



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER 1, 2012

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



Pastor Gary C. Fleetwood
*Chime Bell Baptist Church
Windsor, South Carolina*

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary
Aiken, South Carolina Extension
Dean, Covington Theological Seminary
Country of Romania*

EASY BELIEVISM

PART TWO

Unfortunately, we live in an age that encourages both easy believism and worldly lifestyles within both the laity and leadership of the local church. The problem is that many churches which claim to be evangelical in their faith are grossly unevangelical in their practice. Too often churches lack meaningful theological accountability and direction, and for the most part give little to no evidence of understanding the foundational truths of redemption and salvation. The problem with this position is that the people who are sitting in the pews are very often living under the mistaken impression that they have been saved, when everything in their life and lifestyle point in a completely opposite direction – and the

church makes no comment. Neither the church nor the false converts have taken to heart the warnings of Matthew 7 relative to the “few” and the “many”.

Probably the most prominent and the most influential evangelist of the mid-19th century was Charles Finney. It is unfortunate that he actually chose a preaching profession so early after his conversion simply because his theology lacked any real doctrinal substance or integrity. And to make matters worse, he was not afraid to challenge established lines of doctrine and theology with his own set of novel ideas. One of the factors that seemed to contribute to his outward success was the fact that many of the churches of his day were hyper-Calvinistic and were not very enthusiastic in preaching the gospel. Those churches that were of a hyper-Calvinist mindset did little to nothing in the way of evangelism, and therefore Finney appeared to have somewhat of an open door with his evangelistic novelties. The initial response to his methodologies was significant, but the ensuing and lasting results were at best minimal. His system of theology was simply a by-product of his imagination and logic, and unfortunately his initial success obscured the fatal flaws inherent in his distorted theology.

The use of the altar call as a means of getting decisions was developed and initiated by Finney in his revival meetings as what he called a “*use of means*” to get people to walk the aisles. He actually

invented the word “revival” as a designation for his evangelistic outreaches. In a sense, it could be said that he was the father of the mistaken notion that the end justifies the means. He was the progenitor of what we might refer to as “pragmatism”. The misfortune of a pragmatic theological perspective is that it focuses on results to the detriment of substance. As an example, Finney believed that all that was needed for conversion was resolution signified by standing, kneeling, or coming forward, and because the Holy Spirit always acts when a sinner acts, the public resolution could be treated as “*identical with the miraculous inward change of sudden conversion*”. The tragic outcome of Finney’s direction was that he was successful in obtaining results, but the problem is that “decisions” do not always equate into conversions. A sincere “decision” is no guarantee that actual biblical regeneration and conversion have occurred. If that was the case, then there would have been no need for Jesus to have provided the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8. In Jesus’ explanation of the parable to His disciples in [Luke 8:13-14](#), He makes this statement,

¹³But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. ¹⁴Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

It should be noted that both Finney and his co-worker in the evangelistic efforts, Asa Mahan, both recognized and acknowledged the ultimate failure of Finney’s outreach methodologies. However, the problem is that Finney’s impact on modern day evangelism still lingers and the leaven of his false methodologies has been both retained and highly endorsed by modern evangelistic efforts. Methodology has taken precedence over doctrinal integrity.

In recent years the issue of “easy-believism” has been proliferated and publicized by an ongoing debate between dispensational theologians such as Charles Ryrie and Zane Hodges in contradiction to theology taught by John MacArthur labeled as “lordship salvation”. It was the theology of Zane Hodges in recent times that gave rise to the term

“easy believism” and served as a major catalyst for the current debate. Much of the debate began after MacArthur’s writing of his popular book entitled [The Gospel According to Jesus](#) which was published in 1988. J.I. Packer, who wrote a foreword to the book made this statement in support of MacArthur’s theological position,

“Simple assent to the gospel, divorced from a transforming commitment to the living Christ, is by biblical standards less than faith, and less than saving, and to elicit only assent of this kind would be to secure false conversions.”

What Packer was doing in his opening statement was raising the question as to the very nature of saving faith, which is exactly what the book was intended to do – give clarity to the definition of saving faith. James Montgomery Boice in his foreword to the book wrote this,

“...MacArthur is not dealing with some issue, or issues external to the faith, but with the central issue of all, namely, what does it mean to be a Christian?...It is the idea – where did it ever come from? – than one can be a Christian without being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. It reduces the gospel to the mere fact of Christ’s having died for sinners, requires of sinners only that they acknowledge this by the barest of intellectual assent, and then assures them of their eternal security when they may very well not be born again.”

