

MacArthur Preaches To The Choir
An answer to John MacArthur's book
The Gospel According To Jesus
by Donald Perry

INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately in 2009 I fell into the error of Easy Believism, listening to Pastor Steve Anderson, Charles Stanly, Bob Wilkin, and owning a Ryre Study Bible. In my search for the truth I read the first part of MacArthur's book, and then read from sections in various chapters. Sadly, all I could find were thoughts and texts not organized to prove the Lordship Salvation position from a scholarly position to those lost. Instead I could only find things written to invoke sympathy, or things one would write to those already convinced of Calvinism who already knew the error of an easy faith.

I am sure there are good arguments in MacArthur's writings, the problem is that one needs to be a good detective to discover where they are or how they might work. They certainly are not readily apparent, nor holding the opponent's feet to the fire.

What works I would suggest are *The Potters Freedom* by James White or *The Sovereignty Of God* by A.W. Pink. These are written so as to dismantle the opposition and then redirect him to the truth of the Gospel.

I found that MacArthur was essentially talking to convince himself in the book. I could not find anything that would convince those to repent of E.B. Looking for answers fully convinced of Easy Believism I found only that I was even more convinced because MacArthur did not write so as to prove anything.

Perhaps if MacArthur spent more time closely debating those to whom he tried to preach to, then he would know how to write a book in defense of this doctoral position. He would know what makes for an argument, and what does not. *The Gospel according to Jesus* was written to the wrong audience. The emperor has no cloths and all the people say otherwise. I am surprised that someone like Phil Johnson has not clued MacArthur into the problem, it seems very clear to me now having repented of E.B in 2018.

What I intend to do here below is comment on any worthy arguments MacArthur makes up to the end of the 1st chapter. But be prepared, you will not be much here because most of what he writes not convincing, this will become more apparent as we go through his material below.

MacArthurs strongest argument must be in his first chapter to captivate those lost and bring them the rest of the way home---if MacArthur only makes losing arguments in the introduction and first chapter no one is going to keep reading trying to find anything different. When they are convinced that MacArthur can't convict them of errors they will move on. I would confirm that is indeed the case, chapter 1 is typical.

Additionally, I intend to demonstrate what happens when someone in the Easy Believism camp reads his work.

MY TESTIMONY

Myself, having been subjected to this error reading MacArthur both before and after my day of repentance in 2018 I am qualified to make judgments as to what makes for a convincing argument and what does not. I had spent many hours telling others the Gospel, witnessing on the subways and in the streets, that all one had to do is have faith. At the time I was still a Calvinist, and I wrote in my leaflets that I would hand out in evangelism that *"If you truly trust Jesus you will allow Him into your life and allow Jesus to be your friend, you will read His words ... pray this prayer ... I am willing to trust you with my life and life's decisions."* And *"...faith is witnessed by the Holy Spirit ... John 5:10-13:*

He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

Evidently, John 5:10-13 proves that if you do not have the witness of the Holy Ghost and the new life then you do not have the faith. There are different types of E.B. My belief leaned toward E.B. but yet was contradictory in that I added the works of the Holy Spirit as can be seen above.

The controversy was in that I had affirmed in my leaflet that *“Our faith in Jesus alone” determines salvation. Psalm 89:30-35, 1 John 5:10-13, Gal. 4:23, Luke 8:12-13, John 5:24, Acts 10:43, 16:31, Hebrews 10:10,14. Salvation is a free gift in Jn. 3:16, Romans 5:15,16,17,18, 6:23, 11:29”* This is true, but if our works do not demonstrate true saving faith then we must rather doubt our faith, John 8:39ff reads *“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.”*. There is a saving faith and a damning faith. There is a true faith that comes from God and a faith that comes from man alone without the outworking of the Holy Spirit which fails, Matthew 13 We cannot realize our salvation because we are in a contract signed by a past profession of faith, we are in fact *“being Saved”* as affirmed in 1 Cor. 1:18. In one sense we are still signing the agreement and in another we are not, this is the truth of *“the already but not yet”* principle throughout the Scriptures. 1 Cor. 1:18 and Galatians 5:21b were verses I did not understand at the time, and I supposed 1 Cor. 1:18 was a mistake. Our assurance comes through our willingness and ongoing repentance proving we have a living faith that has saved us is saving us and will save us on the day of judgment.

The point of my repentance came when I had come to a point again in my life where I needed to make Christ Lord of all in order that I might be assured of Christ having victory in my life over sin. It was then that I wondered if this was in fact a prerequisite for salvation. Further study revealed that it could be. But I doubted again for a few days, and at that time went to MacArthur again. But his book only confirmed by doubts rather than challenge them. The Scriptures are what convinced again that not only was it possible that Lordship was at the center of the Gospel, but that it was overwhelmingly evident.

