



# IBFNA

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# THE REVIEW

## Preparation

Vic Perry, Moderator IBFNA

Usually, most of us have plans of one sort or another for today, as well as often into the future. We make preparations so that those plans are fulfilled to the best of our ability as much as possible. The best of plans must involve good preparation, if those plans are going to be successful.

Our plans may involve shopping, and we would know where we would like to go to shop, the best place for deals. We would plan on about how much we are willing to pay and whether we have available funds for that shopping. We would make plans to go with someone else or go by ourselves, what time we would go, and other details. Then we would leave for that shopping experience.

If we are going to paint something, proper planning involves making sure we have the color of paint we want, the necessary brushes, clothing, what tools besides the brushes, masking tape, and other things, so that we can do the painting we want to do. We would make sure the object we are going to paint has been properly prepared for painting. We would want to know when and where it is best to do the painting and probably about how long it takes the paint to dry before we can touch what has been painted.

If we are planning to go on a trip, we would determine where we will go, how we will get there, the estimated cost associated with that proposed trip, and whether we can afford such a trip. We would determine the dates we would travel and where we would stay, whether that place is safe, and what we will do on that particular trip. We probably would read up or learn as much as possible about that place. We might determine what activities and events we might be able to take in on that trip. We might have the option to purchase trip insurance. And we probably, if traveling via air, train, or sea, would want to know from where we are to depart, and the hour we would have to be at that point of departure with plenty of time to go on the trip as planned.

We sometimes make our plans so as to be well prepared in advance, but at other times we may have to make our plans at the last minute. In either case, the plans we make, may be fulfilled, or they may not because of emergencies or other reasons beyond our control.



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Scripture has a lot to say about preparations. Some things God ordered, such as preparation for the Sabbath and the gathering of manna (Exod. 16:5), preparation for the offerings (Num. 15:5, 6, 12), preparations for building the altar (Josh. 22:16), and preparation of the heart (1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Chron. 28:18). Ahab was instructed by Elijah to prepare for rain (1 Kings 18:44).

Isaiah prophesied of John the Baptist's ministry to prepare the way of Christ (Isa. 40:3). The Gospels record his prophecy's fulfillment (Matt.

3:3). Amos instructed Israel to "prepare to meet God" (Amos 4:12). But the preparation which should encourage all of us is that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for His own (John 14:1-3).

To make preparations for our upcoming IBFNA family conference, June 23-25, please refer to the insert included in this quarter's *Review*. There you will find information on our location, hotels, local sites of interest, and the schedule of our preaching sessions on the theme, "Baptist Heritage." Hope to see you there.

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## A Review of *So Great Salvation*

by Charles Ryrie. Victor Books, 1989. 166 pages.

Pastor Kevin Hobi

*Editor's note: This review is a sequel to the article, "What About Repentance?" that appeared in the February 2026 issue of the Review. Please see there for a companion book review of John MacArthur's, The Gospel According to Jesus. Note that So Great Salvation was a response to MacArthur's first edition (1988).*

Dr. Ryrie's foray into this soteriological debate positioned him foursquare against the proponents of lordship salvation. The provocation for this work came from Dr. John MacArthur's 1988 edition of *The Gospel According to Jesus*. *So Great Salvation* quotes sparingly from authors, but of the 62 endnotes listed at the end of various chapters, a full third of these reference Dr. MacArthur's noteworthy book. Dr. Ryrie invariably quotes Dr. MacArthur in an unfavorable light.

Yet the forward by Warren Wiersbe is correct when it claims, "Dr. Ryrie writes with humility and compassion. He has not overreacted to what some extremists have written." Wiersbe's "extremists" label in his commendation of Ryrie's evenhandedness ranks ironically as the book's least evenhanded remark. The book is a short one by comparison to MacArthur's (about half the pages with much larger font size), but

the response it communicates is competent, if somewhat less than completely thorough.

