



INTRODUCTION

After receiving bachelor's degrees from Cincinnati Bible Seminary (now Cincinnati Christian University) in 1959, and the University of Cincinnati in 1962, I spent the next five academic years as a full-time graduate student at Westminster Theological Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary. The former was very conservative and very, very Reformed (Calvinist). The latter was moderately liberal, but being Presbyterian it was also part of the Reformed tradition. Both seminaries thus had roots in the Protestant Reformation and held it in high regard. As a result, during these five years of graduate study I gained considerable familiarity with Reformation theology, and became particularly impressed with the life and thought of Martin Luther. It was during these formative years that my lifelong interest in the doctrine of grace was born and nurtured.

During this same time period I was also spending a lot of time trying to digest the message and structure of Paul's letter to the *Romans*. I tested my growing knowledge by teaching lessons and preaching sermons on *Romans* in local churches. I was overwhelmed by the way the Apostle has in this letter laid out for us the sharp contrast between law and grace as ways one may seek salvation. From that time until now, the way I teach the doctrine of grace is still anchored to the book of *Romans*.

In the fall of 1967 I joined the graduate faculty as professor of theology at Cincinnati Bible Seminary (CCU). The dean, Dr. Lewis Foster, asked me to teach a course in NT Theology. I was not exactly sure what he meant by this, so I asked him how he wanted me to

approach “New Testament Theology.” He said something like, “Teach it in whatever way you think is best.” So I decided to build this course around what I had been learning about grace, using *Romans 1–8* as a framework for presenting the material. After three years I changed the name of the course to “The Doctrine of Grace.” Altogether, since

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1967, I have taught this course at least 68 times, with a total of 1,831 students. It has undergone considerable development along the way, with the latest revision of the course outline coming in the fall of 2008.

“The Doctrine of Grace” has become my “signature” course, and I am delighted to continue teaching it until my teaching career ends. I do not know when this will happen; but since I am already past my allotted “threescore and ten [70]” years of life (*Ps 90:10*), it will no doubt be sooner rather than later. Thus I have decided to preserve the contents of this seminary course by putting it into book form, which now becomes a part of College Press’s new series of “What the Bible Says About” books.

My approach to teaching theology as such may be called *practical biblical theology*. In terms of theological method, I am fully committed to what is called “systematic theology.” That is, I believe that the ultimate form in which we should present the teachings of the Bible is *subject by subject*. This approach is based on the conviction that

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every part of the Bible is fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that the Bible is thus unified in its teaching about any subject.

It is also based on the understanding that reason and logic are part of the very essence of God, and that human beings as created in God’s image reflect this rational nature of God. This means that God is able to communicate rationally with us, and we are able to understand what He is saying to us in His Word.

One of the subjects that permeates the biblical writings is *salvation*, or *how sinners may be saved*. This is traditionally referred to as *soteriology*, from the Greek words having to do with salvation. The biblical teaching about grace is a part of this category. The approach to grace that I use in my course, and now in this book, embraces most of the usual aspects of soteriology.

One reason some are wary of the systematic approach to theology is that they see this method abused by many. Many works of theology are more interested in what *other theologians* have written—Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Wesley, Barth, Tillich, etc.—than in what the *Bible itself* says. This is especially true in more liberal circles. When I entered Princeton Seminary in 1965, a conservative upperclassman warned me that liberals considered “History of Doctrine” (my major) to be the study of the writings of theologians who lived from AD 100 to about AD 1800, and “Systematic Theology” to be the study of the writings of theologians who have lived from about AD 1800 (the time of Friedrich Schleiermacher) to the present. An example of this is a book written by Harold Ditmanson, *Grace in Experience and Theology*. When I first saw the announcement of this book’s impending publication (Augsburg, 1977), I had high hopes that it could be a required text for my course. When I got a copy and saw its contents, I was highly disappointed. While it does not ignore biblical teaching, its main emphases are philosophical, sociological, and historical. I have noticed that this is how theology is taught in some seminaries as well.

Though my doctoral program at Princeton Seminary was focused on History of Doctrine, I have never been tempted to take the above approach to Systematic Theology. When I study and teach theology, I am asking one simple question: what does the *Bible*—the *whole Bible*—say about this subject? That is my approach here, for the subject of grace. *Biblical content* is what matters. What others say about the subject can be useful for illuminating and illustrating biblical teaching, and I often use it for these purposes. But the main point is still: what does the *Bible* say? Also, according to biblical mandate (*Tts 1:9*), sometimes the teachings of men have to be set forth in order “to refute those who contradict” sound doctrine. In order to attain maturity and “unity of the faith” (*Eph 4:13*), we must expose false doctrine so that Christians will no longer be “tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (*Eph 4:14*). But the ultimate goal is still “speaking the truth in love” (*Eph 4:15*), as it is set forth in the Word of God.