COMMENTARY

Page 9 “*You shall call His name Jesus for it is He who will save His people from their sins*” (Matt. 1:21).

E.B. This is the first verse we come to and it does not prove Lordship Salvation, nor is it an argument for it.

Page 10 “*He responds to people’s queries about how to gain eternal life by making salvation sound well-nigh impossible (Mark 10:17-26) ---because for fallen sinners who are trying to save themselves, it is impossible (v. 7).*”

E.B The Easy Believism camp knows this to be the case, they believe faith makes the impossible possible. MacArthur is writing to himself. How does this prove Lordship Salvation? The answer is that it doesn’t.

Page 10, 12, 13:

I knew the book would be controversial, of course, because I wrote it partly as a response to and already-existing controversy. ... the debate has continued ever since.” What does Jesus mean when He says, “Follow Me”? Note how frequently he links that call with terminology that speaks of self-denial, crucifixion, and daily death (cf. Luke 9:23). His “follow me” is often prefaced by admonitions about being willing to die to self, hating one’s own life in this world, and serving Him (John 12:24-26). Here’s how he framed His message to the multitudes: “He turned and said to them, ²⁶“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in

battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends ¹a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.” (Luke 14:25-33). Some, however respond eagerly to Christ while neglecting to count the cost. They received no encouragement from Him: “As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Difficult demands? Impossible in human terms. Yet those are Jesus’ very words----unqualified, unadorned, untampered by any explanation or soothing rationalization. Our Lord was sounding a note that is missing from much that passes for evangelism today. His “follow me” was a call to surrender to His lordship.

E.B. Luke 14 and Luke 9 have to do with discipleship not salvation in the E.B. camp, and MacArthur already knows this as evidenced later on in the book. In this case the debate concerns Lordship vs Discipleship. Right from the beginning one can spot MacArthur taking off on a rabbit trail, as if he is entirely oblivious to it. He defines his work as a response and answer to the ongoing debate, yet he has not only lost the debate because he fails to answer the problem but proves he does not know what the debate is about. Perhaps this part of the book is simply a copy from one of his previous sermons, which is why it is written this way.

Page 13 "If you confess with your mouth *Jesus as Lord*, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9, emphasis added). The lordship of Christ is clearly at the heart of true saving faith.

E.B No, no it is not because MacArthur has created confusion. The KJV reads "hat if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." MacArthur here pushes this text to the forefront, and in doing so only makes a case for the E.B. camp. If MacArthur became a lawyer, he would lose every case because he creates arguments for both sides, and in some cases creates more problems than he solves.

Page 21 Galatians 1:6-9 is a curse on anyone who distorts the gospel of Christ" "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you ^[a]by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel ^lcontrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be ^laccursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be ^laccursed!" That is a sober warning of eternal damnation to those who would tamper with the message of salvation and corrupt it to make "a different gospel." Paul applied it to the Judaizers, who had exchanged a system of works for the gospel of grace. His warning underscores the importance of getting the gospel right. The difference between the gospel of Christ and "another gospel" is the difference between the blessed and the cursed, the sheep and the goats, the saved and the lost, the true church and cults, the truth and a lie.

E.B. If nowhere else this is the place where MacArthur should be proving that an adherence to making Christ Lord of all (*or the work of the Holy Spirit bringing the 10 commandments to light, in light of Galatians 5:19-21, see also Luke 6:46, John 8:39*) justify, seeing this key passage is in principle foremost about faith alone. This very passage is condemning him as used by the E.B. Camp. In that this has to do with faith alone is obvious by the time we get to Galatians 2:16 "...*by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.*" But instead MacArthur goes down another rabbit trail again. Here

he uses this verse to try and shame his opponents never answering how this passage is relevant either to him or the Easy Believism camp.

The answer as to how Lordship or works play a part in the Gospel have to do with the fact that no one can become saved without the indwelling works of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is credited with the works. Likewise, faith can be in this sense considered a work as well, that being a work of God, John 6:29.

Page 25 We have now past the Preface to the previous additions and the Introduction, we are now on the first page of the first chapter. *"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved"* It was damaging enough that MacArthur used this argument at all on page 13 (see above), but now he will use it again. This only proves Lordship Salvation does not have a lot to go on. If however this is not a debate, then it wouldn't matter. In MacArthur's defense, the text of his book maybe put together from transcriptions from his sermons to his congregation, and this would be the reason for quoting Romans 10:9 again.