Important issues receive treatment. After a quick chapter on the nature of grace, Dr. Ryrie addresses some of the excesses in his opponents' style in the next two chapters entitled, "Semantics Alert" and "Straw Men." He shows in the first of these chapters that it is possible to undervalue the role of semantics in theology. He shows how the excuse, "it's only a matter of semantics," can often be used to cover for "fuzzy thinking and a poor, if not wrong, choice of words" (21). He challenges his readers to a sharper understanding of the meanings of the words of salvation that they might communicate the gospel more effectively.

In so doing, Dr. Ryrie seems refreshingly willing to be conventional rather than innovative and precise rather than shocking. In a very effective way, he exposes the failure of lordship salvation proponents to accurately state the position he supports. In addition to criticizing the overvaluation of tradition and the failure to quote fairly and accurately, Dr. Ryrie rejects the characterization of his position as limiting the gospel to "a sterile set of facts" demanding only "intellectual assent" and as espousing that a

believer may be carnal to the point of never producing any fruit of his salvation (29-30).

In his treatment of the soteriological subject matter, Dr. Ryrie begins with a definition of the gospel that saves from 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. He states directly,

Paul wrote clearly that the Gospel that saves is believing that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. This is the complete Gospel, and if so, then it is also the true full Gospel and the true whole Gospel. Nothing else is needed for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life (40).

Paul's description of the gospel contrasts the approach of those to whom Dr. Ryrie is responding. The author relies on his dispensationalism to answer the primary theme of his opponents' advocacy of lordship salvation as "the gospel according to Jesus." He asserts that the gospel of the kingdom in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which was preached by John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, must be interpreted in terms of the "concept and hope of the kingdom which the Jewish people had at the time of the first coming of Christ" (38).

Specifically, because these Jews believed that Messiah would come and establish a geopolitical kingdom, this must be what Jesus and John meant by *the gospel of the kingdom*. That gospel never came true and its kingdom was never established because the people flatly rejected these offerings.

With this brief paragraph, Dr. Ryrie hopes to dismiss the voluminous chapters of Dr. MacArthur's soteriological interpretations of Gospel narratives. The approach is immediately called into question, however, when one remembers that John the Baptist's gospel of the kingdom included the directive, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

Irrefutably, any complete answer to the lordship salvation position must account for the

gospel message in the books of the Bible we call the Gospels. To merely dismiss the gospel as it proceeded from the lips of Jesus Christ as inapplicable is to fall sadly short of completing the task at hand. Only one chapter in the book, a quick six-page discussion of the rich young ruler, deals with any of the soteriological content of the Gospels.

Further discrediting the adequacy of dispensational presuppositions in this context, Dr. Ryrie violates his own interpretive principles by appealing to John's emphasis on faith in a brief discussion about Nicodemus (97-98). Here the geopolitical expectations of Nicodemus do not somehow preclude Christ's preaching to him the gospel of faith alone.

In summary, the book's neglect of a thorough treatment of the soteriological import of the Gospels in favor of a dispensational schema constitutes the chief failure of *So Great Salvation* to provide an answer to *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

But even with this severe limitation in mind, the contributions of Dr. Ryrie's theological acumen bring great light to the overall debate. That 1 Corinthians 15 emphasizes the content of faith rather than the nature of faith is undeniable, and this is where the author begins. Under the heading, "The Direction of the Gospel," Ryrie emphasizes that when one comes to Christ for salvation, he must come with the understanding that there is nothing that he can do about his sin. "In salvation, I am always the recipient, the donee, never the donor. If I try to donate anything with respect to becoming a Christian, then I have added a work, and salvation is no longer solely and purely of grace" (41).

Precision is the mark of a good theologian, and that quality characterizes Ryrie's treatment of fruit-bearing in the Christian life. In contrast to his opponent's caricature of his position, Dr. Ryrie agrees, "Every Christian will bear some fruit" (45). But to this general principle, the theologian in Ryrie adds three caveats. The

statement does not require that every believer is always fruitful, nor that what fruit exists is always outwardly evident, or that an observer's definition of fruitfulness necessarily agrees with God's definition of fruitfulness.

