

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### *The Gospel According to Jesus*

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*The Gospel According to Jesus*, by John F. MacArthur, Jr. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988. Pp. 253. \$14.95. Cloth.

The author of *The Gospel According to Jesus* is the pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California, and is nationally known through his daily radio program "Grace to You," and through his writing and Bible conference ministry. He is also the President of The Master's College and Seminary. His dynamic style and clear exposition of Scripture have won for him a national radio following. The forceful and penetrating style of his preaching leaves one in no doubt about where he stands on any issue he discusses, and this characteristic carries over into his writing as well.

MacArthur's topic--What is the gospel?—is a crucial one; therefore, any serious discussion of it is almost certain to create controversy. Ever since those early days in the church at Antioch, Christians have been deeply concerned about exactly what is required in order for a person to be saved (Acts 15:1-2). Because the issue strikes at the very heart of the Christian faith, it is emotionally provocative as well as intellectually challenging.

Since it became known to what was thought to be a very limited group that this reviewer would be writing this article, he has received phone calls, letters, written materials, and many questions, some coming from persons who wanted his opinion without reading the book themselves. At a recent Bible conference when one session was devoted to an open forum where the audience could question the speakers, the first question had to do with MacArthur's book, even though it was not directly related to the theme of the conference.

Inasmuch as most Christians would agree that the gospel has to do with the good news about the Person and the redemptive Work of Jesus Christ which sinners are called upon to believe, perhaps it would help to state the issue this way: What does it mean to *believe* the gospel? Here is where devout Christians begin to differ, and even strongly-Bible-centered believers choose opposite sides and start to label one another. Such descriptions as "Lordship Salvation" and "Easy-Believism" are bandied about, names which seem apt to the users but are usually regarded as inadequate or misleading labels by those to whom they are applied.

MacArthur does not shrink from confrontation. He names persons with whose writings he disagrees. He is careful to acknowledge his admiration and respect for many of these persons, and he does not discount all of their writings by any means, but he does cite clearly those statements in their writings with which he disagrees. To his credit he relegates much of this to footnotes, and always (or almost always) quotes their statements with documentation. His spirit is forthright, but not unkind. It is frank discussion. The most frequent objects of his criticism are Zane Hodges and Charles Ryrie (both former professors at Dallas Theological Seminary), but others are mentioned as well.

In the Preface the author acknowledges the potential objections he will incur. When he insists upon repentance as being involved in saving faith, he expects some to accuse him of teaching salvation by works. He states very clearly that no pre-salvation works of righteousness are necessary to or a part of salvation. "But I do believe without apology that real salvation cannot and will not fail to produce works of righteousness in the life of a true believer" (p. xiii). MacArthur expects to be accused of questioning the salvation of any convert who does not understand Christ's Lordship. He denies this to be his position, but he does state, "I am, however, equally certain that no one can be saved who is either unwilling to obey Christ or consciously rebellious against the lordship of Christ" (p. xiv). He readily recognizes that a newborn Christian does not see all the implications of his faith at the beginning, and certainly could not be expected to enunciate many of these matters in theological language. Nevertheless the fact remains that a Christian has a changed heart and has become a follower of Christ. With such understanding, this reviewer must heartily agree. Anything less is sub-Christian.

An important factor is discussed in the Introduction when the point is made that there is such a thing as false profession of faith. Here and throughout the book, the author stresses the fact that a simple profession of the facts about Christ's death and resurrection might be enough to qualify someone for acceptance into a local church, but that alone is not enough to guarantee that regeneration has occurred. The same circumstance can be found in the apostolic churches as reflected in the New Testament epistles. Numerous warning passages are contained in the New Testament writings, even though all of them to the best of our knowledge were written to Christians. This reviewer has often found this phenomenon to be a point of confusion to beginning students in his classes. How could the warnings be as dire as they seem if the readers were Christians? This is often followed by attempts to dilute the warnings or otherwise explain them away. The point to be remembered is that each New Testament epistle written to a local church was written to a group of people who had formed that church on the basis of their profession of faith. While the apostles or other founders would doubtless have assumed that each profession at the outset was genuine (just as we do today), the passing of time revealed that such was not always the case (1 John 2:19). MacArthur concludes that when the only criterion for salvation is knowing and believing some basic facts about Christ and that obedience is optional, then a person's one-time profession of faith becomes more valid

than the ongoing testimony of his life-style for determining whether he is a true believer (p. 17). He, of course, denies that this is so.