MacArthur fully acknowledged that “*no one who is saved fully understands all the implications of Jesus’ lordship at the moment of conversion....The mark of true salvation is that it always produces a heart that knows and feels its responsibility to respond to the ever awakening reality of the lordship of Christ.*” And he further states, “*Salvation thus establishes the root that will surely produce the fruit.*”

It is my sincere belief that no one reading this article would ever argue the point that to confuse, complicate, or misappropriate the accuracy and definition of salvation would be one of the most horrific of all theological errors. To give someone an unbiblical assurance of salvation would be the most tragic of all consequences. And yet, in this author’s opinion, that is as much the norm as not. In [Matthew 7:26-27](#), a section of Scripture that is clearly dealing with the nature of saving faith, Jesus makes the statement that,

²⁶“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: ²⁷and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

This is not salvation by works, but simply salvation. Genuine biblical salvation always follows with biblical sanctification. One would be hard-pressed not to recognize from Jesus’ first sermon and the conclusion of that sermon that one of the identifying marks of biblical faith is not just providing some kind of intellectual assent to the gospel message, but an on-going obedience to the Word of God. There is nothing salvific about a mere confession, even if that confession is accurate. For instance, a man can say that he loves his wife, but in reality have no love for her whatsoever. It simply is not sufficient to make a statement that Jesus is Lord or to make a “profession of faith” that does not provide an on-going evidence of that profession. Confessions and professions are very good things and should never be minimized, but a biblical confession must be bound together with a saving, heart-felt belief in Christ. And what has taken place in the heart must be made visible and open to men. This combination of biblical confession and biblical faith are clearly identified in [Romans 10:9-10](#) which states,

⁹that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Biblical faith always renders itself visible in a heart-felt confession of Christ that becomes visible to others. In [Matthew 10:32](#) Jesus says,

³²“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

But what is the actual nature of the confession that the individual makes. In [Romans 10:9](#), it is clearly that Jesus Christ is Lord – “**confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus**”.

Anyone who is familiar with the life of Charles

Spurgeon knows that he waged a personal battle with the issue of “easy-believism” or “cheap grace” in his day. It was a battle that he warred the last several years of his life and is what most believe actually brought about his untimely death. The issue in his day was called “The Down-Grade Controversy”, and it centered around the slow, but ever increasing influence of modernism into the doctrines of the church. Most of the debate began after Spurgeon had published a number of articles in his monthly magazine called “The Sword and the Trowel”. It was this controversy relative to how the historical doctrinal moorings of Christianity were being slowly eroded away that actually caused Spurgeon to withdraw from the Baptist Union. The term “down-grade” came from Spurgeon’s analogy that biblical truth is like the pinnacle of a steep, slippery mountain where once a church, individual, or denomination gets on the down slope that a kind of spiritual momentum in the wrong direction takes place and ultimately leaves the church in a position from which it is difficult to recover.

In the first down-grade article, most of the attention was given to tracing how major Protestant denominations had drifted from the fundamental orthodoxy of Scripture to a form of theological liberalism. It was simply a slippery slope where many churches had almost imperceptibly abandoned positions of sound doctrine. In the second article, Robert Shindler who had helped author the articles, laid the blame for the down-grade at the feet of church leaders. It was his conviction that pastors and theologians were not earnestly contending for the faith as entreated in [Jude 3](#) and that an undesirable spirit of unbiblical “tolerance” had pervaded the church to its demise. In the third article, Spurgeon wrote with a very strong and almost militant tone. His criticism was that pulpits that were established for the preaching of the gospel had given way to a “*new and improved*” variety of Christianity that found itself substituting amusements for the preaching of the gospel. He actually stated that many had turned the church into a “*playhouse*”, and called what was happening as the deadly cobra of “**another gospel**”. In reality, it was this particular article that became the heart and focus of the ensuing controversy and it was a controversy that rocked the evangelical world. There were several other down-grade articles that were forthcoming, but the controversy was already well established and ultimately ended in Spurgeon leaving the Baptist Union and finally being censured. Within just a few years following the death of Spurgeon, the Baptist Union had almost com-

pletely succumbed to the new, modern theology. And history to date clearly validates that Spurgeon was more than correct in his assessment of the consequences of the false theology and methodologies that began to invade the church of his day. To this day, the evangelical church in England has never recovered from the liberal assault of Spurgeon's era.