Noting that the advocates of lordship salvation never assert perfectionism, the author asks a question they cannot answer, namely, what "relative amount or degree of disobedience in the Christian life . . . can be tolerated without doubting the original reception of salvation" (48)? Over and over Ryrie presents biblical evidence that supports the toleration of a good deal of disobedience in the true Christian's life. He cites the carnal "babes in Christ" of Corinth (60-61), the potential for Christians to suffer as murderers, etc. (1 Pet. 4:15; 64), the reminder of James that we all stumble in many ways (Jam. 3:2; 65), the vexed but righteous soul of Lot (2 Pet. 2:7; 111), the objection of Peter on the rooftop, "Not so Lord" (Acts 10:14; 73), and the believers in Ephesus who still preferred magic arts after their salvation experience (Acts 19:18-20; 111-112).

Ryrie's chapter on the meaning of "Jesus as Lord" offers many insights. He notes Everett Harrison's distinction between "objective lordship" and "subjective lordship":

The former labels Christ by virtue of who He is, and is true whether or not anyone ever acknowledges it. The latter relates to that lordship or master relation Christ may have to the believer, and is true only when someone acknowledges it to be so for him or her" (71-72).

Confessing Jesus as Lord, then, must be understood in an objective way when it comes to salvation. Because He must be the changeless object of saving faith in order to save, believers must recognize Him, as He is—objectively, "the Lord." At issue is not what believers personally make Him become to them—subjectively, "their Lord." What we make him become to us can vacillate and fail; who He actually is apart from us never will. Who He is provides adequately for the sure foundation of faith; what we make Him simply cannot.

In his chapter on repentance, the author correctly emphasizes that the meaning of the word is a changing of the mind. But he seems to take his case too far by asserting that repentance is essentially indistinguishable from faith. While it may be true that it is inseparable, such that we may preach one without the other, this does not necessarily mean that they are indistinguishable. Ryrie narrowly insists that saving repentance only involves a change of mind about Christ, rather than a change of mind about oneself or one's sin (94-95).

This interpretation of repentance, however, fails to agree with the important contrast between the Pharisee and the publican of Luke 18. More accurately understood, a change of mind about Christ must always involve a change of mind about self. We must see ourselves as sinners in need of the propitiation of God's wrath that Jesus died to provide. This is repentance, the sense of our need for the sinner's prayer, and the utterance of that prayer is faith's inevitable sequel—the repentance from sinful unbelief.

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## Paul's Gospel Ministry in the Synagogue

Pastor Kevin Hobi

As gospel preachers, we all enjoy those Sunday days when we see a new face in the congregation, whom we do not know, and who we believe may be there to hear the gospel of Christ for the very first time. It is a privilege and joy to preach God's Word Sunday after Sunday to the flock of

God we know, but there is something special about seeing someone who may have not yet believed seated there to listen to the good news. To be given the opportunity to preach to an entire congregation of people like that only multiplies the excitement. That is a great opportunity.

A young preacher, whom I love dearly, has told me about his plans to preach the gospel at a local apostate UCC church (United Churches of Christ), which is without a pastor. I sense in him this excitement over this opportunity. The church flies the rainbow flag and has had recent experience with a lesbian pastor. Possessing separatist convictions, I had no choice but to express my concern and offer my unsolicited counsel.

As I tried to dissuade my brother from his plan, he answered back that he viewed this opportunity for ministry as parallel to Paul's practice of preaching the gospel in the first-century Jewish synagogue. I do not think the parallel holds, and I would like to use this article to explain why. First, I will note some facts about those first-century synagogues, where Jesus worshipped and Paul preached. Then I will address the question at hand. For further reading on the topic, see Alfred Edersheim's *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (1876), chapters 16 and 17, which discuss the origin, structure, physical arrangements, and public worship of the first-century Jewish synagogue.