Part One is devoted to a discussion of the issues. The more extreme views of some dispensationalists are described as they touch upon the issue at hand. He quotes from Hodges (*The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 14) who says that conversion to Christ involves "no spiritual commitment whatsoever." He cites Ryrie (*Balancing the Christian Life*, pp. 169-70) as supporting the position that salvation does not obligate the believer to change his life-style, make any commitment, or even have a willingness to yield to Christ's lordship. To be fair, the point Ryrie makes is that to add such requirements to the receiving of salvation makes it something less than a gift of God's pure grace. Nevertheless, Ryrie does not seem to view commitment as an integral part of faith, and for this MacArthur rightly objects to the misleading statements.

Another point of discussion is the terminology "carnal Christian." Although the expression seems uncomplicated—after all, Scripture does call some Christians "carnal" (1 Cor 3:3)—some interpreters have handled it in a different way than the rest. Instead of seeing it as a description of Christians who for a time were acting in carnal ways, some have virtually implied a separate state of the spiritual life. This idea can be extended to fit the concepts of the "second blessing," "deeper life," or "victorious life" emphasis which also assume a separate plane of existence for some Christians. The converse of this is that the "carnal Christian" state is also a legitimate condition of true believers (although not as admirable as the "spiritual" plane), and that unbroken carnality is no reason for questioning the validity of one's regenerative experience. The author points out that some are proposing that "the norm for salvation is to accept Jesus as Savior without yielding to Him as Lord. They make the incredible claim that any other teaching amounts to a false gospel 'because it subtly adds works to the clear and simple condition set forth in the word of God'" (pp. 27-28).

What MacArthur calls "the two clearest statements on the way of salvation in all of Scripture" emphasize the lordship of Jesus. He cites Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved," and Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." These references certainly seem to support his contention that anything less than a belief in Jesus as one's Lord does not fulfill the Biblical instruction. To argue, as some apparently do, that "Lord" here simply means "God" might be granted without changing the force of the statement. After all, for a believer to trust Jesus Christ as God surely implies also an acknowledgment of his responsibility to his God.

In Part Two MacArthur discusses how Jesus heralded His gospel. A number of incidents are selected from the ministry of Christ in which He confronted a variety of individuals and dealt with their spiritual needs. The author is particularly concerned in this section to show that Christ's approach was not that "putrefying inclusivism that in effect sees almost any kind of positive response to Jesus as tantamount to saving faith" (p. 37). Rather,

Jesus rejected shallow response and always went to deeper issues. MacArthur is clearly distressed by the modern tendency to treat as authentic faith the widest kind of responding to Christ as long as the right formulas are recited.

The case of Nicodemus is the earliest of Christ's one-on-one evangelistic encounters recorded in the gospels, and is chosen by the author as his first illustration in this section. This occurs in John's Gospel immediately after the reference to those who "believed in His name" in Jerusalem but Jesus did not believe in them (John 2:23-25). Obviously not all belief was saving faith as far as Jesus' understanding was concerned, for His knowledge of their hearts caused Him to withhold full acceptance of them. Whether Nicodemus was one of those referred to in 2:23 cannot be ascertained, but the point in the context has been made. Not all faith is saving faith. Jesus therefore dealt with Nicodemus as a man who needed to be born again. As the Israelites of old whose sin had caused them to face the judgment of God in the attack of fiery serpents, Nicodemus also needed to recognize his sinfulness and turn in faith to the Divinely-given Sinbearer (Num 21:6-9; John 3:14-16). The One to whom Nicodemus must look was God's unique Son, and the implications in that statement are profound. Surely more is involved than just believing in the historical facts about Jesus. It is difficult to see how a changed attitude toward sin (i.e., repentance) can be excluded from this saving look, in the light of vv. 20-21. A few verses later, obeying the Son is shown to be implicit in the concept (v. 36).

