THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ESUS

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LORDSHIP SALVATION

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS, by Dr. John F. MacArthur (Zondervan, 1988; 252 pages). The purpose of this highly controversial book is to promote Lordship Salvation.

Lordship salvation is a child of Covenant theology; it is an interpolation. It is not the childlike faith of John 3:16. It rightly insists upon repentance, but wrongly includes a change of behavior—one must "bring forth fruits for repentance" (Lu. 3:8) in order to be saved.

No one questions that there must be a sincere change of mind, a turning from one's self to the Savior; but Lordship advocates attempt to make behavior and fruit essential ingredients of, rather than evidence of, saving faith.

The Lordship war cry is, "If Christ is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all." The old Wesleyan adage is also used: "Christ saves us from sin, not in sin." This is the Arminian admixture of justification and sanctification for initial saving faith. But Scripture teaches that the Lord Jesus saves "the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6) in their sin, and then believers from their sin (Gal. 5:16).

Dr. MacArthur is not alone in his legitimate concern about the barren results of much of present-day evangelism. Many others, too, are just as keenly aware of and burdened about so-called easy believism--professors of faith who subsequently bear no fruit commensurate with true salvation. But, the remedy is not to draw from the previous dispensation, resorting to the Gospel according to Jesus.

The author was quite correct in titling his book The Gospel According to Jesus. The Gospel that Jesus taught in His pre-Cross humiliation as Israel's Messiah was, for all intents and purposes, Lordship Salvation.

On the ground that the author takes (Covenant Israel), he is right concerning Lordship salvation. The problem is that he is on the <u>wrong</u> ground: the dispensation of law! What our brother neither sees nor understands—and he is by no means alone—is that there are not two <u>ways</u>, but two distinctly different <u>kinds</u> of salvation! But both have the <u>same</u> blessed source, the finished work of the Cross, and both are entered by faith.

Dr. MacArthur bases Lordship Salvation upon the Gospel according to Jesus, John the Baptist, and the early disciples. This kingdom Gospel is directed to the covenant nation of Israel. The Lord Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Paul said of Him, "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Matt. 15:24; Rom. 15:8).

The Lord Jesus' Kingdom Gospel had nothing to do with Christians, or the Church. He was making converts to the coming earthly millennial kingdom, ultimately the eternal kingdom upon the new earth. There was no such person as a Christian, no such organism as the Body of Christ, prior to and during the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry. The disciples were not Christians until they were placed in the newly-formed Church, which is His Body, on the day of

Pentecost. The word ekklesia (church), incidentally, does not occur in the Gospels except for three references in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17.

The true, heavenly Gospel for today—the dispensation between Pentecost and the coming Rapture—is scripturally referred to by Paul as "the Gospel of the grace of God," "the Gospel of His Son," and "my Gospel" (Acts 20:24; Rom. 1:9; 16:25). Dr. Chafer insisted upon the complete uniqueness of Paul's Gospel:

Paul's Gospel produces, for those who believe, a totally new order of existence, after another order of man. Christ lives in me. It is not that the old man has received additions and advantages as in a legal religion—a former Gospel—but that I as a Christian am made anew of Him who is the Son of God, and that the old man has been superseded and judicially put an end to in His Cross. Being crucified with Christ, it has no longer any recognized existence before God; while I, as a new creation, am in Christ before the Father, and He lives in me (Gal. 2:20). This is the very kernel of Paul's Gospel.

Paul's Gospel presents the New Creation relationship, where the believer is in the ascended Lord Jesus, and He is in the believer. This two-fold union establishes an identity of relationship and life that surpasses all human understanding. By the baptism of the Spirit, wrought as it is for everyone in the present dispensation of grace when one believes (1 Cor. 12:13), the saved one is joined to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 3:27).