The point in drawing attention to this controversy is simple. The easy-believism debate of our more modern time has very similar attributes. What took place in England in the 1800's is no different than what is happening in the modern church age in which we live. It is not that individuals are trying to destroy biblical faith within the church. The issue is that many are employing methods and messages that are aimed at trying to make the hard-core impact of the gospel more appetizing and acceptable to a cynical, sarcastic, and pessimistic world. The church has embraced a very slippery slope of pragmatism and spirit of worldliness that if left unchecked will leave the church without a Christ-centered message to a lost and dying world. Warren Wiersbe seems to have captured the state of evangelical affairs when he wrote,

"We have a love for novelty in the churches today: emotional movies, pageants, foot-tapping music, colored lights, etc. The man who simply opens the Bible is rejected while the shallow religious entertainer becomes a celebrity."

The very heart of the easy-believism debate is that the individual appealing to Christ for salvation does not have to be willing to submit to the Lordship of Christ. It is the idea that intellectual faith and verbal confession are more than sufficient to save, even though the individual by their life may continue to live in rebellion after their professed salvation experience. I.e., the initial act of a professed salvation does not require any substantiating evidence to its genuineness and substance. The heart of the issue is that easy-believism theology has completely severed justification from sanctification. This is an incredibly monumental theological misunderstanding to say the least.

Martyn Lloyd Jones has aptly stated that an individual cannot have Christ as their justification only, and then later decide to refuse or accept Him as their

sanctification. His point is clear that a person cannot just receive Christ as their Savior, while at the same time refusing to accept Him as their Lord. To the contrary, sanctification is an inherent part of salvation and is something that the believer must both understand and appropriate more and more in their Christian life. Faith in Christ is not simply trusting that the individual has obtained forgiveness of sin because inherent in faith is faithfulness. Genuine biblical faith leads to a "newness of life". Christ is the One who effects it, and the Holy Spirit is the One who appropriates it in the life of the believer.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has captured the essence of what happens in people's lives after they are saved. He says,

"Let me put it very plainly in this way: there is no point in our saying that we believe that Christ has died for us, and that we believe that our sins are forgiven, unless we can also say that for us old things are passed away and that all things become new; that our outlook towards the world and its method of living is entirely changed. It is not that we are sinless, nor that we are perfect, but that we have finished with that way of life. We have seen it for what it is, and we are new creatures for whom everything has become new."

In essence, any claim to justification that does not lead to transformation, or sanctification, is a spiritual charade and a bogus spiritual claim. Justification by God always leads to sanctification by the Spirit of God, and the corresponding nature of both components is always godly in what they produce. Justification would never lead to a sanctification that advocates sin as a means of promoting grace. The idea of such a preposterous and outrageous position is unthinkable and heretical. Once justification has taken place, sanctification is the result. They are inseparable. There cannot be one without the other.

Just the simple statement made by Paul in [Romans 6:11](#) that the new believer is now "**dead indeed to sin**" means that he has also passed into a newness of life and into a new spiritual realm that has within it a new principle of life which is righteousness. There is now the force of God's grace that is working in the life of the believer. Within the easy believism mentality, there appears to be a fundamental lack of understanding relative to grace. Grace not only justifies a person, but it also sanctifies that person. I.e., holiness begins where

justification ends. And if holiness does not spiritually materialize, then justification has not actually taken place. There cannot be justification without sanctification. It is a spiritual impossibility and a truth with which the modern church has lost touch.

Paul asks a very pertinent question in [Romans 6:1](#). He asks, **1What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?**

The word “**continue**” carries the idea of **habitual persistence**. W.E. Vine defines it as “to remain on, to continue long”. Zodhiates defines the word as “to continue in any state or course, to be constant or persevere in” and specifically to continue in “sin”. It should be encouraging that Paul is not referring to the daily sins and struggles that every Christian has. Rather, he is talking about **intentional, willful** sin on someone’s part, sin that is **a consistent habit of life**. Before salvation, it is the only way a person can live. But **after salvation**, after one has **been born again**, after a person has **received the super abounding grace of God** in their life, after they have been **given a new heart** and new desires, after they have been **indwelt by the Holy Spirit** - after all of that, the rhetorical question is can they still continue in their old sin with no change? And the obvious answer and conclusion is an emphatic **NO**.

What if there was a man who was always getting drunk, always angry, selling and taking drugs, and continually unfaithful to his wife. And he attends a church, hears the Word of God, and makes a “profession of faith” in Christ - but he never changes. He still gets drunk, he still becomes very angry, he still sells and takes drugs, and he is still unfaithful to his wife. Why would someone think that person was saved just because he had previously made an apparent profession of faith? What provides validity and proof to the genuineness profession? Is it not logical that the saving grace of God operating in a person’s life will bring about changes that reflect that saving grace of God? It cannot do anything else.