Also, my approach to teaching and writing theology has mostly been *practical*. Now, I can write for academic audiences if I choose to do so,¹

¹ See, for example, my unpublished doctoral dissertation, “Covenant and Baptism in the Theology of Huldreich Zwingli” (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

but my main goal has always been to teach and inform church leaders whose main work will be in the local church. Thus I have tried to present my understandings in ways that are clear, concise, and relevant. This does not mean that I have ignored the more academic material myself, but I believe that it is not necessary to include a lot of this in my instruction. This has been true of my course in “The Doctrine of Grace,” and it is true of this book. It is not my purpose here to enter into the many scholarly debates related to this subject. This is very practical material.

Much of the content of this book has previously been presented in briefer form and on different levels in some of my earlier books, especially *His Truth*, a very brief treatment of sin and salvation themes; *Being Good Enough Isn't Good Enough*, later titled *Thirteen Lessons on Grace*; some sections of *What the Bible Says about God the Redeemer*; my College Press commentary on Romans; some chapters of *Baptism: A Biblical Study*; and the relevant chapters in *The Faith Once for All*. So what am I hoping to accomplish by writing this book? My general purpose is to present a comprehensive doctrine of salvation, bringing all the biblical material together in a more complete and more systematic way than I have done up to now.

In presenting my understanding of the doctrine of grace, I am also trying to accomplish a deeper purpose, namely, to heal the division between the Restoration Movement and the Evangelical world. In my judgment the RM historically has had a serious lack of understanding of what it means to be saved by grace. But at the same time (until recently, at least) it has had a strong commitment to the biblical view of Christian baptism as a salvation event. These two positions are somewhat related, in that a defense of salvation by works has often been seen as a necessary part of the defense of salvific baptism. This compromise of grace has often resulted in the RM being regarded in Evangelical circles as heretical outcasts. We are regarded as having forfeited the biblical view of grace by making baptism a work of salvation. And, unfortunately, very often this is exactly what we do.

In a similar way, I have long regarded Evangelicalism (insofar as it embodies the main thrust of the Protestant Reformation) as having a

Theological Seminary, 1971). See also “Understanding God: God and Time,” in *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, vol. 2, ed. William R. Baker (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2006) 64-85; and “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Brand (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006) 70-134.

rich and valid understanding of grace, one from which we in the RM may greatly benefit. But at the same time, because of its extreme “faith only” (*sola fide*) approach to salvation as found in Zwingli’s revisionist approach to baptism, I see Evangelicalism as being seriously lacking in its understanding of baptism as a saving event. Their separation of baptism from salvation is rightly regarded by traditional restorationists as serious false doctrine, with the concept of “faith only”—not salvific baptism—being the real heresy.

In my judgment, both approaches—traditional restorationism and *sola fide* Evangelicalism—are wrong. The difficulty is the ubiquitous theological demon of *false choice*. In other words, both sides seem to think that the two positions briefly described above are the only choices, and that these choices are contradictory and exclusive. *Either* one will hold to a salvific view of baptism, *or* he will accept the Reformation concept of grace.

This is why many in the RM, having become enlightened concerning grace, have abandoned the biblical view of baptism and have accepted

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Evangelicalism *in toto*, sometimes even to the point of embracing Calvinism. Confronted with these positions as the only possibilities, they opt for the latter.

This is illustrated in an episode that involved me in early 2002. On December 30, 2001, Dennis DeVries (whose background seems to be the *a cappella* churches of Christ) sent this e-mail message to Standard Publishing, in Cincinnati, Ohio:

Dear Standard Publishing:

I’ve drawn up a comparative study of the traditional Churches of Christ and Evangelical Christianity’s doctrine of justification. Would you please look it over (at www.cofcdilemma.org)? There is a figure comparative at the bottom of the web page that you may find helpful. Thank you.

On January 2, 2002, Sam Stone, then editor of *Christian Standard* (published by Standard Publishing), forwarded this e-mail to me with the following request:

Jack, could you look this over and let me know what you think? I hate to impose on your time like this, but thought it might be of interest to you also. Thanks, Sam

I did indeed check the website; in fact, I checked it again just a few minutes ago. I found the “figure comparative” in its updated version (opposite).

The letters of the web address, *cofcdilemma*, are short for “Church of Christ Dilemma,” and the website is described as “a comparative study of evangelical Christianity’s and the Church of Christ (Stone/Campbell movement) doctrine of justification.” When I originally checked the site back in 2002, it had this statement of purpose: “Our ministry purpose is to respectfully prompt or compel the traditional Churches of Christ to prayerfully re-examine their doctrine of justification.” When I examined it again (in 2008) its purpose had expanded considerably:

Churches of Christ often begin their study of the gospel by closely examining the conversions listed in book of *Acts* [sic]. . . . Here the assumption is made that if a person will follow all of the same commands as the first century believers did at salvation, you can be saved as well.

Unfortunately such a preconceptual view of the gospel can, and often does, prevent someone from ever truly understanding how it is that a person can be saved by personal faith in Jesus Christ, and thus can lead a person into a salvation theology that can only be characterized as justification by works.

