

Newsletter November 2013

In this newsletter, we shall discuss the Lordship of Jesus Christ by utilizing edited excerpts from various chapters of the three books contained within the *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity* study series. In Book III, *Pentecost to the Eternal Ages*, we discussed the Christian faith within the context of Church history. We saw in the early days of the Church that accepting Christ as savior began a firm commitment to the absolute Lordship of Christ such that many willingly suffered poverty and even death through persecution – thus demonstrating the persistency of the true faith. For approximately a thousand-years, beginning in the early fourth century, the Church on earth became enveloped in Roman churchianity that stifled biblical faith even as it forced everyone – believer and reprobate alike – into the temporal church (cf. Book III, Chapter 17.7). Although the Reformation Movement in Europe eventually freed much of its populace from the political tyranny of the Roman Church, Christians still found themselves bound by the religious dictates of various state churches, which still held to much of the same doctrinal errors and non-biblical traditions as the Roman church. This eventually led many devout church groups such as the Puritans to leave Europe to establish colonies in the vast North American continent where they could freely practice their faith in peace (cf. Book III, pages 250, 276). That early migration of faithful believers ultimately led to the founding of the world's first nation wherein freedom of religious faith was guaranteed by its laws (cf. Book III, Chapter 18.5). Through that new found freedom, biblical reform found a clear path ahead without fear of institutionalized persecution.

Unfortunately, religious reform did not always follow along sound biblical lines in the United States as political freedom fostered various forms of religious license. Beginning in the 1800's, a form of evangelism became evident that was based upon human experience and emotion rather than upon the direct teaching and study of Holy Scripture. In Book III we referred to this anomaly as “experiential evangelicalism.” Its presence was most clearly felt in campground revivals as the young nation expanded westward (cf. Book III, page 329). Added to the errors of experiential evangelicalism was the constant pressure of religious liberalism, which is based upon “open deism” in which God is viewed as a nebulous deity or merely as an intuitive concept within the mind of man (cf. Book III, pages 331, 349, 351, 443). As religious liberalism infiltrated evangelicalism, the doctrine of salvation became further corrupted into a new form exemplified by the Neo-evangelicalism of the 1940's and 1950's, which was primarily based upon the rapid growth of institutionalized churchianity in an expansion of church-building construction (cf. Book III, page 405; Book II, Chapter 13.1).

In the decades beginning in the 1970's and leading into the Twenty-first Century, a resurgence of paganism or Neo-paganism (cf. Book III, pages 419, 430, 439), mixed with a rapidly growing secularism in the nation's churches, further degraded Neo-evangelicalism to the extent that the doctrine of salvation has now become nothing more than a form of “easy believism.” Easy believism is characterized by a certain amount of intellectual ascent regarding the facts of the Gospel and the person of Jesus Christ accompanied with certain religious rituals such as reciting a prescribed prayer, altar calls, and of course ritual baptism (cf. Newsletter August 2012). Proponents often misrepresent this easy believism using the term “free grace.” Certainly God's grace is free in the sense that it is purely a gift of God, but the implication of the word “free” as advocates of easy believism use it allows them to appropriate salvation for themselves through mere words expressed in a one-time declaration or a ritual completely free of any encumbrance upon their sinful lifestyle, personal thoughts, or actions. There is no true spiritual depth to their belief; it remains superficial and is rooted only in the flesh (cf. Mt.13:6). They may confess with their tongues, but they do not believe in their hearts (cf. Ro.10:9). They may enjoy reading portions of the Bible as a pleasant religious exercise on occasion, but they cannot ever partake of the meat of its doctrine, which deeply impacts the mind enabling true believers to grow toward a state of spiritual maturity.

