust in the Lord. He answered his friends, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (Job 19:25). And, when we look a little deeper in the



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book of Job, he identifies that “Redeemer”: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: But I will maintain mine own ways before Him. He also is my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before Him” (Job 13:15-16).

We don’t see it in the English, but the Hebrew word *salvation* (vs. 16) is related to the name *Jesus*. Job trusted Jesus! We need to do the same, regardless of whatever God may allow in our lives! We are reminded in 2 Timothy 3:12,

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Often, I have thought on that verse, recently studying it rather than just reading it. It applies to life as Job faced it, and the one we know facing it today. The word *persecution* literally means, “to hunt, to bring someone down as an animal.” That is what Satan is attempting to do today, and sadly, too many are caving in to him rather than standing strong for the Lord like Job did. May there be a host of Job-like people in these days!

What About Repentance?

Pastor Kevin Hobi

I have come across recent news of division among brothers I love over the role of repentance in the conversion miracle of salvation. A brother, whose church has fellowshiped with our Fellowship of churches for generations, has ended that relationship with us. We will miss him at our next conference.

A few years ago, a missionary couple we support severed their relationship with a sister church of ours in the same Fellowship over this same question. Our church still supports those missionaries, and we still enjoy fellowship with this church, but strangely they no longer connect with one another.

For this reason, I would like to focus our readers’ attention on some clarity to be found in the IBFNA statement of faith left for our edification by our founding fathers nearly 35 years ago. Here is what we believe:

We believe that salvation is wholly a work of God, performed from beginning to end by Him, and that unsaved man cannot do anything to save himself, or make himself more acceptable to God in order to merit God's saving him. God therefore commands man to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the means of appropriating salvation. Repentance is a

change of mind toward God prompted by the Holy Spirit and is an integral part of saving faith. (Ecclesiastes 3:14; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:15-16, 18; Acts 15:11, 16:30-31; Romans 3:24-25; I Corinthians 15:1-4; 1 John 5:13).

The statement begins appropriately declaring that conversion is a miracle of salvation. It also helpfully explains that biblical repentance is a change of mind about one’s sinful unbelief. The Bible references a kind of false faith that fails to save (John 8:30-33). The faith that saves always includes a change of mind about one’s unbelief. To believe is to repent of sinful unbelief.

The confusion that divides good brothers still today is traceable to a breach that divided Pastor John MacArthur and Professor Charles Ryrie years ago. The confusion began with Dr. MacArthur’s publication, advocating what came to be known as Lordship salvation and titled, *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Ryrie responded in his work, *So Great Salvation*.

In the article that follows, I offer a review of MacArthur’s book. I will do the same with Ryrie’s book in the *May Review*. My hope is that these insights will help set today’s confusion in its historical context and add needed clarity to our understanding of this inscrutable miracle.

A Review of *The Gospel According to Jesus*

by John MacArthur. Zondervan, 1994. Revised and expanded edition, 302 pages.

Pastor Kevin Hobi

The vast ministry of John MacArthur involved exposure to a wide spectrum of broad evangelicalism. What he saw there often disappointed him. The author describes himself as “apprehensive . . . about the methods and content of contemporary evangelicalism. On a disturbing number of fronts, the message being proclaimed today is not the gospel according to Jesus” (xx).

Specifically, MacArthur charges modern soteriology with a “new gospel,” which he calls “insidious easy-believism” (xxi). According to the author, the dispensational emphases of the 20th century Dallas Seminary theologian, Lewis Chafer, created the problem facing today’s evangelical world (29-33). In response to this unfortunate legacy, the author calls for a return to an emphasis on the lordship of Christ in the gospel message. Quoting a challenger to his own position, MacArthur agrees that lordship salvation is “the view that for salvation a person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to his sovereign authority” (34, see “Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?” by Livingston Baulvelt, Jr., *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1986), 37).

The preface to this revised edition of MacArthur’s advocacy of lordship salvation recognizes that “a major controversy . . . erupted on the evangelical scene with the publication of this book five years ago” (xiv). He also writes in this 1994 edition that the “debate continues to this day.” Unfortunately, that sentence still holds true. That the debate spawned by this book in 1988 rages on in the year 2026 unsettles the reader as he confronts the author’s introductory interpretation of Galatians 1:6-9: “That is a sober

warning of eternal damnation to those who would tamper with the message of salvation and corrupt it to make ‘a different gospel’” (xxii-xxiii). Clearly, the author takes very seriously the assertions he makes in the pages of this book, and the careful reader must do so as well.