### Origin of the Synagogue

Edersheim explains that the origin of the synagogue "is lost in the obscurity of tradition" (230). He notes that the discovery of the book of the law in the temple during the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8) indicates that the Old Testament was not widely available to the Jewish people of his day. Because the purpose of the synagogue was to teach people the Old Testament, this fact of Jewish history means that synagogues did not exist in the days of Josiah.

After the Babylonian Captivity, however, with its destruction of the Jerusalem temple, there arose a necessity for a ministry like the

synagogue among the deported Jews. It may be then that the institution originated. Edersheim points out that Ezra's public reading of the Law in Neh. 8:2-3 gave precedent to the practice of the synagogues (231). Perhaps that address inspired the first synagogues among the Jewish people as they returned to the land of their fathers. Faced later with the Syrian persecution during the times of the Maccabees, the synagogue would have been a critical source of strength and hope for the suffering Jewish people.

### Similarities to the NT Local Church

The word *synagogue* comes from two Greek words meaning *to lead together*. Similar to a local church, a synagogue is simply an assembly of people who have been led together. James, the pastor of the Jerusalem Church, refers to local church assemblies as synagogues in James 2:2, "For if there come unto your assembly . . ." The word translated *assembly* is the Greek word for *synagogue*. There are some similarities between first-century synagogues and the New Testament local church.

Like many of our local church buildings, Jewish synagogue construction aimed for visibility. Often, the highest ground in a community served as the sacred construction site. Alternatively, a plot near the city gate or on a busy street corner offered a suitable location. Jesus seems to have known of such synagogue locations when He warned, "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men" (Matt. 6:5).

If neither of these optimal options were available, a high pole stretched from the roof of the synagogue beyond other buildings, marking its location for all to see. The pole pointed heavenward, much like our local church steeples do today. In some smaller towns, the synagogue met in a portion of a private home set apart for this purpose. Early local churches also met in private homes (Acts 2:46, 5:42; Rom. 16:3, 5; Philem. 2).

There were rules of decorum for worship in the synagogue. The meetings called for orderly, quiet, and reverent demeanor. Paul encourages the same in the local church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 14). With what Edersheim calls “almost wearisome details and distinctions,” Jewish authorities set standards for proper dress and cleanliness at the synagogue (238). James, however, warns against ostentation in this regard: “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons” (James 2:1).

The synagogue was for teaching the Word of God. Edersheim explains, “There was no service of ‘praise’ in the synagogues” (245). The institution shared the goal of every good local church that still adheres to her Protestant heritage, expressed by Martin Luther: “a Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God’s Word and prayer” (Ryan Martin, “Luther on the centrality of the Word in worship”; [religiousaffections.org](http://religiousaffections.org)). Jesus preached the Word in the synagogues (Matt. 4:23, Mark 1:21, 6:2; Luke 4:15, 6:6, 13:10; John 6:59; 18:20). It is what He wants us to do in our local churches.

The synagogue’s structural design anticipated the public reading and preaching of God’s Word. Each had a raised platform with a pulpit in its center, at which the worship leader would stand and read the Scripture. Afterwards, he would sit and preach from an accompanying chair. Behind the pulpit sat the ark, a chest containing the sacred scrolls of the Scriptures. The congregation sat facing the ark, but the rulers of the synagogue sat on the platform with their backs to the ark facing the people. These were seats of honor among the Jews, and Jesus found in them many a prideful occupant. He said Pharisees loved “the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues” (Matt. 23:6). James warned against this pride (James 2:3).

On the whole, the synagogue of the first century was biblically orthodox in their faith and practice, but tragically mistaken in their rejection

of Jesus Christ, their Messiah. Edersheim concludes, “there was nothing in the worship itself of the synagogue which could have prevented either the Lord, or His apostles and early followers, from attending it till the time of final separation had come” (244).

#### Differences with the NT Local Church

It was the Jewish synagogue that ultimately demanded “the final separation” about which Edersheim writes. During Jesus’s public ministry in Judea, authorities determined that any who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue (John 9:22). On the whole, the synagogues of the Greek world never responded well to Paul’s preaching of the gospel, although some who heard him were gloriously saved. That Jesus Himself is the center of our worship as local churches is the key difference between them and the first-century Jewish synagogue.