Another chapter is devoted to the encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well (John 4). In our Lord's invitation to the woman to "drink of the water that I shall give" (4:14), MacArthur raises the question whether "drink" means appropriation apart from commitment (p. 52ff.). His answer is that the factor of commitment is always present in true faith, and that Jesus' offer of living water as a gift to the woman in no way removes that element. The context surely supports this understanding. The woman was confronted in a natural but direct way about the sin in her life. When she quickly drew the conclusion that He was a prophet, she tried to divert the conversation to a traditional religious controversy. Jesus, however, dismissed that diversion with one statement and then drew her back to the vital issue: God, and her relationship to Him. Only then did He reveal Himself to her as the prophesied Messiah (v. 26) and the Giver of living water (v. 10). Evidence of her changed life was immediate. She at once began to point others to the Messiah she had met, doing so in a delicate way that would arouse curiosity rather than produce almost certain rejection if such a woman had tried to tell the village men who Jesus was (4:28-29, 39).

In discussing Christ's confrontation with Matthew, MacArthur indulges in a bit of extravagant language to paint his word picture of the event, perhaps revealing his rhetorical skills more than total dependence upon the text. For instance, he describes Matthew the publican as "unequivocally the vilest, most wretched sinner in Capernaum" (p. 62). Of the banquet Matthew gave in order to introduce his friends to Jesus, he says, "This gathering was attended by some of the most notorious, base, villainous people in the history of banquets" (p. 63). While not trying to excuse the sinfulness of Matthew and his friends, this reviewer considers those descriptions somewhat stronger

than the Biblical passage itself requires. Of course, this has no real bearing on the issue being discussed.

What is important to note, however, is that Jesus explained to the group that His presence among those who were openly regarded as sinners by the general populace was not an oversight on His part but was at the heart of His purpose. "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Focusing on sinners and confronting them with the solution to their guilt and enslavement was the reason why Jesus came. A call to repentance was the first recorded message Jesus ever gave (Matt 4:17). It followed upon a similar proclamation by John the Baptist, and was the basis for the message which the apostles preached (Acts 3:19; 26:20). MacArthur states it this way: "No one who neglects to call sinners to repentance is preaching the gospel according to Jesus" (p. 66).

One of the chapters in this section is devoted to the rich young ruler and his meeting with Jesus (Matt 19:16-26; Luke 18:18-30). This eager young man apparently had led an exemplary life. At least Jesus did not challenge his claim directly. Furthermore he had an expressed interest in obtaining eternal life. When he asked Jesus, "What good thing shall I do . . . ?," our Lord did not chide him for expressing it in terms of *doing*, as though he must have been thinking in terms of works to be done to acquire righteousness. All of his traditional upbringing would have led him to think this way. However, he may have meant no more than those who asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28); to which Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (v. 29).

But then Jesus proceeded to tell the rich young ruler that he must sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and follow Him. He did not mean that charitable giving is the means to salvation. He was dealing with that specific person and was addressing his particular need (Christ did not approach others this way). What he was asking was for this man's total allegiance. Mere eagerness and enthusiasm was not enough. A submission to Christ was the requirement. To this reviewer, this assessment seems correct. Christ could have asked this man to accept a few facts about Jesus (admittedly at that time before Calvary, the precise formula would have been somewhat anticipatory) and then pronounced him "saved" if that were all that was involved. On the contrary, Jesus showed himself to be uninterested in superficial faith.

MacArthur's summarizing statement clarifies his point and guards against misinterpretation of his discussion. "I do not believe, and have never taught, that a person coming to Christ must understand fully all the implications of sin, repentance, or the lordship of Christ. Even after growing in his understanding for years as a Christian, he will not know all of these in their full depth. But there must be a *willingness* to obey. Furthermore, repentance and submission are no more human works than faith itself. They are every bit the work of God—not elements added to faith, but essential aspects of God's work of faith in a human heart" (p. 88).