The book contains five parts. After the description of the issues at hand in part one, part two takes the reader through eight chapters of expository analysis of the methods of the Savior in regard to gospel preaching. Part three examines key soteriological parables, and then part four looks at the more explicative sections of Jesus’ teaching about the gospel. This section includes a chapter on justification that the first edition did not. Part five is also new to the book. It is a brief chapter emphasizing the finished work of Christ on the cross.

The author’s style contributed to the success of the book. MacArthur wrote with a pastor’s passion endeavoring to correct serious error. Interesting illustration and illuminating insights make the book a valuable commentary on many difficult gospel passages.

The topic at hand, however, calls for a theological precision that seems at times to be missing. The author’s presentation of his opponents’ position is one example of this shortcoming of the book’s style. Whereas MacArthur felt comfortable quoting a challenger’s presentation of his own position as accurate (34), a challenger would have trouble finding the same courtesy in the pages of *The Gospel According to Jesus*. On multiple occasions, the author tries to make his case by what appears to be a misrepresentation of the mainline position of his opponents: “Nevertheless, loud voices from the dispensationalist camp are putting forth the teaching that

it is possible to reject Christ as Lord yet receive him as Savior" (33); "He came to save his people from their sin . . . , not to confer immortality on people in bondage to wickedness" (60); "The modern definition of faith eliminates repentance, erases the moral significance of believing, obviates the work of God in the sinner's heart, and makes an ongoing trust in the Lord optional" (188); "It has become quite popular to teach professing Christians that they can enjoy assurance of salvation no matter what their lives are like" (215). None of those who disagree with MacArthur would state their position this way.

Overstatement is a second stylistic problem with *The Gospel According to Jesus*. On one occasion MacArthur asserts, "Scripture never once exhorts sinners to 'accept Christ'" (113). On the same page, however, he recognizes that a footnote on John 1:12 is necessary. There he claims that "receiving Christ" is to "embrace him and all his claims without reservation." John calls it "believing."

Other important passages on this theme go untreated. The book of John alone contains many passages that speak of the need to "receive" and "accept" the message of Christ (3:11, 33, 5:43, 12:48, 13:20; 14:17; 17:8), as do many other important passages (Luke 18:17, 2 Cor. 6:1, 11:4, 2 Thess. 2:10). Rather than emphasizing an embrace of "all his claims," these passages normally link "believing" with the concept of "receiving."

Overstating the narrowness of the gate to life in Matthew 7:13-14, the author claims, "But Jesus does not seek multitudes; he seeks and saves only those who know they are lost" (208). This comment leaves very little room for the truth of Matthew 9:36-38, where Christ saw the crowds and felt compassion on them, many of whom undoubtedly did not know that they were "distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." He sought the lost, even those who did not know it.

At times, the author utilizes the overstatements of others. Quoting D. Martin Lloyd Jones

in italics, he says, "we must never think of sanctification as a separate and subsequent experience" (212); but to the contrary, MacArthur fails to follow the advice he quotes when he correctly cautions, "First, do not confuse justification with sanctification. Roman Catholic theology makes this error" (197-198).

Spurgeon also contributes the following in keeping with MacArthur's style: "The idea of 'saving faith' apart from good works, is ridiculous" (268). In that passage Spurgeon argues correctly that saving faith saves from sin unto good works, but "the idea of 'saving faith' apart from good works" is clearly not "ridiculous." On the contrary, both Spurgeon and MacArthur would agree that this idea is the crux of the soteriology of the New Testament. What makes Christianity different from any other religion in the world is the fact that "saving faith apart from good works" is absolutely not "ridiculous." What we have here is stylistic overstatement, and the method tends to leave the reader in a fog where clear light is desperately needed.

The author's penchant for overstatement leads to confusing contradictions at key points of his argumentation. One of these, "an important truth to grasp," is the author's definition of saving faith as "an exchange of all that we are for all that Christ is." He then issues a corrective, "We do not buy salvation by surrendering our lives." Two sentences later, however, he directly contradicts this statement by saying, "Everyone who surrenders to Christ gets all Christ has to give in return" (150).