Page 26 "He who was called while free, is Christ's slave [doulos]. You were bought with a price" (Cor.7:22-23) MacArthur says a bit here about the Greek word for slave, to try and show what is a proper relationship between Christ and the saint. And although what MacArthur says is patently true, it does not prove that the Gospel or salvation hinges on making Jesus Lord of all.

Page 28 "... Matthew 6:24 Jesus said. *"No one can be a slave to two masters"* ... *"Do you not know that ... you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price"* (1Cor. 6:19-20)"

E.B. As it does appear within the Camp of MacArthur's opponents, MacArthur is attempting to put the E.B. camp on a guilt trip for not accepting Lordship salvation. MacArthur only makes his opponents more difficult to reach.

Page 29 “He was certainly not trying to appeal to a longing for self-esteem or make discipleship look enticing to the people of Galilee and Judea when he spoke about the cost of following Him.”

E.B Did you catch that? MacArthur just equated discipleship with salvation seemingly ignoring the fact that this is one of the pivotal points having to do with Easy Believism Vs Lordship Salvation. It appears by the way MacArthur handles the material that he expects those in the Easy Believism camp to just take his word for it.

Page 36 Jesus gave this sobering warning: “Not everyone who say to me, ‘Lord Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day. ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness’”. (7:21-23, emphasis added). Clearly no past experience –not even prophesying, casting out demons, or doing signs and wonders ---can be viewed as evidence of salvation apart form a life of obedience.

E.B MacArthur does not explain the misuse of this text by the E.B. camp to then dismantle it, and then disprove it point by point. Instead he uses the whole text to try and shame the E.B. camp, and then ends with that Christians must follow “obedience”. The E.B. camp uses this text to prove that those who suppose they are saved by Lordship salvation are merely trusting in their own works of filthy rags alone. The righteous are those who have no works to tell of, but only trust in Christ’s imputed righteousness.

The truth of the matter is that those who enter in have their own works that they receive a crown for, having worked out their salvation with fear and trembling. Those who enter not in had supposed that they can be saved without being in a knowing and sanctifying relationship with the risen Savior. Jesus does not know them. MacArthur admits this in the previous paragraph but does not bring it to bear on the faulty assumptions made by the E.B. camp. He does so similarly on page 211 and elsewhere.

Page 40 “...God’s plan for Israel is not superseded by or swallowed up in His program for the church.”

E.B. MacArthur is a Dispensationalist and dispensationalism has to do with dispensations about how God saves men. If salvation and the promises have had (and will have future) to do with the sanctification-circumcision of man rather than of Christ (John 17:19), then men are saved by works and not by faith alone. Here MacArthur contradicts himself. In the past, as it will remain, the circumcision of Israel only had to do with pointing to Christ, they were never to be considered an end in themselves. If we are to go back to circumcision, we must also go back to the animal sacrifices and reject Christ according to what we read in the book of Hebrews 9 and 10.

Page 45 “Those who teach that obedience and submission are extraneous to saving faith are forced to make a firm but unbiblical distinction between salvation and discipleship. That is the only way they can explain the ministry of Jesus. This dichotomy, like that of the carnal/spiritual Christian, sets up to classes of Christians: Believers only, and true disciples. Most who hold this position discard the evangelistic intent of virtually every recorded invitation of Jesus, saying those apply to discipleship, not to salvation. “

E.B. MacArthur finally gets to a core argument. Yet, there is no convincing argument that MacArthur will make proving one must abandon E.B. MacArthur thinks that one should repent of E.B. due to the many texts which appear to him to say it to be so.

Page 47 “Misunderstand on that key point is at the heart of the error of those who reject lordship salvation. They assume that because Scripture contrasts faith and works, faith must be incompatible with works. They set faith in opposition to submission, yealdedness, or turning from sin, and they categorize all the practical elements of salvation as human works. They stumble over the twin truths that salvation is a gift, yet it costs everything. The ideas are paradoxical, but they are not mutually exclusive. ... (Luke 18:13) ... That man’s desperate prayer is one of the clearest pictures of genuine, God-wrought repentance in all of Scripture. ... He understood that the only way he could ever be saved was by God’s merciful grace.

E.B. MacArthur here admits that true faith must have work but appears to disprove it later on down the page with Luke 18:13. He says that it is a paradox, a paradox is a contradiction. But if that's true then he cannot prove anything. Maybe that is the reason why his book is not a good example of dialectal argumentation, nor convincing to those in the E.B. camp.