Additional instances, such as that of Zacchaeus and Judas, are discussed to demonstrate that saving faith is clearly not mere profession but has a changed life as part and parcel of the genuine experience. Zacchaeus and Judas are contrasting instances of this truth.

Chapter 9, "He Offers a Yoke of Rest," is devoted to a discussion of Matt 11:25-30. The opening paragraphs are certain to capture one's attention, particularly if he has grown up in evangelical circles and has absorbed the vocabulary and clichés that are so common among these groups. The author reminds us that Scripture "never once exhorts sinners to 'accept Christ'" (p. 106). He further points out that popular evangelistic terminology such as "make a decision for Christ," "ask Jesus into your heart," "try Jesus," and "accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior" is not Biblical language either. He may be a bit strong when he says it "violates both the spirit and the terminology of the Biblical summons to unbelievers," but he endeavors to explain his point. He declares that the gospel invitation is not an entreaty for sinners to allow Jesus into their lives, but an appeal to repent and follow Him. "It demands not just passive acceptance of Christ but active submission to Him as well. Those unwilling to surrender to Christ cannot recruit Him to be part of a crowded life" (p. 106).

In his treatment of Matt 11:25-30, the author isolates what he calls five essential elements of genuine conversion. They are so inextricably linked, he asserts, that not one of them can be eliminated from the biblical concept of saving faith. These elements are humility (11:25), revelation (11:27), repentance (11:28), faith (v. 28), and submission (v. 29). He concludes by arguing that "Take my yoke upon you" argues against the notion that one can take Jesus as Savior but not as Lord (p. 113).

Part Three discusses the way in which Jesus illustrates His message by analyzing selected parables from our Lord's teaching. The author fully acknowledges that parables cannot be pressed beyond reasonable bounds in view of their symbolic character (p. 136). Nevertheless he makes every effort to explain them in their immediate and larger contexts so as to find their essential message.

Beginning with the parables of Matthew 13, the author interprets them as illustrative of the kingdom of heaven (as Jesus himself indicated, Matt 13:11). He further explains the kingdom of heaven as God's rule over the earth and in the hearts of men, although it "exists now in mystery form. Christ does not now exercise His full divine will as King over all the earth, though He is ultimately sovereign. He rules as King only among those who believe" (p. 118). MacArthur explains that this aspect of God's kingdom was a mystery to those who were looking only for a political monarchy. He explains further in a footnote his understanding that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are not separate entities but are interchangeable expressions, as clearly demonstrated by the parallel passages in Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10.

The parable of the sower and the soils is explained graphically with much application as depicting the varying response which the gospel encounters when it is proclaimed. He concludes that the only circumstance which receives Christ's approval is depicted by the good soil which produced fruit. Thus the good soil pictures the believer; the others depict pretenders or absolute rejecters. "Fruit-bearing is the whole point of agriculture. It is also the ultimate test of salvation. Jesus said, 'Every good tree bears good fruit; but the rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and

thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits' (Matt 7:17-20). . . . Fruit, not foliage, is the mark of true salvation" (p. 126).

Although some interpreters continue to make allowance for genuine belief in the cases of the seed on the rocky ledge and in the thorny soil, the view espoused in this book is certainly more obvious from the Biblical text. Only one kind of hearer received Christ's commendation in this parable. It is doubtful whether any other explanation would be suggested if one were not being protective of another agenda. It is, of course, clearly indicated in the parable that not all of the seed in the good soil was equally productive, and it goes without saying that fruitfulness does not occur immediately in the agricultural world of this parable. Nevertheless this parable does explain that everyone in the "good soil" category is fruitful to some extent.

In his discussion of the parables of the hid treasure and the pearl the author interprets them as picturing believers who make a complete commitment of all that they have in order to obtain the kingdom of heaven. This explanation surely fits well with the thesis MacArthur is proposing, and this reviewer finds no objection to the truth being thus elicited. Other teachings of Jesus make it clear that halfhearted response is not good enough.