Throughout the book the author feels rightly compelled to concede, "Because we retain the vestiges of sinful flesh, no one will obey perfectly" (190); but these balancing concessions are often followed by a contradictory overstatement, "true faith always produces righteous works" (191). At first glance the second of these statements does not appear to be an overstatement, because fruit is the produce of every believer. But the author needs the statement to say more than this to make his case for lordship

salvation. What the author needs the reader to read when he writes, “true faith always produces righteous works,” is “true faith always produces enough righteous works to distinguish a believer from an unbeliever.” Only this latter assertion allows him to build his case effectively for lordship salvation, but this latter assertion is the one that is impossible to reconcile with the realities of the “vestiges of sinful flesh” in a biblical way.

The Bible would not use the word *always*. There are exceptions to the rule. Some produce 30 fold, some 60, and some 100; and because it is an obvious reality that there are more than three categories of spiritual fruitfulness represented in the lives of believers, it stands to reason that some may produce 95 fold, some 47, some 32, and some perhaps only 5. So even though the author wants to say, “Faith obeys. Unbelief rebels. . . . There is no middle ground,” he must also always admit in a footnote that there actually is plenty of middle ground, “Again, this is not to deny the obvious truth that Christians can and do fall into sin” (194). The effect of this style – overstatement counterbalanced by a contradictory corrective – yields a net lack of precision where theological specifications are too tight to allow it.

A lack of precision creeps into the author’s treatment of important passages. At times, a biased preference for some passages over others is apparent. The Samaritan woman episode and the publican story fail to explicitly support a lordship salvation approach to the gospel, so the author concludes that one passage is “not an appropriate foundation upon which to base an understanding of what constitutes the gospel” (56), and the other is simply a statement of the “fact of justification,” not an explanation of the “theology of it” (197).

In his chapter on repentance, the author argues against the definition of repentance as a change of mind, but he does so with an artificial dichotomy between “mental activity” and “the intellect, emotions, and will” (179). Historically,

when Protestants have viewed repentance as a change of mind, they meant that it was not a change of body, or Romish penance. They meant it was not good works. Any act of the intellect, the emotions, or the will is also an act of the mind.

Confusion of this historic distinction leads to yet another overstatement in the author’s definition of repentance: “a complete surrender of their will and an inevitable change of behavior – a new way of life, not just a different opinion” (181). Repentance is not a new way of life, nor a change in behavior; it is a changing of the mind. A new way of life and new behavior are good works, and they do not save. Repentance is a part of faith that saves, so not works.

In his interpretation of the non-saving faith of James 2, the author under appreciates the inadequacy of the object of non-saving faith (2:19). Instead, he emphasizes that this faith did not save because it has no works (186). Lot’s experience as described by 2 Peter 2:7-9 is given little treatment in the book (274). Certainly, the need for precision demands an explanation for Lot.

The Gospel According to Jesus makes clear that the departure of lordship salvation from biblical soteriology centers on how we are to understand the distinction between justification and sanctification. The author’s discussion of the issue begins well by warning against the Roman Catholic failure to distinguish between the two (197-198). Rome interprets justification in terms of sanctification truth. She makes getting saved a lifelong process of obedience, one that robs the believer of any hope of security in the grace of God.

MacArthur claims that antinomianism has taken this distinction too far, and that the corrective must bring justification and sanctification back together again. Yet the reunion MacArthur calls for cannot be accomplished consistently without winding up back in the error of the Vatican. Repentance becomes changed behavior, and saving faith an embrace of every claim.

On the contrary, the historic corrective to Romish error also protects against antinomianism—faithful maintenance of the biblical distinction between justification and sanctification. Whereas Rome confuses justification in terms of sanctification truth, antinomianism confuses sanctification in terms of justification truth.

For example, the antinomian sees the legalist as one who teaches error about sanctification, whereas the Bible teaches that the legalist is one who teaches error about justification. For decades, New Evangelicalism has accepted the definition of sanctification in terms of justification – no works, no law, no rules, and no standards. The result has been the theological and spiritual landscape so appalling to John MacArthur. Men

are saved apart from works and without the law, but Christians grow neither apart from works nor apart from law.

In spite of its real value as an interpreter of key passages of Scripture and as an important corrective against the real danger of the easy-believism of contemporary evangelism, *The Gospel According to Jesus* fails to maintain faithfully the distinction between justification and sanctification so critical to historic Protestant truth—salvation by faith alone. Its solution for antinomianism is misdirected, and its overemphatic style brings unnecessary blurriness to the historically clear distinction between Protestant soteriology and the bondage of salvation by works.