Other differences between our local churches and the synagogue are important. The synagogue was an institution of civil authority among the Jewish people, like courts, kings, and governors (Mark 13:9). As Baptists, we understand the separation of church and state (Matt. 20:25-26). Our local churches possess spiritual authority, not civil authority. Synagogue attendance had to exceed ten for the service to proceed, whereas Jesus assures His local churches, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

Although synagogues would typically welcome Gentile visitors, their membership had to submit to circumcision. Paul emphasized that local church membership is to be comprised of the truly saved, both circumcised and uncircumcised (Gal. 6:15). Following the norms of first century Eastern culture, synagogues included separate meeting rooms for men and women, who worshipped apart. In contrast, both male and female members of local churches worship together (Gal. 3:28).

## The Question at Hand

So, what does all of this mean for my brother's assertion that it is ok to preach the gospel in an apostate UCC church, because Paul preached the gospel in Jewish synagogues? For the following reasons, I believe that conclusion is misguided and potentially a harmful mistake.

1. When Paul visited a synagogue for a gospel opportunity, he did so in a time of transition for the people of God, from synagogue to the local church. The claim to follow his example into an apostate church today is anachronistic at best. Because Edersheim's "time of final separation" has come, no Jewish synagogue today welcomes teachers of New Testament truth into their worship services any longer.

Even in Paul's ministry, separation from the synagogue came quickly, although Paul initially sought and found an evangelistic opportunity there. After this final separation, Paul taught clearly the Bible doctrine of ecclesiastical separation (2 Corinthians 6, 11). I do not believe he would have supported Corinthian pastors fellowshiping and worshipping with Jewish synagogues in Corinth in pursuit of gospel opportunity, especially if they were found to be donning rainbow flags.

2. Jesus later warns His churches against the synagogues of Satan (Rev. 2:9). The warning clearly precludes joining their services to preach the gospel. At minimum, there must have been some synagogues, the worst of them, where pastors of Jesus's local churches were not to be found ministering. This warning against false synagogues applies to false local churches today.

3. Paul treated the synagogical demand of circumcision as a touchstone of separation. The influence of the synagogue on the local churches of Galatia in this significant area troubled Paul deeply because it was a corruption of the true gospel. He called the position "another gospel," and he demanded that faithful believers let those holding the position "be accursed" (Gal. 1:8-9).

If the circumcision controversy required this obedient separation in Paul's day, other false gospels in the UCC, such as pluralistic universalism and the denial of the efficacy and necessity of the atonement of Christ, require the same response today.

4. Biblically, a better analogy for the question at hand is Paul's relationship to the pagan temples of the first-century world. Paul never entered a pagan temple with his gospel message the way that he entered a Jewish synagogue. Instead, he even counselled believers to avoid meat sacrificed to idols in those temples for the sake of our testimony as a brotherhood who flees idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14). Surely, in the same way, Paul would be concerned about the testimony of a brother who is willing to preach in a pagan false local church today.

The desire to reach souls in false churches is a noble desire. At times, apostate works have been recovered by orthodox pastors. Still more noble, however, is the commitment to faithfully obey the commands of Scripture. Forbidden is fellowship, communion, concord, sharing, and agreement between a true preacher and a false church (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

Setting aside the more noble cause of ministry obedience for ministry opportunity is not a new ministry philosophy, although it once claimed the label "New." The lessons of the failed New Evangelical experiment have taught us that revival must come through obedience to the Lord, not from our compromises for the Lord (See Roland McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism*, 2004).

Let's obey. Let's touch not the unclean thing and trust the Lord's promise: "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters" (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

May this ever be our word from the Lord Almighty to each of our sons and daughters in the faith who is willing to listen. And having listened, may he pass the same truth to their sons and daughters someday.

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