Another view of these parables is held by some interpreters. They explain the man who finds the treasure and the merchant who buys the pearl as Christ who gave all that He had to acquire believers. Inasmuch as Christ is the leading man in the other parables of the series (the sower, the tares), a certain consistency is thus maintained. One of MacArthur's reasons for rejecting this view, although he does so graciously, is his assertion that sinners could hardly be called a hidden treasure, for they are useless debris until after Christ has redeemed them. From one standpoint this is certainly true. However, it must not be forgotten that man was the crown of God's creation and even fallen man still bears to some extent the divine image (Ps 8:3-8). If one holds this view of these two parables, their use as corroboration for MacArthur's thesis would not be applicable.

To conclude this section the author discusses the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, the thief on the cross, and the parables of the hundred sheep, the ten coins, and the two sons. Several of these do not bear directly on the subject of submission to Christ's Lordship, but they do pertain to the message Christ proclaimed. MacArthur explains the parable of the prodigal son as an illustration of the fact that acknowledgment of sin and repentance of it preceded the son's receiving of his father's forgiveness and entrance into his joy. He argues that the elder brother was no less lost than was the prodigal, but he did not recognize it. In view of the fact that this parable, along with the others in the series, was addressed to an audience composed largely of hostile Pharisees and scribes (Luke 15:1-3), it seems appropriate to explain the elder brother in some such fashion. Even though he too was lost, the father in the parable sought him as well (Luke 15:28).

Part Four, the final main section of the book before the appendixes, concerns the doctrinal content of Christ's message. The key concepts bearing upon the topic of this book are selected for treatment in separate chapters.

In the first chapter of this section, MacArthur discusses repentance and its relationship to the topic at hand. He deplores the present tendency to avoid speaking of repentance from sin when the gospel is presented to

unbelievers. He further criticizes the teaching of some with whom this avoidance is no oversight. This is not a recent problem. For many years there have been in the evangelical camp strong advocates of the view that repentance is a human responsibility which is too often erroneously added to faith or belief. He quotes L. S. Chafer who wrote that the New Testament did not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation (pp. 160-61).

This is a crucial matter for this issue. Is repentance a separate act of man which is an additional requirement for salvation? Is it prior to faith or a result of faith? Or is it an integral part of saving faith? Some who criticize MacArthur for adding this "work" to salvation have not carefully considered what he actually says. He comments, "Above all, repentance is *not* a pre-salvation attempt to set one's life in order. The call to repentance is not a command to make sin right *before* turning to Christ in faith. Rather it is a command to recognize one's lawlessness and hate it, to turn one's back on it and flee to Christ, embracing Him with wholehearted devotion" (p. 163).

What is repentance? Etymologically it means a change of mind. However, in the contexts in which Jesus used it with reference to man's response to God, He meant far more than just a superficial change of opinion. He was talking about a person's attitude, his mindset, his way of thinking about God and His righteous demands. This kind of repentance will usually be accompanied by sorrow for sin, but whether or not there are tears of remorse is not the vital issue. It is the change in attitude that is the significant factor.

Repentance is very closely tied, therefore, to faith and conversion. Numerous times these terms are used together. When this happens, repentance is always put first (Matt 21:32; Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19; 20:21; Heb 6:1). They are not, however, three separate acts of the soul, or three steps to salvation. They are three aspects of one act of the soul whereby the believer responds positively to the offer of Christ in the gospel. It is for this reason that the Bible does not always use all three terms to describe persons who receive salvation. On one occasion Peter invited his hearers to "repent and be converted" in order to have sins forgiven and salvation obtained (Acts 3:19). He did not mention faith at all, but he didn't need to because that was understood as implicit in the invitation. To separate repentance from faith and make it either optional or a subsequent act of believers is contrary to the teaching and practice of Christ and of the apostles whom He commissioned. Jesus said in His commission to them, "Repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Paul preached, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). He wrote the same thing, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom 2:4). Peter wrote similarly: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Surely repentance here is regarded as an alternative word for salvation, interchangeable with faith even when it may emphasize a different aspect. In the opinion of this reviewer, what MacArthur has to say about repentance needs to be said, and he says it well.