“Baptist Heritage”

2026 IBFNA Family Conference

June 23-25

Host Church: The Baptist Church of Danbury in Brookfield, CT; Pastor Bob Payne

Register at www.ibfna.org

Conference Speakers: Jeff Bailey, Jeff Briden, James Brown, Kevin Hobi, Jerry Johnson, Ken Lawson, Bob Payne, Vic Perry, and Mark Strangman.

Theme: Sessions will celebrate our Baptist heritage. Three messages will focus on Baptist history, including The Danbury Baptists and Thomas Jefferson, George Whitfield and the Baptists of the Great Awakening, and Isaac Backus and the Baptist pursuit of religious freedom. Other sessions will emphasize our Baptist convictions from studies in the New Testament history book of Acts.

Things to See and Do (within 75 miles of Brookfield):

- New York City, NY. There are all sorts of attractions here. As a suggestion, Staten Island Ferry is free and it comes within close proximity to the Statue of Liberty.
- Mystic, CT. This historic coastal town features the Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic Aquarium and Olde Mistick Village.
- New Haven, CT. Home to Yale University where visitors can tour the historic campus and museums such as Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale Peabody Museum, and the Yale Center for British Art.
- Hartford, CT. The state capital of Connecticut offers several cultural attractions, including The

Mark Twain House and Museum, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the Connecticut Science Center, and the Mark Twain House & Museum.

- East Haddam, CT. At Gillette Castle State Park visitors can explore the unique, picturesque “castle” and the surrounding park grounds overlooking the Connecticut River.
- Essex, CT. Essex Steam Train & Riverboat. Embark on a scenic journey through the Connecticut River Valley on a vintage train and riverboat cruise.
- West Point, NY. Visit the West Point Military Academy and Museum.
- Fanny Crosby Birthplace and Grave Site. Fanny Crosby was born very close to Danbury at 284 Foggintown Road, Brewster, NY 10509. There is a plaque on the outside of the house identifying the house as the birthplace. You cannot tour the house. Her grave site is at Mountain Grove Cemetery in Bridgeport, Connecticut. There is a small unassuming grave stone, and a large monument added later. Buried there is also P.T. Barnum. There is also a statue of Tom Thumb.

Hotel list (organized by lesser to greater distance from the church):

- Quality Inn & Suites Danbury near University. The driving distance is 5 miles from the church. 78 Federal Rd, Danbury, CT 06810. Phone: 203-297-8150.
- Microtel Inn & Suites by Wyndham Bethel/Danbury. The driving distance is 5 miles from the church. 80 Benedict Rd, Bethel, CT 06801. Phone: 203-748-8318.
- Best Western Danbury/Bethel. The driving distance is 5.3 miles from the church. 11 Stony Hill Rd, Bethel, CT 06801. Phone: 203-744-3200.
- La Quinta Inn & Suites by Wyndham Danbury. The driving distance is 5.7 miles from the church. 116 Newtown Rd, Danbury, CT 06810. Phone: 203-798-1200.
- Comfort Inn & Suites Danbury-Bethel. The driving distance is 6 miles from the church. 80 Newtown Road, Danbury, CT 06810. Phone: 203-792-4000.
- Courtyard by Marriott Danbury. The driving distance is 6 miles from the church. 3 Eagle Rd, Danbury, CT 06810. Phone: 203-730-2228.
- Hampton Inn Danbury. The driving distance is 6.3 miles from the church. 81 Newtown Rd, Danbury, CT 06810. Phone: 203-748-6677.
- Ethan Allen Hotel. The driving distance is 11 miles from the church. 21 Lake Ave Ext, Danbury, CT 06811. Phone: 203-744-1776.

Conference Schedule:

Tuesday:
 8 am Registration
 8:30 am Devotions and Prayer
 9:30 am Service
 10:45 am Fellowship Break
 11:15 am Service
 12:00 pm Lunch
 1:30 pm Service
 7:00 pm Service

Wednesday:
 8:30 am Devotions and Prayer
 9:30 am Service
 10:25 am Fellowship Break
 11:15 am Service
 12:15 pm Business Meeting
 1:00 pm Free Time
 7:00 pm Service

Thursday:
 8:30 am Devotions and Prayer
 9:30 am Service
 10:45 am Fellowship Break
 11:15 am Service
 12:00 pm Departure

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