The truth is that the works and faith are not a paradox, the faith and works both belong to the work of the Holy Spirit and not to man. Saving faith generated and preached through the Gospel is only the means whereby God will quicken and save men or else leave men in their death nevertheless demanding they repent. Any good we do must ultimately in the end be credited to God alone. The exercise of faith (the work of God) is separated from man's good work and will in Galatians. Faith is not without the work of God, the works and indwelling workings of the Holy Spirit.

MacArthur's inability to make this distinction and call it a paradox disproves the sovereignty of God leaving those lost in E.B. with the very dichotomy he is trying to prove does not exist. They may suppose that they can keep their own faith.

Page 48 The Bible does not recognize "conversion" that lacks the radical change of direction (Luke 3:7-8). A true believer cannot remain rebellious --or even indifferent. Genuine faith will inevitably provoke some degree of obedience. In fact, Scripture often equates faith with obedience (John 3:36; Rom. 1:5; 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:8).

E.B. MacArthur makes a good point here, but he does not follow through and jumps around instead. Most of what MacArthur writes is a testimony to his observations. This kind of information has nothing to do with good argumentation. MacArthur needs to convince people with arguments from Scripture, he is not doing this here. John 3:36 which reads "obeyeth not the son" is "believeth not the Son" in the KJV and other versions. Once again, MacArthur does not go into details but expects that people should just take his word for it. The other verses speak of the obedience of the faith, which E.B. may or may not deny. E.B. sometime says that that obedience maybe difficult or impossible for us to see, and for this reason faith is the center of the Gospel not works. MacArthur does not get into

the controversy. And then there is the argument having to do with some of these verses that the obedience of faith is to believe that are not addressed either.

Page 48 If we are truly born of God, we have a faith that cannot fail to overcome the world (1 John 5:4). ---we will sin ---but the process of sanctification can never stall completely. God is at work in us (Phil. 2:13), and He will continue to perfect us until the day of Christ (Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:23-24).

E.B. Those in the E.B. camp may believe that there is sanctification, but only that it can be undetectable, and therefore works are not the center of the Gospel. But they do believe they understand that they have a relationship with God. They believe that their faith will not fail because they can only believe that Jesus died, and died for them, they being sinners. How could then then un-believe?, salvation is not difficult here. The verses MacArthur uses are not convincing. Why not use Titus 1:16 *“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”*? If there is bad fruit, then that is a profession that they have denied Him, not that they have believed with the faith ordained of God. There is a true and there is a false faith, and what separates the two is works. MacArthur needs to make a solid connection between faith and works, and not assert they are a paradox.”

Page 56 “...the Pharisees entirely missed it ... They stressed obedience to the law, not conversion to the Lord, as the way to gain eternal life. They were so busy trying to earn righteousness that they neglected the marvelous truth of Habakkuk 2:4: “The righteous will live by faith”.

E.B. What separates a Pharisee from what MacArthur proposes? What is the difference between E.B. and MacArthur’s definition of a believer here? The truth of the matter is that the Pharisees only had faith in their own work, not in God being the Sovereign Savior that He is. MacArthur appears to be avoiding Calvinism here in his book to appeal to a wider audience, and this making his arguments are so ineffective as they are here.

Page 100 When Jesus proclaimed His kingdom , He was preaching salvation. His conversation with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 helps to clarify the terminology He used. The young man asked Jesus what he could do to obtain eternal life. After the man left without receiving it, Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (v 23). ... “Then who can be saved? (v. 25).”

E.B. This verse is misused by the E.B. camp, they propose that Jesus was telling the rich young ruler to try and save himself by looking to the ten commandments depicted here, to which Jesus agrees “Then who can be saved?” Following Jesus says, “*But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*” The E.B. camp says that Jesus is here now referring to faith alone rather than works. The truth of the matter is that Jesus was telling of works, and that he was not telling the rich young ruler to fail so that he could see the value of mere faith alone. If the rich young ruler was not willing to sell all that he had and follow Christ, then indeed he did not have saving faith that produces ongoing repentance and works being unworthy of the kingdom of Heaven. MacArthur does not explain this to the E.B. camp, instead he jumps away.

Page 211 Many who think they are saved but live unholy lives will be shocked to discover in the final judgment that heaven is not their destiny. It is hard to picture a more horrifying scene than that described by Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone who say to me, ‘Lord Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day. ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness’”. Those who think of salvation as merely a legal transaction, a reckoning apart from practical righteousness, will have a difficult time with this warning of Jesus. IT puts salvation in very practical terms. IT reiterates the key statement of the Sermon on the Mount” “say to you, that unless your righteousness surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20)

E.B. Here anyone in the E.B. camp would only be further convinced.
See our comments on page 36.