Another key issue discussed in this section is discipleship. MacArthur criticizes those who separate discipleship from salvation as if it were an



entirely separate issue, and that one can be had without the other. Great care must be exercised here, for those who have fostered this idea have done their work well. In fact this distinction is regarded in some evangelical circles as a basic principle for understanding the New Testament. A fresh look at this matter is long overdue.

The term "disciple" is used frequently in the New Testament, and not always with exactly the same meaning. Three distinct meanings can be found, with some overlap between them. The basic concept in the term depicts a learner or a follower in the pupil-teacher sense. Hence we often find the term used to describe the twelve who became followers of Jesus (Matt 10:1). They were followers in the sense that they enlisted as learners under his teaching and attached themselves to him. Jesus operated no formal school but taught by His deeds as well as His words wherever he went in His travels, and the disciples literally followed Him about.

Another use of the term in the New Testament is applied to all believers. In the Great Commission, the twelve were commanded to "make disciples of" all nations (Matt 28:19). He used the verb from the same word-family. Even before this, however, there were other disciples besides the twelve (Luke 6:17; 19:37). Jesus frequently spoke to the crowds about what it meant to be His disciple. It would demand their primary allegiance (Matt 10:37), the risk even of their lives upon occasion (Luke 14:27), and a total commitment of all that one has (Luke 14:33). It is clear that acceptance as a true follower of Christ cannot be purchased by the believer at any price and yet it will cost him everything.

A final use of "disciple" shows that it can refer to temporary followers of Christ also. There were some in Jesus' day who followed Him for a time with a casual attachment, but when the issues became clearer they left (John 6:66). Thus the term itself merely means "a follower." The nature of that discipleship must be derived from the larger context.

It is the clear evidence of the New Testament that the concept of discipleship is intended to portray the relationship of all the followers of Christ. Every believer is a disciple. Although there were instances of temporary, superficial, or otherwise inadequate disciples, there are no instances in the New Testament of the application of this term to a superior or more advanced level of belief. Those who have separated discipleship from salvation have not done us any service. Their interest in preserving the simplicity of the gospel offer and the avoidance of any notion of works-righteousness may be commendable, but the means they have used are not what Scripture teaches and have opened the door to serious abuse. One must recognize, of course, that some believers are more exemplary disciples than others, and some make more rapid progress than others. Yet the teaching of Scripture is clear. A believer and follower of Christ by Scriptural precept and by definition is one who believes and who follows. He is not merely someone who made a creedal confession at some time or other, but is one who continues to believe. He is not just someone who made some initial motions that might have indicated spiritual activity (like the seed on the stony or thorny ground), but is one who continues to follow. And every true believer is a disciple.

One may easily anticipate the objection that will be raised to this explanation. Does this mean that salvation is dependent upon one's perseverance? Is one saved by Christ, but kept saved by man? Certainly not. The Scriptural

teaching is that true faith results in a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). That new creation will reveal itself by its actions. Those actions will not secure salvation, but they are the inevitable consequence of it.

The concluding portion of the book (Part Five) consists of two appendices. The first examines the gospel as presented by the apostles in their writings during the early days of the Christian church. He looks at Paul, Jude, Peter, James, John, and the writer of Hebrews. MacArthur concludes that the gospel proclaimed by the apostles was the same as that preached by Jesus. "It is a small gate and a narrow road. It is free but it costs everything. And though it is appropriated by faith, it cannot fail to produce the fruit of true righteousness in the life and behavior of the believer" (p. 220).

Appendix 2 examines the records of church history from the *Didache* and Ignatius onward to support the premise of this book that submission to the Lordship of Christ with subsequent obedience to His commands is part of the salvation experience for everyone, not an option for some. In this section the author answers the charge that "Lordship salvation" is a recent addition to the gospel by showing that the consistent understanding of the church throughout her history has been that becoming a Christian involved trusting and obeying the Savior, not just acknowledging certain facts about Him.