There is nowhere in Scripture where Paul makes any allowance for a believer continuing to live in and continuing to habitually practice sin. Paul told

Titus that the grace of God which brings and provides salvation, has appeared to all men and it teaches the believer how they are to live. [Titus 2:11-12](#) states, **1For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 2teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,**

Any teaching that is contrary to this is false teaching, and ultimately becomes an abuse of God’s grace and will have the direct result of offering a false salvation and a false assurance to those who have never truly been converted.

It seems apparent that there are many individuals who are sincerely interested in salvation, but without any evidence of actually having been saved. There is an unfortunate term often used to describe what it takes for someone to be saved. The term is “decisionism”. It is the false belief that a person is saved by providing some outward, visible, and tangible evidence of a decision that they have supposedly made internally. It might be by coming forward at a service, or by raising their hand to indicate some spiritual activity within their heart. It may be by baptism or signing a statement that the individual adheres to a certain creed, or actually joining a church and becoming a member. And all of these external evidences are often given as proof, and unfortunately often as assurance, that someone has actually experienced genuine salvation. But none of these acts are sufficient to attest to biblical salvation. In fact, all of these kinds of experiences can actually take the place of a genuine saving encounter with Christ. From a purely Scriptural basis, there is no place in all of Scripture where the evidence of salvation is someone walking down an aisle and telling another individual that they have “accepted” Christ. There is no proof text of that experience in the New Testament. Can that experience be possible and genuine? Absolutely! But the unfortunate fallout is that very often churches are filled with people who have never been truly converted, but who have been assured that they have been simply because they made some external response that was actually encouraged and advocated by the church itself.

The modern church has simply devised a way of salvation that simply is not biblical or saving. Arthur W. Pink in his article called “Present Day Evangelism”, states the following, *“Those preachers who tell sinners that they may be*

saved without forsaking their idols, without repenting, without surrendering to the Lordship of Christ, are as erroneous and dangerous as others who insist that salvation is by works, and that heaven must be earned by our own efforts.”

The solemn truth of the total depravity of man seems to have been completely ignored in the advance of modern evangelism. It is almost as if the desperate case and condition of the lost man has been totally disregarded and even discounted. Man in his lostness is spiritually corrupt by his very nature. And to make his condition even worse, he is completely unaware of his spiritual blindness and utter helplessness, and unconscious that his spiritual condition is one of being dead in trespasses and sin. To the contrary, the lost man believes that he is spiritually good and actually deserves salvation. So, the moment that someone who is preaching the Word of God casually modifies this condition of total depravity, the individual's salvific plight is even worsened.

What this downplaying of such critical and significant truth has done within the church is create an atmosphere where people do not want to be “preached at”. Once false doctrine and false methodologies have found a foothold in the church, they create an appetite for the superficial and the false. Modern church analysts are arguing that the current generation simply is not inclined to sit in a pew and just listen to someone preach. What the consumer wants is a spiritual experience that satisfies and comforts their ego, but not one that confronts their depravity. And so to satisfy the spiritual palate of the unbeliever, the church has resorted to philosophy, psychology, humor, skits, story-telling, and human opinion. The problem with that approach is that no matter how externally successful it may seem at times, it can never be spiritually transforming. Any preacher who desires to have God's blessing and God's results on his ministry must preach the Word without any compromise or apology. The worst thing that a preacher can do is to make people feel good about themselves when they should have their sin and rebellion confronted and corrected through the Word of God.

There are thousands of evangelical churches that have great difficulty with sound doctrine. They find it extremely difficult to tolerate any kind of strong

teaching that refutes their false doctrines, their personal sins, and calls them to a life of obedience and sacrifice.

II Timothy 4:3-4 states,

³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

This is the simple principle of supply and demand where the demand for soothing messages creates an unhealthy supply of teachers who are more than willing to tell people what they want to hear. Just the term “seeker sensitive” seems to be a reproach to the gospel. It is the church's way of marginalizing the hard and difficult demands of Scripture. It is a calculated effort to minimize the sinner's confrontation with the Word of God on their life. And to make it worse, those that are called on to preach the difficult portions of Scripture have seemingly devised a methodology of teaching that employs a kind of theological gymnastics to divert attention away from the things that are difficult to the things that are easy and soothing. How can someone called on to accurately and boldly proclaim the gospel message to lost men and women cleverly devise a way to avoid such Scriptural topics such as sin, judgment, hell, repentance, or Lordship? In fact, there is nothing in Scripture that would ever give the impression that those who preach and teach the Word of God should try and lure people into salvation with clever and creative approaches to the presentation of the gospel. **Acts 4:12** is as definitive as is possible,

