

“HISTORY-ONICS”

Miles J. Stanford, Jan. '90

In the closing words of his Lordship Salvation book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 237, Dr. John MacArthur, Jr. states [emphases ours] :

Any doctrine making surrender to Christ's Lordship optional is bad teaching. Clearly it is a departure from what Christians have always affirmed.

Thus "lordship salvation" is neither modern nor heretical but is the very heart of historical soteriology. To label it as false teaching is foolhardy and thoughtless at best. To teach anything else is to withdraw from the mainstream of church teaching through the ages.

Here Dr. MacArthur has climaxed his Lordship thesis with statements that are either exaggerated, or ignorant. It is granted that historical church teaching contains Lordship Salvation, and there is much of it.

But it amounts to only what some Christians "have always affirmed." Lordship Salvation is most certainly not "the very heart of historical soteriology." Nor is it even in "the mainstream of church teaching through the ages."

At the outset, Dr. MacArthur resorts to the always doctrinally questionable Church Fathers in an effort to substantiate his historical claim for Lordship Salvation. He quotes from the *Didache*, an extra-biblical work, and then he cites Ignatius, Clement, and Augustine. (p. 222)

Aurelius Augustine, however, stood at the other extreme from Lordship! In chapter 5 of his *On the Predestination of the Saints* he wrote, "Faith is nothing less than to think with assent." Augustine out-Zaned Hodges!

John Calvin is also presented as having held Lordship Salvation. (pp. 222, 223) But again, Calvin's view is far from Lordship. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion, III. XIII:5*, he wrote, "For as regards justification, faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God's favor but receiving from Christ what we lack."

Dr. R.T. Kendall says, "What stands out in Calvin's descriptions is the given, intellectual, passive and assuring nature of faith." Dr. M.C. Ball further states, "Calvin taught that faith is fundamentally passive in nature, is centered in the mind and understanding, and is primarily to be viewed in terms of certain knowledge."

Dr. MacArthur's chief source of reference [apart from Scripture] in all of his material is the Puritan [post-Reformation English Calvinist] writers. That portion of the Reformation pulled away from the grace-stand of both Luther and Calvin, and developed what we now know as Lordship Salvation. It is the natural outcome of their law-oriented Covenant theology¹.

Dr. MacArthur quotes extensively from their *Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)*, as well as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism (1674)*. (pp. 226-228) But he did not get as far as *Question 82* in the latter, where it is asserted that "every Christian sins daily in word, thought, and deed."

The Puritan writers utilized are all Covenant Lordship proponents, such as Wm. Guthrie, Joseph Alleine, Thomas Watson, Thomas Manton, John Gill, and Thomas Goodwin.

Other anti-dispensational writers resorted to for vindication are Matthew Henry, Charles Spurgeon, J.C. Ryle, B.B. Warfield, O.T. Allis, A.W. Pink, and A.W. Tozer.

One of the severe penalties of Lordship Salvation is the loss of biblical assurance of salvation. At a recent Convention, when Dr. MacArthur was questioned concerning positive assurance before some 500 theologians, he answered: "*The Puritans said that such absolute assurance was not possible. We can have assurance, but not absolute certainty.*" Speaking of semantics!

Dr. R.L. Dabney [1820-1898], a well-known Southern Presbyterian [Covenant] theologian, brought out the difference between the Puritan's Westminster Standards, and the grace-stand of Luther and Calvin.

The cause of this error is no doubt that doctrine concerning faith which the first Reformers, as Luther and Calvin, were led to adopt from their opposition to the hateful and tyrannical teachings of Rome. These noble Reformers ...asserted that the assurance of hope is of the essence of saving faith. Thus says Calvin in his Commentary on Romans, "My faith is a divine and scriptural belief that God has pardoned me and accepted me."

Calvin requires everyone to say, in substance, I believe fully that Christ has saved me. Amidst all Calvin's verbal variations, this is always his meaning; for he is consistent in his error... for as sure as truth is in history, Luther and Calvin did fall into this error, which the Reformed churches, led by the Westminster Confession o Faith, have since corrected. (Discussions of Robert L. Dabney, Vol. I, pp. 215-16)

Dr. MacArthur and the other Lordship salvationists have been forced to erect their erroneous soteriology from the past dispensation of Law, and the Covenant segment of Church history.

The Lord presents many of His blessings in disguise, even to the extent of utilizing error for the establishment of His truth. All of these present-day aberrations, such as Lordship Salvation, Incarnational Sonship, the Blood as a token, One Naturism, blurred Dispensationalism, and the error of the Church taking part in Israel's New Covenant, will serve His purpose to establish many in the rightly divided Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

¹ Covenant theology, as a system, was largely the creation of English Puritanism and reached its highest expression with the Westminster Divines. For a comprehensive account, see Kenneth H. Good, *ARE BAPTIST REFORMED?*. The late-date origin of Covenantism is also accurately documented in Amos and Gardiner's, *NEVER BEFORE IN HISTORY, America's Inspired Birth*. On page 43 they write:

God was the perfect king and the Bible was the perfect expression of his will. As a result, the Puritans advocated a government in which written words, not human beings, were sovereign.

This, however, raised another problem. The Bible is not a systematic book of laws. It is not organized as a comprehensive set of legal statutes designed to cover every eventuality. To make the Bible's teaching more systematic, the Puritans therefore organized them into a series of covenants. The word *covenant* occurs nearly 400 times in the Old Testament and thirty-three times in the New Testament.

To the Puritans, all of God's dealings with humanity occurred through covenants.

DRS, Apr.'04