And by that union with the ascended Lord Jesus he is made a partaker of His ascension life (Col. 1:27), is translated out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13), is crucified, dead, buried, ascended with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6), is a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20), is forgiven all trespasses (Col. 2:13), is justified (Rom. 5:1), and blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

The Gospel according to Jesus was of a different nature than the above. His Gospel was on the level of the law and the earthly kingdom, as it was designed to be. Read the writings or sit under the ministry of the Lordship salvationists as having to do with the Christian life, and you will be exposed to very little of Pauline truth. You will be taken as far as Romans Seven, and there you will remain under the grinding grip of the law. Dr. Chafer again:

The Church is not mentioned once in relation to the Gospel according to Jesus and His teaching of the kingdom, nor are those teachings applied to her; for her part in the kingdom is not to be reigned over, but to reign with Christ-her Head. She, being His Bride, is His Consort.

There is a very dangerous and entirely baseless sentiment abroad which assumes that every teaching of Jesus must be binding during this dispensation simply because He said it. The fact is forgotten that the Lord Jesus, while living here, keeping, and applying the Law of Moses, also taught the principles of His future kingdom; and, at the end of His ministry and in relation to His coming Cross, He also anticipated the teachings of grace—as He ministered to us through Paul. If this threefold

division of the teaching of the Lord Jesus is not recognized, there can be nothing but confusion of mind and consequent contradiction of truth --L.S. Chafer (Systematic Theology IV:224).

The Lordship Salvation error is a natural product of Reformed/Covenant theology. Since it is anti-dispensational, hence fails to "rightly divide the Word of truth," its advocates attempt to get the right results from the wrong realm of the Word, i.e., the law realm. This is Dr. MacArthur's position. Statements from his The Gospel According to Jesus are in italics:

There is a tendency, however, for dispensationalists to get carried away with compartmentalizing truth to the point that they can make unbiblical distinctions. An almost obsessive desire to categorize everything neatly has led various dispensational interpreters to draw hard lines not only between the church and Israel, but also between salvation and discipleship, the church and the kingdom, Christ's preaching and the apostolic message, faith and repentance, and the age of law and the age of grace. The age of law and the age of grace division in particular have wreaked havoc on dispensational theology and contributed to confusion about the doctrine of salvation (p. 25).

It is a mistake of the worst sort to set the teachings of Paul and the apostles over against the words of our Lord and imagine that they contradict one another [they do not] or speak of different dispensations [they do] (p. 214).

Now to "rightly divide" is not to confuse, but to clarify. Confusion will cause one to slip into the wrong dispensation of the Word. Dr. MacArthur is not alone in this practice of failing to draw a hard and fast line, or any line at all. This same delinquency has already developed in such dispensational seminaries as Talbot, Grace, and Dallas.

The "doctrinal development of Orthodoxy," i.e., Progressivism, that is being perpetrated by some seminary leaders is simply wrongly-divided unorthodoxy. Their "developing dispensationalism" is playing into the hands of the Covenant advocates. It is the tragic spectacle of the Evangelical father rushing out to intercept the prodigal Covenant son, covering him with kisses, cloaking him with the robe of acceptance, and merrily escorting him into the house.

These Evangelical leaders have forsaken and fled from the hard-line dispensationalism of Darby, Scofield, and Chafer. All that they have was received from them, but now is being squandered with reckless abandon. They have gone backward and fallen to the ground; right down to the earthly Covenant level! Why is it, for instance, that so many Dallas graduates are Covenant-oriented?

This is similar to what occurred a generation ago when passive evangelical leaders gave the right (wrong) hand of fellowship to the aggressive charismatics. That was a matter of subjective fellowship, since there was so little actual doctrine involved. Now it is more an objective matter—a breaking down or confusing of doctrinal distinctions, and that by those who have previously held and maintained rightly-divided doctrine.

Dr. MacArthur is in no sense of the word a valid dispensationalist. Rather, he is an amalgamationist. This book, as well as others of his, is larded with Covenant quotations. The following are some of the writers the author utilized in an effort to authenticate his claims for Lordship Salvation:

J. Alleine, O.T. Allis, W. Arn, L. Berkhof, G.C. Berkouwer, C.J. Crenshaw, J. Edwards, J. Flavel, J. Gill, T. Goodwin, Wm. Guthrie, M. Henry, C. Hodge, M. Lloyd-Jones, G. Machen, T. Manton, L. Morris, D. Niquette, J.I. Packer, A. Pink, E. Reisinger, J.C. Ryle, R. Shank, C. Spurgeon, R. Stedman, J. Stott, R.A. Torrey, A.W. Tozer, G. Vos, B.B. Warfield, and T. Watson.

