

Grace Under Fire: The Fallout of Lordship Faith Teaching

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Introduction

Recently I attended the funeral of an elderly Mormon lady, a dear friend of mine and of my family's for several decades. I'll refer to her as "Jane." In one of the eulogies given the speaker commented that in her dying days Jane had expressed fears that her church tithes might not have been paid up to date. As I pondered what had just been said, I thought, how tragic, how sad that a person should have to live in such bondage, doubt and fear right up to the point of death. I silently felt grateful to God that at least we, as evangelical Christians, don't have to live our lives in such enslavement to duty shrouded by panic and uncertainty of salvation. My thoughts raced to John 10:27-30: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." [NIV as are all refs.]¹ I rejoiced in the warm snuggling grasp of our Lord's hands, saving and preserving each and every person who comes to salvation by faith in Christ alone. But, I reflected, don't many Christians live out their lives under precisely the same cloud of insecurity, apprehension and angst experienced by Jane? Do all evangelicals really act so differently than she?

What, then, is the defining distinctive hallmark that sets evangelical Christianity apart from Mormonism, the JW's, Roman Catholicism, and indeed, every other religious belief system? Free Grace theology states it best: "We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Every other religious structure has a works-based salvation plan at its core. But aren't many evangelical writers and pastors guilty of promoting a similar type of works-for-salvation system of their own? Certainly, proponents of Lordship Salvation have been accused of teaching just such a salvation plan despite their vehement denials. Much has been written on this debate. I will not rehash it here; however, this paper will describe some of the pernicious fallout of Lordship Salvation teaching on the lives of believers especially and on some unbelievers as well. For additional study of the Lordship debate, I refer the reader to some of the best works that I have read on the subject: 1. Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response, GraceLife Edition* (Burleson, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 1992, 1997). 2. Fred Chay and John P. Correia, *The Faith that Saves: The Nature of Faith in the New Testament* (Phoenix, AZ: Grace Line, Inc., 2008). 3. Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Chicago: Moody Press, SP Publications, 1989, 1997). 4. Fred R. Lybrand, *Back to Faith: Reclaiming Gospel Clarity in an Age of Incongruence* (San Antonio, TX: Fred R. Lybrand, Xulon Press, 2009). 5. Thomas M. Cucuzza, *Secure Forever! God's Promise or Our Perseverance?* (St. Cloud, MN: Thomas M. Cucuzza, Xulon Press, 2007). 6. Lou Martuneac, *In Defense of the Gospel: Biblical Answers to Lordship Salvation*

(LaVergne, TN: Lou Martuneac, Xulon Press, 2006, 2010).

The Fallout of Lordship Faith Teaching

Battered! The Father Serra Syndrome

Father Junipero Serra was an 18th century Franciscan priest who is famous for founding the Roman Catholic mission system throughout western Mexico and California. He is known to have been a flagelist, that is, one who would regularly pummel himself with a whip in order to exorcise his personal demons (sinful thoughts and attitudes). In a California history course in college, I learned that on more than one occasion Father Serra had to be physically restrained by his assistants to prevent him from flogging himself to death.

Do some Christians today beat themselves up as Father Serra did? Oh, maybe they don't do so physically, but do they torment themselves mentally and emotionally over their struggles with sin? Listen to the following composite of one who is caught up in such a pattern of conflicted self-deprecating thinking: "James is a young man with a different set of problems, the greatest one being lust. Though he has never actually committed fornication, James struggles continually with impure thoughts. He lives in dread that his Christian friends will discover what is happening inside his brain. Attached to this mental impurity is a sense of deep shame, a shame that permeates his feelings about himself and his position before God."ⁱⁱ James desperately needs a regular healthy dosage of the preaching of God's abundant awesome gift of grace in the believer's life. He also would benefit tremendously by the warm understanding embrace of fellow Christian brothers and sisters.