¹²Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

In closing, it should be evident that this is a debate that will not end. The debate between free grace and easy believism vs. lordship salvation will not end in the near future. However, the issue for those who preach and teach the word of God with integrity is not how easy or how difficult one can make the message of salvation. No preacher of the gospel should ever have as his goal to provide the gospel in terms that are doctrinally tempered. To the contrary, even though the gospel is a simple message, it does not mean that it can be diluted for the sake of expediency or results. Obviously, the person who is not redeemed has no inclination to-

wards the difficult demands of the gospel such as repentance and forsaking those things that are inherently sinful. The issue is how clearly and accurately all of the attributes and nuances of a life transforming salvific message are presented. To oversimplify the embedded truths of the gospel without proper explanation is without any question a substantial error made by many. It proliferates a false and outward success that is in actuality an evangelical myth. There must be a substantial clarity to the gospel message that does not undermine its demands on the unbeliever.

Unfortunately, and very often without the wrong intent, the easy believism approach to evangelism has produced a generation of churches that are filled with unbelievers who have been assured of their salvation apart from any on-going evidence of that salvation in their life. Spiritual attributes such as commitment, obedience, faithfulness, and sacrifice seem almost non-existent in some churches and are not challenged as long as there is some superficial level of attendance. Very often the unbeliever's lack of spiritual substance is simply enhanced and augmented by an incomplete and deficient presentation of the gospel message. They have been convinced that they possess something that they do not possess. And sadly, if someone articulates their lack of meaningful spirituality with some level of "sincerity", then the church just accepts their sincerity as an authentic evidence of salvation. In essence, the cultural church has determined that discernment, reproof, and discipline are not necessary for biblical success. In a seeker sensitive culture, external results have simply taken precedence over doctrinal substance. The consumer has become predominant and the actual message subordinate, and the result is a generation of individuals who possess a form of godliness, but do not possess eternal life. The message of salvation in order to be the message of salvation must be biblical, clear, and accurate. A creative and alternative cultural gospel designed to stimulate and satisfy the unbeliever is not the gospel and has no saving efficacy whatsoever. And with this in mind, may God provide His strength, discernment, and courage to be faithful to the gospel message and to the methodologies of the New Testament.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ MacArthur, Romans 1-8, 316.
- ² MacArthur, Ashamed, 229-232.
- ³ www.rogershermansociety.org/easy-believism.htm
- ⁴ www.monergism.com/easybelieve.html
- ⁵ MacArthur, Gospel, ix.
- ⁶ MacArthur, Gospel, xi.
- ⁷ MacArthur, Gospel, xiii-xiv.
- ⁸ Kendall, 14-15.
- ⁹ MacArthur, Ashamed, 21-22.
- ¹⁰ MacArthur, Ashamed, 198.
- ¹¹ MacArthur, Ashamed, 200-201.
- ¹² MacArthur, Ashamed, 205.
- ¹³ MacArthur, Ashamed, 22-23.
- ¹⁴ Precept, II Timothy 4:3-4.
- ¹⁵ www.monergism.com/easybelieve.html
- ¹⁶ Murray, 375.
- ¹⁷ Fee, 500-501.
- ¹⁸ Lloyd-Jones, 120.
- ¹⁹ Lange, 199.
- ²⁰ Barnhouse, 10-12.
- ²¹ Vine, 228.
- ²² Zodhiates, 631.
- ²³ www.thehighway.com/presentdayevangelism/Pink.html
- ²⁴ www.thehighway.com/presentdayevangelism/Pink.html
- ²⁵ MacArthur, Ashamed, 36.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Barnhouse, Donald Grey. *Romans: God's Freed, Romans 6:1-7:25*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961.
- Fee, Gordon. *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/qna/easybelieve.html>. n.d.
- Kendall, R. T. "Once Saved, Always Saved." Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1983.
- Lange, John Peter. *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Romans and Corinthians*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Translated by Philip Schaff. Vol. 10. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960.
- Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Sanctified Through the Truth*. Westchester: Crossway, 1989.
- MacArthur, John. *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993.
- . *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988.
- . *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 1-8*. Chicago: Moody, 1991.
- Murray, Iain H. D. *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, n.d.

Pink, Arthur W. "Present Day Evangelism." *The Highway*. n.d. www.thehighway.com/presentdayevangelism/Pink.html.

Vine, W. E. *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984.

Wiersbe, Warren. "II Timothy 4:3-4 Commentary." *Precept Austin*. n.d. <http://preceptaustin.org/2Timothy4:3-4/htm>.

Williamson, Thomas. "Case Studies in Easy-Believism." *Rogers Herman Society*. n.d. www.rogershermansociety.org/easy-believism.htm.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*. Vol. Revised Edition. Chattanooga: AMG International, 1993.