Here *Church of Christ Dilemma* seeks to explain the oft-misunderstood doctrine of justification by faith to those in the Churches of Christ and provide answers to many of the objections they have regarding this doctrine.

When I originally examined the website at Bro. Stone’s request, the following was my initial, basic analysis of the “dilemma” as presented on this website:

DeVries rightly identifies a strong element of works salvation in churches of Christ (this applies to both the instrumental and the non-instrumental branches), and he desires to remedy this works-salvation stance by substituting for it an undiluted Evangelical faith-onlyism. On the website his heroes are D. James Kennedy, J. Vernon McGee, and R. C. Sproul. The only church of Christ writer who has it right, he says, is Max Lucado (who, in recent years, has become less and less a representative of the churches of Christ). DeVries recommends Jay Adams’ book, *Meaning and Mode of Baptism*. I.e., he has embraced the Zwinglian view of baptism entirely; all references to baptism for salvation are referring to spiritual baptism only.

The source of righteousness required for justification

As understood by the traditional Churches of Christ:
God has provided mankind a rational plan of salvation that anyone can understand and follow.
By following this plan (i.e., the command requirements of the New Testament) forgiveness has now been provided to the believer.

How the righteousness of God is received

Forgiveness is provided to the believer by his own cooperation and obedience to God's N.T. command requirements.
For example, if the believer will obey God's 5 step plan of salvation (hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized), he can now be saved, providing he continues to live and worship in accordance to what is required in the New Testament.

Underlying reason/rational [sic]

Man has the moral power and ability within his own humanity to live in obedience to all the commands that God requires.
When man chooses to cooperate and live in obedience to them, he can now be saved.

As understood by evangelical Christianity:

The righteousness that God provides is a gift and its substance is both the perfect life of Jesus Christ and his atoning, sacrificial death.

This righteousness that is applied to us both cleanses our sin and also provides the perfect righteousness we need.

This righteousness is applied to us through our faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Author's note: Certainly the righteousness that God provides will also bring with it the added benefit of a holy life in that of the believer. But it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ applied to us by faith that makes us holy before God, without blemish and free from accusation.)

Because of the fall of Adam, man lost the moral power and ability to be saved by the principle of keeping commands and laws.

Therefore, according to God's set purpose and foreknowledge, He has provided perfect righteousness through faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

This analysis is still valid. The current website says, "Evangelical Christianity does believe that we must be baptized in order to be saved—but certainly not in the same way [as the Church of Christ understands it]. Let the reader understand that we are talking about true, actual or Holy Spirit Baptism rather than rite, ritual or 'water' baptism." Indeed, "water baptism in evangelical Christianity is understood in the same light as communion in that it is an ordinance practiced by those who are already saved. Therefore what evangelical Christianity means when it says that we are saved through baptism is the believer's real or actual baptism of the Holy Spirit that comes upon us at conversion."

Back in January of 2002, after examining DeVries' website, I sent the following general analysis to Brother Sam Stone:

Dear Sam:

I have looked at most of the material DeVries has on his internet site. He is quite correct in his analysis of and criticism of the traditional churches of Christ (non-instrumental AND instrumental) view of salvation, which is definitely oriented toward works salvation. But he is seriously, seriously, SERIOUSLY wrong in thinking that the solution to this is the traditional Reformation/Evangelical approach, accepted *in toto* without a similar critical analysis.

It is true that we need to learn a lot from Evangelicalism, and many of the correctives that DeVries advocates are appropriate. But he has just accepted the whole package as is, which is just as wrong as accepting the traditional C. of C. view as is. Thus his views are quite dangerous, since they will appeal to those who sense the problems in the churches of Christ but who will then think the only solution is to swallow the Evangelical view whole. This is a classic case of false choice.

My own approach to the doctrine of salvation has been similarly critical of the traditional Restoration Movement view, but I am also critical of the standard Evangelical view. Both are wrong. I have tried to present a theology that incorporates the truth from both sides, but eliminates the errors from both sides. Anyone familiar with my course on the Doctrine of Grace will immediately recognize the problem with DeVries' views.

Is there a "dilemma" for the churches of Christ, or for traditional restorationists in general, or for anyone else? There is indeed a *question*: how can we accept a salvific view of baptism without sacrificing a grace view of salvation? Evangelicals typically say "We can't!" and

simply opt for the latter while rejecting the former. Many restorationists also say “We can’t!” and thus opt for the former while in practice denying the latter. But we must remember: a *dilemma* exists only when none of the existing choices seem acceptable, or when it seems that one must accept as true two or more choices that seem to contradict. But that is not the case in this situation. We can accept *both* the salvific view of baptism *and* the grace view of salvation. They do not contradict! At the same time we must reject *both* the traditional works-salvation of restorationists, *and* the faith-only doctrines of Zwinglian Evangelicalism. An underlying theme of this book is to show how this can all be accomplished.

My main purpose, though, is simply to present the biblical teaching on what it means to be saved by grace, especially in light of Paul’s teaching in Romans.