The teaching and preaching of Lordship Salvation can foster a tremendous state of anxiety and doubt for some believers because its precepts demand a high level of purity of thought and lifestyle undergirded by the constant threat of not having been blameless enough or virtuous enough to merit salvation. Recently I witnessed a heart-wrenching testimony from a young Christian man whose assurance of salvation was decimated by the reading of a best-selling book which promulgates a very condemning form of Lordship Salvation doctrine. Out of respect for the young man I'll share just a brief portion of what he said without giving his name: "there is no hope for most of us to ever be like the one who is not lukewarm. There is no hope for me anymore, for I thought I was a Christian for over 15 years, but I am according to the scriptures 'lukewarm' and will not be accepted into heaven May God have mercy on us all" Hearing a sad profession such as this reminds me of why it is so crucial for Free Grace teachers and writers to proclaim strongly the message of God's grace and to counter the harmful repercussions of Lordship Faith preaching. I wonder if any of these popular Lordship pastors and writers ever pause to consider the fallout, the damage and pain that they might potentially inflict through preaching and publishing their judgmental diatribes. Who will pick up the broken pieces of shattered lives?

Driven! When is Enough Enough?

Some Christians live in a constant state of tension and dread, always ill at ease, restless, uncertain, never knowing when they've done enough; they're never quite able to get a grasp on assurance. One of the consistent marks of Lordship Faith teaching is that it sets very lofty (some would say *unattainable*) standards of normative Christian achievement. After all, their teachers might say, didn't Jesus establish the ideals for us in the Sermon on the Mount? Pity the average churchgoer who may not appear to be very dedicated to God or to be very active in serving him. She might find herself listed among the ranks of the half-hearted or, dare I say, the "lukewarm"; if so, certain Lordship Faith leaders would almost certainly brand her as unsaved. But who sets the criteria for Christian attainment and who gauges the hearts and motivations of the congregation? How many years must one actively serve God? Ten, twenty, thirty, fifty? Must good works be obvious to men or can they be quietly noticeable before God? Are any periods of failing allowed? For how long? Is working in a secular job acceptable or must one quit her job and go to the mission field? Do true "on-fire" believers have to sell their fancy cars and houses and live like paupers? The questions are endless and the answers are few. And, one of the saddest questions of all is, how many unbelievers are put off by Lordship teachers' unreasonable up-front demands of commitment, surrender and change of lifestyle in order for one to be allowed into the kingdom? Rather, shouldn't Christians be giving them the *good news*, the *grace news* of John 3:16, Acts 16:30-31 and Ephesians 2:8-9?

Listen to the story of a *driven* believer: "Betty is as reliable as Mother Teresa, as dedicated to Christ as one can be. . . . But no matter how much Betty does, she always feels she's not doing enough, because she also feels that somehow she isn't quite pleasing God. This haunting sense of God's disapproval drives her from Bible study to prayer group, from buying each 'New and Improved System for Personal Devotions' at her local Christian bookstore and joining every church outreach program to standing at every opportunity to recommit her life to Christ. In spite of her 'gold-medal performance' as a Christian, Betty continues to feel that God considers her a failure."ⁱⁱⁱ Is this really the way that God wants Christians to live? Wouldn't God want us to live lives characterized by confidence, freedom and grace?

Gutting the Gospel! Eternal Security or a Dangerous Mixture of Faith and Works?

A popular singing group named "Chicago" released a hit song in 1969 entitled, "Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?" The beginning goes, "As I was walking down the street one day . . . a man came up to me and asked me what the time was that was on my watch, yeah . . . and I said . . . Does anybody really know what time it is? . . . Does anybody really care? . . . If so I can't imagine why . . . We've all got time enough to cry . . ."^{iv} Quietly as I considered the evangelical scene today and the vast pervasive impact of Lordship Faith

teaching upon the Christian community at large, my thoughts raced back to the chorus of the Chicago song: “Does anybody really know what time it is? . . . Does anybody really care?” I mused, “Does anybody really know what *true grace* is? . . . Does anybody really care?” Sometimes I feel as though those of us who embrace a Free Grace understanding of the gospel in response to the onslaught of Lordship indoctrination are trying to hold back an avalanche with a snow shovel. I take heart in knowing that there are learned men of grace like those in the leadership of Free Grace Alliance who declare boldly and clearly the biblical message of God’s grace.