The main objections that this reviewer has encountered in relation to the position Dr. MacArthur espouses are these: 1) Lordship salvation is an addition to the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone. 2) It makes assurance of salvation impossible prior to death. 3) It fosters a judgmental spirit toward others. 4) It confuses salvation with discipleship.

Most of these objections have been dealt with earlier in this review. In summation, however, it may be fairly said that the author does not create the dichotomy between salvation and "Lordship" additions. Rather he is responding to the dichotomy which the objectors have proposed. MacArthur sees salvation as that one grand entity whereby the believer receives Jesus as Lord on the basis of initial faith, not as some subsequent and perhaps even optional act. A friend of this reviewer has used the analogy of marriage: "When I married my wife, I did not marry her as cook, as housekeeper, as lover, and as potential mother of my children. I married *her*, and all of these aspects were part of it." Repentance is another way of saying the sinner is recognizing his need and is turning from his dead works to serve the living God. Our saving relationship is to Christ. New life, obedience, enlistment as a disciple—all of this is implicit in receiving Christ by faith.

Is assurance rendered impossible or meaningless? Not at all. The Scripture promises eternal life to those who exercise saving faith. But Scripture also indicates that saving faith is not just intellectual acceptance of certain facts, but is a commitment of the heart to Christ the Lord, and this will inevitably be followed by demonstrations of new life. These are evidences which can be examined, and the Bible tells us to do just that (2 Cor 13:5). The view taught in this book properly questions the grounds of a false assurance, but it is in harmony with the Biblical expressions on the subject. It is true that some could use certain conclusions suggested in these pages and become judgmental toward others. That is a danger that exists among all Christians, whether or not they adopt the position of this book. Nevertheless, the truth must be accepted while avoiding the danger of misapplying it.

To those who feel that salvation has been confused in this volume with discipleship, this reviewer would urge a careful rereading of these pages. The author makes a good case for his conclusions. Much that has been written on this topic has needed rethinking.

In conclusion some cautions might prove helpful to all who are interested enough in this topic to have read the book and to have thought deeply about the issues. First, be careful about misrepresenting those who verbalize these matters in a different way. It is always possible for a writer who is emphasizing a certain aspect of truth to express himself in an exaggerated way and open himself to being misunderstood. One often suspects that this becomes a factor in the debates between "Lordship salvation" and "easy-believism." The full context of a writer's comments should be evaluated before too quickly castigating him for a particular statement.

Second, we should avoid fragmentizing Christ. The separation of Christ as Savior from Christ as Lord is not a Biblical concept. It is Christ Himself whom we must present to lost men. He is the God-Man, the only one who could be the Savior. The invitation to trust Him carries with it implicitly the obligation to obey Him because of who He is. Believers do not make Him the Lord of their lives at some later time. They may recognize more fully the implications of their relationship to Him as they grow in their understanding of Christian truth, but it is not an option to choose if they so desire. It was always inherent in true faith as the Bible describes it.

Third, beware of the danger of legalistically categorizing others. It can be tempting to establish one's own code of righteous behavior, and then judge others who do not conform. Spiritual "fruit inspectors" can easily fall into the trap that Jesus described as searching for the speck in another's eye while oblivious to the beam projecting from one's own. At the same time, it is equally unwarranted to ignore a continuously sinful life and offer assurance of salvation to such people simply because they have made a profession of faith at an earlier time. There is such a thing as false profession.

Finally, in looking at other Christians it must be remembered that spiritual growth does not occur at equal rates among all believers, and that instant maturity never happens. Those who are more experienced in their faith are to assist the weak and restore the fallen (Rom 15:1; Gal 6:1).

*The Gospel According to Jesus* is a thought-provoking book. The discussions it has prompted are important ones and should cause every believer to examine again the crucial issues of Christian faith so as to be true to the Scripture and honest with sinners. Dr. MacArthur has raised these issues effectively.