Dr. Eddie Ildfonso

*West Los Angeles Living Word Christian Center
Los Angeles, California*

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary
Honduras, Pakistan, Zimbabwe Extensions
International Dean, Covington Theological Seminary*

Easy Believism

(Part 2)

Every month we choose a topic to write about that will challenge both the writers and the readers. This topic is no different and certainly has presented us with a dilemma. Do we approach this topic from the side of salvation or from the side of discipleship? Do not forget that this topic has two sides of the same coin: Salvation and Discipleship. I choose to take the latter for part 2 of this article.

There is so much to say from either side that it is our hope and prayer that it will both stimulate your thinking as well as your presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Bible Is Not Dated

1 Peter 1:23 (NASB)

²³ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

1 Peter 1:25 (NASB)

²⁵ BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

There are Christians among us today who seem to feel that their spiritual lives would have been greatly helped if they could have had voice-to-voice and person-to-person counsel from our Lord or from the Apostle Peter or Paul.

I know it is fair to say that if one of the apostles or any of the great early fathers of the church could return to this world from their yesteryear, there would not be room to contain the crowds that would rush in.

If it were that St. Augustus or Chrysostom or Francis of Assisi or Knox or Luther or any of the greats who have lived were present to speak, we would all give our closest attention and listen as though we were hearing indeed a very word from God.

Under the circumstances, we cannot hope to hear from men of God who centuries ago completed their ministries and went to be with the Lord. The voices of the great saints and mighty warriors of yesterday can no longer be heard in this twentieth first century.

However, there is good news for those who are anxious to hear a word from the Lord! If we have a mind to listen, we may still **"hear"** the voice of an apostle for we are dealing with the words written by the man, Peter. He was indeed a great saint, even though we may not consider him the greatest of the apostles. I think it is safe to say that he was the second of the apostles, Paul alone, perhaps, having a higher place than the man, Peter.

So, as we look into his message, Peter will be speaking to us, even though it is through an “interpreter.”

Often missionaries have told us of difficult times they have had with interpreters. The expression of the missionary may go in one way and come out with a different sense to the hearer, and I think when we expound the Scriptures, we are often guilty of being imperfect interpreters. I shall do the best I can to catch the spirit of the man, Peter, and to determine what God is trying to say to us and reduce the interference to a minimum.

Now, I supposed more people would like me if I were to declare that I preach the Bible and nothing but the Bible. I attempt to do that, but honesty compels me to say that the best I can do is to preach the Bible as I understand it. I trust that through your prayers and the Spirit of Christ my understanding may be right. If you pray and if I yield and trust, perhaps what we get from First Peter will indeed be approximately what Peter would say if he were here in person. We will stay as close as we can to the Word of the Living God.

Reputation for Being First

The man Peter had a reputation for being first because he was an impetuous man. He was either the first or among the very first in almost everything that took place and that touched him while he was alive.

For this reason, I suppose that Peter would have made a wonderful American! He usually opened his mouth and talked before he thought and that is a characteristic of many of us. He rushed to do what he had to do—and that is also characteristic of us.

From the record of the gospels, it appears that Peter may have been the first, or at least among the very first, to become a disciple of John the Baptist. He was among the first disciples who turned to Jesus when John the Baptist pointed and said:

John 1:29 (NASB)

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the

sin of the world!”

Peter was the first apostle called by our Lord to follow Him. I believe that Peter was the first convert for he was the first man to say:

Matthew 16:16 (NASB)

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Peter was among the very first to see our Lord after He had risen from the dead. There are those who insist that Peter was the first, believing that the Lord Jesus appeared to no one else until after a meeting with His beloved friend, Peter.

Also, remember that Peter was the first of the New Testament preachers. It is quite in keeping with the temperament of this man that when the Holy Spirit had come at Pentecost and there was opportunity for someone to stand and speak the Truth, Peter should be the man to do it.

I think there is no profound theological reason back of this. I think it is a matter of temperament and disposition. When 120 persons are suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit and it falls to the lot of one of them to leap up and express the wonder of what has just happened, it would be normal for the man Peter to be the one. So, he got to his feet and poured out that great sermon recorded in the second chapter of the book of Acts—the great sermon that converted 3,000 persons!

But Peter was a man, and in his early discipleship and ministry there were glaring contradictions and inconsistencies in his life. It is not possible for us to try to boast and say that this man, this second greatest of the apostles, never deviated one inch from the straight line from the moment of his conversion to the time of his death. I do believe in realism in religion and I do not think any good can come from hiding the bad and trying to reflect an unnatural righteousness which is not true to the whole character of the man.