When examining the faith vs. works debate, we observe that a cultist might say, “A person is saved by faith plus works.” A Lordship proponent may declare, “One is saved by faith *that* works.” Both have added works to the salvation message, a toxic combination to be sure. Lordship Salvation doctrine flows out of, or is synonymous with, the strong Calvinist teaching of *perseverance* (the *P* of the Calvinist acronym *TULIP*). Listen to the following quotations from John MacArthur on the teaching of perseverance, followed with responses by Dr. Thomas Cucuzza (Cucuzza holds that the proper emphasis should be placed upon God’s *preservation* of the saints, as in John 10:28-29). MacArthur: “Any doctrine of eternal security that leaves out perseverance distorts the doctrine of salvation itself.”^v MacArthur also admitted that what is commonly called “lordship salvation” is, “nothing more than the doctrine of perseverance!”^{vi} Cucuzza’s response: “*Look closely at that statement* [referring to MacArthur’s first statement]. Is he not saying that there must be perseverance to be eternally secure? Perseverance has to do with *our faithfulness and works*. This man is saying that you and I must persevere, or work, to be saved. This is why, in the same article, MacArthur calls lordship salvation, ‘working-faith salvation.’ This is clearly mixing works with faith.”^{vii}

Myopic Fixation! An Unhealthy Gaze Within

Thin is in! The modeling industry that venerates beautiful skinny young women has spurred on a culture fixated on flawless looks. “About five million people in the United States, most of them teenage girls, have anorexia, a psychological condition closely associated with low self-esteem, intense perfectionism, and a pressing need for control. At least 1000 people diagnosed with anorexia die each year.”^{viii} The article went on to say that this dreaded disease anorexia nervosa is “Turning children into living skeletons!”^{ix}

Spiritual Anorexia: Could it be that a myriad of Christians suffers from such a spiritual malady, an anorexic *starvation of grace*, similarly devastating to the many lives it afflicts? What might be the cause? In his article “Meditations on the Psalms,” Francis Dixon describes one of the common causes of depression among Christians. He labels it, “*Too much unhealthy introspection.*”^x Dixon elaborates: “we must at all costs avoid plunging into an unhealthy, unspiritual, morbid introspection that keeps looking inside and can see nothing but bad. The look we must cultivate is indicated in Hebrews 12:2 and Colossians 3:1-2. Many of God’s people are spiritually, mentally and physically ill because they will keep looking at themselves!”^{xi} Dr. Charlie Bing similarly describes how Lordship Faith teachers cultivate a harmful inward scrutiny in

believers by emphasizing that faith must be “qualified”: “And so you read Lordship Salvation teachers using a lot of terms to qualify faith, sometimes to disqualify faith with negative terms like ‘spurious faith,’ ‘counterfeit faith,’ ‘intellectual faith,’ ‘false faith,’ ‘insincere faith,’ ‘pseudo faith,’ ‘emotional faith,’ and ‘head faith.’ Yet none of these expressions is found in the Bible.”^{xii} In addition he states, “If we grant to Lordship Salvation that faith must be qualified, that there are different kinds of faith, we surrender objectivity to subjectivity. And assurance becomes impossible.”^{xiii}

An Unhealthy Self Image: A classic old hymn of the faith begins, “Alas! and did my Savior bleed? And did my Sov’reign die? Would He devote that sacred head for sinners such as I? (Originally the last line read, ‘for such a worm as I).”^{xiv} One area of fallout of the inward scrutinizing mentioned above is a tendency for Christians to consider themselves as very lowly, the lowliest of the low, having little or no value before God. I call this *worm theology*. This kind of thinking is wrong. I’ve heard it referred to as, *stinkin’ thinkin’*. Christians do have worth! Our worth is based upon our relationship and standing with God by grace through faith in his Son Christ Jesus, NOT in or of our own good works. We are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Psalm 139:13-14 trumpets joyfully, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