What true dispensationalist would call upon 39 or more Covenant antidispensationalists to substantiate the thesis of his book? And what Covenant anti-dispensationalist would write a Foreword to such a book if it were in any way dispensational? It is certainly a legitimate question to pose: "Just what side is Dr. MacArthur on?

The author includes not one, but two Forewords. The first is by J.I. Packer:

It is a fine book--clear, cogent, and edifying--doing for us [Covenantists] what is nowhere else done so well, and that is very much needed at this time. I wish it a wide circulation and a thoughtful readership. It will render the Christian world great service. I commend it enthusiastically (p. x).

The second is by James Montgomery Boice:

If MacArthur's book succeeds in turning many from this weak gospel and false confidence, as I believe it will, The Gospel According to Jesus may be one of the most significant books of this decade (p. xi).

Now, consider some of the confusion of mind and contradiction of truth as contained in Dr. MacArthur's attempt to fasten the Lord Jesus' Kingdom Gospel upon His heavenly Body:

On a disturbing number of fronts, the message being proclaimed today is not the gospel of Jesus (p. 15).

And it is a good thing! Today we are to minister Paul's "by grace are ye saved through faith" Gospel, by which we are recreated in the Body of Christ; not the Lord Jesus' Gospel relating to the law-oriented theocratic kingdom.

We can not confidently point men to the way of life unless we get the right gospel (p 17).

The way of life that Dr. MacArthur is pointing to via the Gospel according to Jesus results in "the <u>law</u> as the rule of life." Whereas the glorified Lord Jesus' present Gospel according to Paul results in "the law of the Spirit of <u>life</u> in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2).

Jesus did not come to proclaim a message that would be invalid until the Tribulation or the Millennium. His gospel is the only message we are to preach—any other gospel is under God's curse (Gal. 1:6-8) (p. 27).

The Galatians were not saved by the Gospel according to Jesus; they were Galatians 2:20 Christians, saved through Paul who "called you into the grace of Christ" (1:6).

Jesus was not announcing a new way of salvation distinct from OT redemption (Matt. 5:17). This is to say that salvation under the dispensation of grace is no different from salvation under the law (p. 42).

The Gospel according to <u>Jesus</u> under the law consisted of forgiveness of sins by the future work of the Cross, and eternal kingdom life upon the millennial, and subsequently new, earth.

The Gospel according to <u>Paul</u> consists of the forgiveness of sins by the past work of the Cross, and eternal life in Christ who is Head, in heaven. Both salvations are eternal, but the one is in the glorious <u>earthly kingdom</u>, the other is in the glorious heavenly Person, who is our Life.

This once blind beggar became the first person recorded in Scripture to be thrown out of the synagogue for Christ's sake (John 9:34). This incident began the breach that finally resulted in the separation of the church and Israel (p 73).

One is constrained to refrain from commenting upon such an unworthy statement. First, the thrown-out beggar was not a Christian, but a converted Israelite. Second, the breach between Israel and the Church was consummated once and forever via the separating work of the Cross, and was manifested at Pentecost.

The rich young ruler failed the test. He really \underline{did} want eternal life; but he was unwilling to come the way Jesus specified, the way of confessing his sin and surrendering to Jesus' lordship (p. 87).

The eternal life that the rich young ruler sought was kingdom life, which he could have gained by confessing his sins and surrendering to Jesus' lordship. He never would have become a Christian, "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

God preserves His people in this world through their perseverance (p.98).

This is Covenant teaching; i.e., if you persevere to the very end, you will be saved. Dr. MacArthur's legal orientation causes him to put perseverance in reverse. The Christian perseveres because the Father has recreated him in His Son; and it is in and by His life that he perseveres. Grace!

We learn from his [Judas'] story that it is not enough to be close to Jesus Christ. One may "accept" Him and still fall short. The individual who responds positively but not wholeheartedly risks being lost and damned forever $(p.\ 100)$.