Actually, I wish that every one of us could be like the angels or those strange creatures in the **first chapter of Ezekiel**, of whom it is said that when they went “each went straight forward” (**Ezekiel 1:9**).

Need To Go Straightforward

I do not know what that means precisely, but I do know that it is an intriguing test—when they went they went straight forward. I wish that from the time I was converted I had gone straight forward; but I did not and most of us have not. We zigzag on our way to heaven in place of flying a straight course. I am sorry about this. I don't excuse it, but I try to understand it!

Well, Peter was a bundle of contradictions and I take the position that it further glorifies the grace of God that He could take a weak and vacillating and inconsistent man like Peter and make Saint Peter out of him!

Read again all that the New Testament says about Peter and you will find glaring contradictions. In His very first meeting with Peter, Jesus said:

John 1:42 (NASB)

⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Jesus Himself in calling Peter gave him this new name meaning a rock, which is of course a solid and unshaking thing.

But this man—this “rock”—was so wavering that he denied his Lord! He clipped off a man's ear in an impatient act to defend his Master, yet within a few hours denied that he had ever met Jesus. He was prone to rush into a situation, to act without thinking and to apologize often. That was the rock—but a wavering rock—and that in itself is a contradiction!

I note also that Peter was not above rebuking his Lord and Master. He could walk up to Jesus and rebuke Him as though they were equals. But in the next moment, he might be down on his knees in a trembling reverence, crying:

Luke 5:8 (NASB)

⁸ But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

That was Peter—more daring than any of the apostles and often with more faith—but he had more daring than he had faith! Have you met any of God's children like that?

You remember that Peter was so daring that he

rushed out of the boat and actually walked on the water, and yet he had such little faith that it would not support his daring. So he sank, and then had to be helped by the Lord to keep him from drowning!

Yes, this man Peter was the first one to confess his Lord and then the first one to deny Him.

He was the man that Jesus called “**Blessed**” and a little later called him Satan. “**Blessed are you, Simon Barjona**”; then, “**Get behind me, Satan**” (**Matthew 16:17, 23**).

Matthew 16:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 16:23 (NASB)

²³ But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan!” You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.”

I mention a few other contradictions about this man, Peter. He is said by a portion of the Christian (Roman Catholic) church to be a Vicar of Christ on earth, and yet Peter himself never seemed to have found out about it! He never referred to himself as the vicar or vice-regent of Christ; he called himself an apostle, one of the elders. That's all. The humblest elder in any church has a title as great as Peter ever claimed for himself, except that he said he was one of the apostles.

I could point out that Peter is supposed by many to have been the first of the popes and yet he was overshadowed by one of his fellow apostles, for without question, Paul overshadowed Peter.

Paul Was Greater

The man Peter was a great man, but the man Paul was greater. It would seem to me that if God were to select a pope, the first one, he would have chosen Paul, the mightiest, the most intellectual of them all, rather than the wavering and inconsistent Peter.

I point out, too, that Peter fades out of the book of Acts and as he does so, Paul moves in. By the time we

come to the end of the Acts, Peter is not visible anywhere. Paul fills the horizon and when God would lay the foundations of His church, forming its doctrines deep and strong, He chose Paul and not Peter.

So, this is a simple and very brief sketch of the man, Peter. Many other things could be said about him, but he is able to speak to us again out of his New Testament letters for he was declared an apostle to the Jews as Paul was to the Gentiles.

The Jews had been scattered abroad and that is the reason for this letter from Peter. They had been dispersed into many nations and at the day of Pentecost, they had come back to Jerusalem, numbering into the hundreds of thousands. Then when Peter preached, they were converted in large numbers, and returning to their own countries, carried the message of the risen Savior and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Thus there were colonies of Christians in all of the provinces of Rome and Peter felt that he was to be pastor to that great number of Jewish Christians scattered abroad. He accepted his apostleship to the Jews most seriously and wrote his first pastoral letter to the Jewish converts to Christ scattered throughout Roman Asia.

Actually, the circumstances in the Roman provinces that brought forth this letter from Peter were extremely grievous. The Roman emperors had begun harsh persecution of the Christians. Jesus had told them that they were to expect persecution and now it was beginning to break over their heads like waves over a sinking ship.

One of the men coming into great political power was the emperor Nero, who is remembered in history as the most incredibly wicked of all the sons of Rome. His life and his acts and his habits are among the most wretched and offensive in all of history so no one can mention in public all the crimes of which he was guilty. But he was the emperor—and Peter and the rest of the Christians were under his control.