Dr. Johnson C. Philip (PhD in quantum-nuclear physics and a prolific writer on Christian apologetics) explains in his article, “A Christian’s Self Worth,” the dangers of a works-based/ achievement-based righteousness: “The world has its own standard’s of evaluating one’s worth. Most of them are based upon performance or appearance [sic]. Such standards are very deceptive for the Christian because spiritual self-worth is never to be evaluated on the basis of worldly standards. It will give rise to several problems, some of which are: 1. We never know when we have achieved enough. There are no standards for lasting achievement. . . . 2. If achievement is our measuring-stick, then comparison with others becomes essential. Comparison is a very dangerous game because it brings out the worst inside our hearts. . . . 3. Since no person can be a consistent achiever, false fronts become necessary to keep others thinking that all is well with us. . . . The Lord does not want any of His children to be frustrated in their lives. He has provided for their needs in unique ways. One of this [sic] is to make all of us equal in Christ. We all have the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us so that in front of God we are fully and uniquely righteous as far as our position is concerned.”^{xv}

Conclusion

What, then, is the essential fallout of Lordship Faith teaching? It is an adding to the straightforward clear-cut gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. It is basically an enslavement to doubt and fear, the dread of not having done enough to be found pleasing to God (and men). It is the apprehension of not being sinless enough, pure enough, or holy enough. What, in my opinion, is the greatest fallout? It is an annihilation of assurance of salvation!

In his best-selling book, *The Grace Awakening*, Charles Swindoll relates the baffling true historical narrative of how the slaves were legally declared free by the

ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in late 1865, yet many or most of them chose to remain on the plantations, not exercising their new legal status of free men and women. He makes the comparison that many Christians, although freed by the death and resurrection of Christ, choose to continue to live in a state of bondage to sin, legalism, fear and doubt. To quote Swindoll, using the analogy of Lincoln freeing the slaves, he says, "To use terms everyone can understand, President Grace legally freed us from our lifelong master, Sin, and his wife, Shame. Theoretically, we were freed when we believed in Christ, but practically speaking, our plantation owners do everything in their power to keep us ignorant, afraid, and thinking like a slave. . . . *Many Christians still live as though they are enslaved.*"^{xvi} A bit later he inquires, "What in the world has happened to grace? Furthermore, where is the abundant life Christ offered? Are freed people supposed to live such a frightened existence? Are we emancipated or not? If so, let's live like it! That isn't heresy; it's the healthiest kind of theology imaginable."^{xvii}

ⁱ The Holy Bible, New International Version, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society).

ⁱⁱ Ron Smith and Rob Penner, *Grace Simply Grace: Dealing with Condemnation and Legalism in the Christian Life* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1990), pp. 7-8.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

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- ^{iv} Robert Lamm, writer and singer for the group *Chicago, Album: The Chicago Transit Authority*, Warner Strategic Marketing, a Warner Music Group Company, 1969, 2001.
- ^v John MacArthur, "Perseverance of the Saints," *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Spring 1993), p. 14.
- ^{vi} *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ^{vii} Thomas M. Cucuzza, *Secure Forever! God's Promise or Our Perseverance?* (St. Cloud, MN: Thomas M. Cucuzza, Xulon Press, 2007), p. 89.
- ^{viii} <http://fathersforlife.org/health/anorexia1.htm> (article title: "Anorexia Nervosa, Changing Ideal of Beauty or Insane Obsession?"), p. 1.
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ^x [Http://www.wordsoflife.co.uk/BibleStudy/Series14/Study6.htm](http://www.wordsoflife.co.uk/BibleStudy/Series14/Study6.htm) (Francis Dixon, article title: "Meditations on the Psalms,") p. 2.
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ^{xii} Charlie Bing, "Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Salvation, Dr. Charlie Bing Published: Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1999 (source: <http://www.gracelife.org/resources/articles.asp?id=19>), p. 3.
- ^{xiii} *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ^{xiv} Isaac Watts, Ralph E. Hudson, "Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed?" *Hymns for the Living Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1974, original version 1885), p. 279.
- ^{xv} <http://www.articlesbase.com/christianity-articles/a-christians-self-worth-648467.html>
- ^{xvi} Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Nashville, TN: Charles R. Swindoll, Inc., W Publishing Group, 1990, 1996, 2003), p. 98.
- ^{xvii} *Ibid.*, p. 99.