The author spends most of an entire chapter (8) on Judas, using him as an example of a professor of Christianity. Neither Judas nor any of his fellow disciples knew anything of what it meant to be a Christian. At one time, prior

to His death, "all the disciples forsook Him, and fled." "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (Matt. 16:56; John 6:66). The term "disciple" (follower, learner) does not occur after Acts. Discipleship has to do with the law economy. As the Gospels are a transition from law to grace, so the book of Acts is the transition from Judaism to Christianity.

This active, continuous attitude of repentance produces the poverty of spirit, mourning, and meekness Jesus spoke of in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-6). It is the mark of a true Christian (p. 165). There is no salvation apart from the repentance that renounces sin (p. 168).

Repentance, as it relates to both kingdom salvation and Christian salvation is explained by Dr. Chafer, in his book titled Salvation (pp, 48-50):

Today it is an error to require repentance as a preliminary act preceding and separate from believing. Such insistence is too often based on Scripture which is addressed to the covenant people, Israel. They, being covenant people, are privileged to return to God on the ground of their covenant of repentance. There is much Scripture both in the OT and in the New that calls that one nation to its predicted repentance, and it is usually placed before them as a separate unrelated act that is required.

The conditions were very different, however, in the case of an unsaved Gentile, who was a "stranger to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world"; and equally different for any individual Jew in this dispensation. In presenting the Gospel to these classes, there are 115 passages at least wherein the word "believe" is used alone and apart from any other condition as the only way of salvation. In addition to this there are upwards of 35 passages wherein its synonym "faith" is used.

There are but six passages addressed to unsaved Gentiles wherein repentance appears either alone or in combination with other passages. These are: Acts 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; Romans 2:4; and 2 Peter 3:9.

That repentance does not save is evidenced in the case of Judas, who repented and yet went into perdition. It is worthy to note that there are 25 passages wherein "believe," or "faith," is given as the only condition of Gentile salvation to one passage wherein repentance appears for any reason whatsoever.

It is evident from this fact that repentance, like all other issues, is almost universally omitted from the great salvation passages; that such repentance as is possible to an unsaved person in this dispensation is <u>included</u> in the one act of believing. The statement in 1 Thessalonians 1:9,10 may serve as an illustration. Here it is said: "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven." This represents one all-inclusive act.

Dr. MacArthur gives us an unChristian attitude in prayer:

We have all prayed with the Psalmist, "Let the wicked perish before God" (p. 131).

No, dear brother, we have not all prayed that prayer. That prayer was acceptable from a covenant Israelite, from the only basis that he had: law-governed Adamic flesh. The Christian, not in the flesh but in the Last Adam, prays the Spirit-led prayer concerning the wicked: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lu. 23:34).

Eternal life brings immediate death to self. "Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with. that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Rom. 6:6) (p. 140). Receiving Christ does not mean we can merely add Jesus to the refuse we have accumulated. Salvation requires total transformation: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17) (p. 183).

Here Dr. MacArthur fails to differentiate between the Christian's <u>position</u>, and his <u>condition</u>. As to "immediate death to self," and "the old things passed away, behold, new things are come," that is true of all Christians, <u>positionally</u>; but hardly as to their daily condition—even the most mature.

Willingness to surrender to divine authority is the driving force in the heart of every true child of the kingdom. It is the inevitable expression of the new nature (p. 140).

The author's first sentence is correct. The convert via the Gospel according to Jesus became a child of the kingdom. And divine authority will ever be the driving force in his heart—the indwelling Spirit writing the law upon his heart to enable him to surrender to the theocratic kingdom law, under his King.

But that is not the "inevitable expression of the new nature." Not at all. The inevitable expression of the new nature is the manifestation of the Lord Jesus in the Christian. He is not under authority, he is not seeking to obey--unless he is under the law as described in Romans Seven.

For him to live is Christ, and that life is not under authority; it lives by its righteous nature, by means of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The believer lives by the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," which has made him "free from the law of sin and death." The flesh requires authority and law to inhibit and control it, but not the life that is Christ--which is manifested by "the fruit of the Spirit," and "against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22,23).