It is recorded of Nero that he set the city of Rome on fire and then in his own tower played the harp and sang Greek songs while Rome burned. But then he became frightened, realizing that the Romans would turn on him if they knew he had set the fire, so he looked around for a scapegoat—and who could be easier to blame than the troublesome Chris-

tians?

These believers were vocal and they were in evidence everywhere. So, Nero turned on the Christians as Hitler turned on the Jews and he had them slain by the tens of thousands. Property was taken from them, they were thrown into jail, they were tortured in many ways and they were killed—all of this throughout the regions of Bithynia and Pontius and Cappadocia and Roman Asia.

Peter, the dear man of God, knew what was happening. He had seen some of it himself in the city of Jerusalem and he knew the fury of the persecution. Out of this knowledge came his letter of encouragement, a letter inspired by the Spirit of God as he waited on the Lord in long, amazing hours of prayer for his suffering Christian brothers and sisters.

I think it must be said of Peter that within himself he felt very keenly the loneliness of the “strangers” to whom he wrote. They were scattered, they were persecuted, they were in heaviness, and they were isolated in this world for their Christian faith.

The Genuine Christian Is a Lonely Soul

The Christian, the genuine Christian, realizes that he is indeed a lonely soul in the middle of a world which affords him no fellowship. I contend that if the Christian breaks down on occasion and let's himself go in tears, he ought not to feel that he is weak. It is a normal loneliness in the midst of a world that has disowned him. He has to be a lonely man!

Those to whom Peter wrote were strangers in many ways and first of all because they were Jews. They were Jews scattered among the Romans and they never could accept and bow to the Roman ways. They learned the Greek tongue in the world of their day, but they never could learn the Roman ways. They were Jews, a people apart, even as they are today.

Besides that, they had become Christian believers so they were no longer merely Jews. Their sense of alienation from the world around them had increased and doubled. They were not only Jews—unlike the Gentiles around them—but they were Christians, unlike the Jews as well as unlike the Gentiles!

This is the reason that it is easily possible for a Christian believer to be the loneliest person in the world under a set of certain circumstances. This sense of not belonging is a part of our Christian heritage. That sense of belonging in another world and not belonging to this one steals into the Christian bosom and marks him off as being different from the people around him. Many of our hymns have been born out of that very loneliness, that sense of another and higher citizenship!

Citizenship Is In Heaven

That is exactly the thing that keeps a Christian separated—knowing that his citizenship is not on earth at all but in heaven above, and that he looks for the Savior to come. Who is there that can look more earnestly for the coming of the Lord Jesus than the one who feels that he is a lonely person in the middle of a lonely world?

Peter loved the Lord Jesus Christ and his letters to suffering believers clearly reveal that great and sweeping changes had come into his life. He had become stable, he had become solid, and he had become the steady and dependable servant of Christ. Now he was able to see that suffering for Christ is one of the privileges of Christian life and he prepared his brothers and sisters for the future with his counsel:

1 Peter 4:12-13 (NASB)

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

Fellow believers, it is the same kind of world in which we live in this twentieth first century. We do well to let the Apostle Peter speak to us!

No matter whom you are, no matter what your education, you can read Peter's First Epistle and understand it reasonably well and you can say to yourself, "The Holy Spirit is saying this to me!"

There isn't anything dated in the Book of God.

When I go to my Bible, I find dates but no dating. I mean that I find the sense and the feeling that everything here belongs to me. There is nothing here that is obviously for another age, another time, another people.

Many other volumes and many other books of history contain the passionate outpourings of the minds of men on local situations but we soon find ourselves bored with them. Unless we are actually doing research we do not care that much about something dated, something belonging only to another age.

But when the Holy Spirit wrote the epistles, through Peter and Paul and the rest, He wrote them and addressed them to certain people and then made them so universally applicable that every Christian who reads them today in any part of the world, in any language or dialect, forgets that they were written to someone else and says, "This was addressed to me. The Holy Spirit had me in mind. This is not antiquated and dated. This is the living Truth for me—now! It is just as though God had just heard of my trouble and is speaking to me to help me and encourage me in the time of my distress!"

Brethren, this is why the Bible stays young always. This is why the Word of the Lord God is as fresh as every new sunrise, as sweet and graciously fresh as the dew on the grass the morning after the clear night—because it is God's Word to man!

This is the wonder of divine inspiration and the wonder of the Book of God!



The Talmid is published by:

***West Los Angeles
Living Word Christian Center***

6520 Arizona Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90045 USA
(310) 645-2522 or (310) 665-0137

Email: admin@wlalwcc.org
Web Site: www.wlalwcc.org