Those who profess this easy believism feel that they need not remain entirely committed to their initial profession as long as they have “properly” engaged in a prescribed one-time baptismal ritual and/or confession, which is considered an unbreakable seal of their salvation regardless of their future thoughts and actions. We discuss the biblical doctrine of the security of the believer in Book I, page 176 and again on page 199 as the perseverance or preservation of the saints. However, the much simplified “once saved, always saved” doctrine, as it is commonly put forth by Baptists and many other evangelical churches when combined

with easy believism brings about secular-minded imitators or “pseudo-Christians” – those who may outwardly profess to be true believers on Sunday, but demonstrate no evidence of saving faith in the way that they live their lives day-to-day. Some may not even realize that they have been ensnared into a shallow belief system with no substance; they are not truly saved – except in the fantasy of their own minds. This delusion only further hardens them to acceptance of the true Gospel from which they are totally adrift.

Clearly, easy believism has had a very negative effect upon true Christian evangelism, with which it is often falsely associated. The collective wisdom, knowledge, and faith of the apostles, which we must acknowledge and hold in trust for others within the Gospel, is being discarded by the pseudo-believer in order to exhibit a simulated or “pseudo-spirituality” through mimicking various outward signs, rituals, and engaging in various forms of petty-legalism. Attempting to “dress up” the Gospel message with “signs” and “wonders” in an attempt to authenticate it through emotionalism, adorn it in ritual, or augment it with pointless rules of conduct, only hinders the efforts of the Holy Spirit to reach the lost (cf. Book II, Chapter 14.1). As true believers, we must calmly and sanely present the manifest Gospel to others in a conversational tone, using words that can be easily understood by the unsaved, omitting all common Christian clichés and especially all unsubstantiated fantasy. We must then be ready to answer questions in an honest and matter-of-fact way while letting the Holy Spirit do his work in them as He sees fit. We cannot compel anyone to believe; only God can open human minds to receive the Truth as it is faithfully and accurately presented to them.

The pseudo-believer often has an intellectual and/or emotional form of affirmation, such that he may outwardly profess Christ as Lord in a cosmic sense, yet does not accept him as Lord over his or her own personal life. Jesus asked of such as these, “...Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say” ((Lu. 6:46)? Pseudo-believers often say that they attempt to follow the example of Jesus’ moral teachings, particularly as found in the Beatitudes (Mt.5:3-11), without any personal knowledge of God’s grace that transforms lives as is needed to comply with the high calling found in the Sermon on the Mount. The pseudo-Christian may regularly attend church services, aid the poor, sing in praise teams, teach Sunday school, serve on church boards, and even preach as an ordained minister from the pulpit. But, of these Jesus said, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Mt.7:22,23). Therefore, we find that today’s easy believism is a very seductive and dangerous trap for the unwary carrying with it serious eternal consequences.

In direct opposition to the easy believism found so deeply embedded in today’s institutionalized churchianity are those who insist that accepting Christ as the Lord of ones life (as well as ones savior) is a necessary prerequisite to genuine conversion taking place. This school of thought is commonly referred to as “Lordship Salvation.” A doctrine zealously formulated in direct opposition to rampant error is often itself faulty creating unintentional errors of its own. Accordingly, we find that there is a serious problem with “Lordship salvation” as it is most often understood inasmuch as it would seem to be necessary for each of us to first “clean up our lives” in obedience to Christ (as Lord) through fully forsaking our sin before we could ever approach Christ to receive redemption. It is evident that salvation achieved in this way would be contingent upon personal works, which is in direct opposition to the Gospel as presented in Scripture by the apostle Paul. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ep. 2:8-10). In this passage we find that grace and even faith itself is a gift of God such that no man can appropriate it for himself by any means he possesses. God through Christ has provided the way of salvation for his own that is all of God’s grace and his grace alone (cf. Newsletter October 2013).

Therefore, we find that the common problem with “easy believism” and “Lordship salvation” as it is ordinarily presented, is that they both place a necessity for an initial redemptive action upon the shoulders of depraved man who has no understanding of his fallen state and thus has no inclination to seek after God to receive redemption (cf. Ro.3:11). In the mind of the pseudo-Christian, salvation is considered to be a simple one-time transaction with no follow-up necessary – thus rendering it empty of substance. In the case of Lordship Salvation personal redemption requires a precise obedience to God’s Law prior to conversion taking place, which opposes the stubborn nature of fallen man and which is therefore impossible for him to achieve.