The moment his [the thief on the Cross] repentance wrought faith, the Savior received him into His kingdom (p. 148).

Yes, the thief on the Cross was received into the kingdom, via the holding pattern of heaven. But he was not received into the Lord Jesus Christ as his Life--he did not become a Christian, a member of the Body of Christ. The Christian faith is not wrought by repentance, for, "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

Paul preached the gospel according to Jesus. In fact, his defense of his apostleship was based on the claim that he received his gospel direct from Jesus (p. p. 217).

Here is the crucial area concerning Dr. MacArthur's theology, i.e., applying the Kingdom dispensation to the Church dispensation. The Gospel according to Jesus was directed to kingdom Israel. He was a "minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers" (Rom. 15:8). And what were some of the promises made to the fathers? Jeremiah and Ezekiel tell us plainly:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.... This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:31,33).

"Therefore, say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God...I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep Mine ordinances, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God" (Ezek. 36:22,24-28).

Here is the description of the convert to the Gospel according to Jesus. In the millennial kingdom in the land promised to the fathers, the regenerated Jew will be cleansed from his sins, he will be given a new heart and a new spirit. God will put His Spirit within him, and cause him to walk in his statutes, and keep the ordinances of the theocratic kingdom, and do them.

The apostle Paul did not receive this Gospel of the kingdom from the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, Head of the heavenly Church. No member of the Body of the Lord Jesus has the law written on his heart, to enable him to keep the laws of the coming theocratic kingdom.

Some dispensational leaders, such as Dr. Renald Showers in his book, The New Nature, are teaching that the Christian has the law written upon his heart. But it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is written on the heart of the Christian—"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2).

Here is a sorely needed principle for the Church: There is nothing in all the Word concerning the Christian that exceeds, or even remotely compares with, that which our glorified Head gives us through Paul!

It is true that Paul set forth the same means (faith) of salvation as did Jesus in His preaching; but Paul was offering an altogether different Gospel. Paul wrote, "I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem, and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:19,20).

And just what was the Gospel that Paul received by revelation from the glorified Lord Jesus Christ? "I made known unto you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11,12). "Even the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to His saints, to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:25-27).

Paul's Gospel does not write the law upon the heart, but rather the indwelling Spirit of Christ establishes the life of the Lord Jesus in the heart of the Christian, and he lives for the glory of the Father by the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2).

Dr. MacArthur would take us <u>back</u> to the blessed Lord Jesus in His humiliation, prior to His wondrous Cross, <u>preaching His kingdom Gospel to covenant Israel.</u> But "except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). Paul takes us <u>forward</u>, up to the ascended Lord Jesus Christ in His glory, preaching His <u>Person--"Christ</u>, who is our Life" (Col. 3:4).

Israel will never be a part of this heavenly Body of the Lord Jesus, which is the Church, begun on the day of Pentecost, and to be <u>completed</u> at the Rapture. She will have nothing at all that the Church is and has in her Head and Life. There is no comparison between the Church and Israel, glorious as the latter will be in "the regeneration," the glorious Messianic Kingdom--with the King upon David's throne with his consort Bride, the Church, reigning together over Israel and the Gentile nations.

Since this infinite distinction exists between the Church and Israel, it will ever be maintained throughout the Millennial Kingdom and on into Eternity. Forever. Nothing can be added to the then completed Body, not even regenerated Israel.

C.E. Stewart expresses the final word as to Dr. MacArthur's Jewish stress on Lordship:

To the Church, whether viewed as His Body or His Bride, the Lord Jesus is <u>Head</u>, not Lord. Lord, of course, He is; God made Him such (Acts 2:36) The Church knows Him as Lord; but He is Head to, not Lord of, the Church.

Headship and Lordship both belong to Him, but they are not convertible terms. As Lord, He stands apart from all others; as <u>Head</u>, He is in close association and communion with that to which He is as such in union. Scripture never speaks of Him as Lord in relation to the Church.

As Dr. Chafer wrote:

<u>Christ</u> is the Head of a New Creation, and <u>Christians</u> are with Him in that creation as its vital members. <u>Israel</u> was of the old creation and attached to the earth; the Church is of the New Creation and related to heaven.