It must therefore be clearly understood that salvation is purely a unilateral work of God not of any work or activity undertaken by fallen man individually or collectively. God alone is the source and initiator of man's salvation through a supernatural means of conversion that comes about in a way that is known only to Himself. The momentous difference between those who are mere pseudo-believers and those who are genuine is that true believers have the Holy Spirit living within them while the pseudo-believer does not. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit takes place as a spiritual birth received from above (cf. Jn.3:1-8), as was previously discussed in our November 2012 Newsletter and Chapter 5.4 of Book I. When God determines to save a lost man or woman, the Holy Spirit at first begins to work in their hearts and minds to convict them of their personal sins that issue forth from their fallen sin nature. The lost at first perceive this as an annoyance of conscience inasmuch as it opposes the sinful way of life that he or she prefers and enjoys. However, as the conviction of sin eventually becomes overwhelming to the lost soul, the Holy Spirit begins to reveal Jesus Christ as savior, thus making Him evident to their unregenerate mind. The heavily burdened sinner finding a clear path of salvation before him responds to the entreaty of the Holy Spirit to embrace Jesus Christ, whom he had previously rejected. The Holy Spirit then takes up permanent residence in the newborn believer, who through that means becomes transformed into an entirely new creature in Christ (cf. 2Co.5:17).

When we receive Christ, we immediately repent of our sins thus turning away from our old sinful way of life, which has become extremely repulsive to our new nature (cf. Ro.6:1,2); the Christian has not been saved that he may remain in his sin, but to be set apart from it. The saving faith that we have received is not a dormant one, but is active in producing good works in the believer (cf. Book I, Chapter 7.2 *Faith in Action*). Although the overall goal of man is to glorify God through sanctified works, the more particular nature of this work varies from one individual to another. God has a plan for each soul that He saves to perform specific tasks that He has predetermined for him to do here on earth. "For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which he has preordained that we should walk in them" (Ep.2:10). The new-found desire to obey and please God is found only in the acceptance of Jesus' absolute Lordship, a concept that becomes a self-evident reality once we receive a new spiritual nature.

Although we have instantaneously received a positional state of holiness in the new nature granting us the security of eternal salvation when we first received Christ as our savior, we must continue to struggle with the practical aspects of sanctification as we continue to yield every facet of our personal lives to Christ as our Lord (cf. Ph.2:12). Practical sanctification is a consequence of the renewal of our minds that takes place as the Holy Spirit applies Holy Scripture to our inward-most thoughts. For that reason, a believer must be constantly reading and studying the Bible (cf. Ro.12:2). Depending upon a person's circumstances before his conversion, spiritual growth may appear to progress rapidly in some, immediately impacting their lifestyle, but for most it takes an entire lifetime to approach a practical state of spiritual maturity. We must understand that even the most mature Christian cannot boast that he does not ever commit sin (1Jn.1:8-10), but only that he constantly strives to walk in righteousness while despising the sin that so easily besets him (cf. (Ro. 7:15).

In conclusion, only when we come to understand salvation from the perspective of God's Sovereignty demonstrated in his divine election, do we discover that Jesus' Lordship over our personal lives is in full accordance with Scripture (cf. Newsletter October 2013 and Book I, Section 3). There is no way that we could receive eternal salvation from Christ if He is not fully God and therefore fully Lord; He would have no authority to grant it. All true believers not only accept Christ as their savior, but also inevitably accept Him as their Lord. The reality of Jesus' Lordship solidifies in our minds as a consequence of God's redemptive action in our conversion and is therefore not in any way a prerequisite to us receiving salvation. Since Jesus Christ is truly Lord of all things, both in Heaven and in Earth, we as believers must fully surrender our lives to Him that He may rule over us, lest we find that we are still floundering under the failed Lordship of Adam in which death continues to reign. While under the federal headship of Adam, into which we were all born when we came into this world, men remained spiritually dead in their trespasses and sin, but all men in accepting the headship of Christ as their Lord become spiritually alive in Him (cf. 1Co.15:22). In the Lord Jesus Christ alone do we truly possess eternal life over which death has no power (cf. 1Co. 15:55-57).