

Reformation
& Revival

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Book Reviews

Renewal as a Way of Life

Richard Lovelace

Inter-Varsity Press (1985), 206 pages, paperback, \$7.95

In 1979 InterVarsity Press issued Richard Lovelace's large book *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. *Renewal as a Way of Life* was released six years later, partly in response to requests for a shorter version of the larger volume, and partly to incorporate the author's more recent reflections upon the dynamics of personal and corporate spiritual growth.

Lovelace, professor of church history at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, organizes *Renewal* into three sections. The first, "The Normal Spiritual Life," describes the God-centered life and the kingdom-centered life. Drawing upon the writings and experiences of Augustine and Jonathan Edwards, Lovelace shows that the preconditions of renewal are an awareness of God's holiness and an awareness of the depth of sin. The cost of renewal is not ignored. "Repentance...is the most dynamic inrush of the kingdom within ordinary history. When we repent we enter the kingdom, and the kingdom enters into history in a little larger measure (Mark 9:47, Luke 18:16, John 3:3)" (pp. 47-48).

In the second section, "Dynamics of Spiritual Death," the author shows that the Christian who seeks spiritual renewal must battle the world, the flesh and the devil. In the third section, "The Dynamics of Spiritual Life," Lovelace shows that in Christ, our Prophet, Priest and King, and Second Adam, reside all the dynamics of true spiritual life. He does not see God's process of spiritual renewal completed in individual experience only. God's purpose in renewing the individual and His church extends into missions, i.e., following Jesus into the world, presenting His gospel in proclamation and in social demonstration.

A paragraph from Lovelace's preface lays the ground rules for his perspective. "Historically there are two ways of approaching Christian spirituality. One way, which might be called the 'ascetic model,' emphasizes the cultivation of faith through spiritual disciplines, especially forms of individual prayer and meditation, the broadcasting and receiving cycles of the soul. The other way, which I will call the 'charismatic model,' stresses that having the Holy Spirit in our lives is a pure gift of God in response to faith, which is another gift. Both models are valid and complementary to one another." (p.10)

Although Lovelace neglects some of the helpful emphases of the Protestant Reformers in his counsel for both personal and church renewal, he does present some fresh Biblical insight on a theme that is too often distorted by shortcuts offered today by popular church renewal practitioners.

Donald E. Anderson
Associate Editor

Transforming Grace: Living Confidently in God's Unfailing Love

Jerry Bridges

NavPress (1991), 207 pages, cloth, \$14.95

The author, on the staff of the Navigators since 1955, draws upon decades of serious Bible study to present in this, his fourth book, the doctrine of grace and how it applies to all of life, not merely to the initial work of conversion.

Demonstrating familiarity with the writings of the Reformers as well as contemporary works of evangelical and Reformed theologians and commentators, Bridges relates

the doctrine of God's grace to many problems faced by struggling believers: e.g., legalism and good works, expectation of rewards for faithful service, unanswered prayer, confession of sin after repeated failures, etc.

In Chapter 8, titled, "Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace," the author relates grace to the work of sanctification. He writes, "To live by grace is to live solely by the merit of Jesus Christ." (p.101) "In every one of these views of sanctification we see the grace of God. God in His grace sees us as perfectly holy in Christ. God in His grace sends the Holy Spirit to create a new heart within us and to write His law on our hearts, thus changing our basic disposition. And God in His grace continues to work in us through His Spirit to transform us more and more into the likeness of His Son." (p. 117)

In drawing the reader into the riches of God's grace, Bridges spans the wide gulf between the heart of God and the needs of man. This book offers many helpful thoughts for preachers, but even more important, it presents a biblical prescription for understanding God's way of dealing with both the sinner and the saint.

This book is highly recommended, along with Bridges' three previous books, all still available from NavPress.

Donald E. Anderson
Associate Editor

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life

Donald S. Whitney

NavPress (1991), 250 pages, \$14.95

I go on record as urging all Christians to read what Don Whitney has written; indeed, to read it three times over,

with a month's interval between each reading. This will not only make the book sink in, but it will also make us realistic about our seriousness, or lack of it, as Jesus' disciples. Our first reading will show us several particular things we should start doing. In our second and third readings, (for which we should book dates on the day we complete the previous reading) we shall find ourselves, willy-nilly, reviewing what we have done and how we have fared in doing it. From that we shall begin to see what calibre Christians we really are. That will be very good for us, even if the discovery comes as a bit of a shock at first.

Ever since Richard Foster rang the bell with his *Celebration of Discipline* (1978), discussion of the various disciplines has become a staple element of conservative Christian in-talk in North America. This is a very happy thing. The doctrine of the disciplines, (Latin, *disciplinae*, meaning courses of learning and training) is really a re-statement and extension of classical Protestant teaching on the means of grace (i.e., the Word of God, prayer, fellowship, and the Lord's Supper). Don Whitney's spiritual feet are blessedly cemented in the wisdom of the Bible as spelled out by the Puritan and older evangelical masters, and he plots the path of discipline with a sure touch. The foundations he lays are evangelical, not legalistic. That is, he calls us to pursue godliness through practicing the disciplines out of gratitude for the grace that has saved us, not as a gesture of self-justifying or self-advancing self-effort). What he builds on these foundations is as salutary as it is solid. He is, in truth, showing us the path of life.

If, then, as a Christian you want to be really real with your God, moving beyond the stage of playing games with yourself and Him, this book is right up your alley. A century and a half ago the Scottish professor "Rabbi" Duncan sent his students off to read John Owen, the Puritan, on indwelling sin, with the admonition, "But, gentlemen, *prepare for the*

knife." As I pass over to Don Whitney, I would say to you, "Now, friend, *prepare for the work-out.*" You will find health for your soul.

Dr. James I. Packer

(Adapted slightly from the Foreword to the book and used by permission)

Invitation to Live

John Blanchard
Evangelical Press (1991), paperback, 121 pages, \$7.95

In 1658 Richard Baxter first published *A Call to the Unconverted*.

In the first year alone, 20,000 copies were printed and used in the awakening and conversion of many. Near the end of his life Baxter claimed to have received letters every week telling how God was using the book to change lives in England as well as on the Continent. At his funeral it was said that "the book spoke with great authority and would be powerfully effective 'while the church remained on earth'."

Over the last 300 years, Baxter's *Call* has been reprinted many times, but the length of the work (over 40,000 words) and the often archaic language has limited its readership mainly to Puritan scholars. As a result, today the unconverted, for whom Baxter wrote, are its least likely readers.

It is here that John Blanchard has provided an invaluable service by transporting Baxter's appeal into modern genre in this new book, *Invitation to Live*. Blanchard has entirely recast Baxter's work by eliminating Baxter's repetition, modernizing his language, and reorganizing his material into a readable restatement of Baxter's ideas.

How does Blanchard accomplish this task? First, he reworks *virtually every sentence* in order to shorten the work, thus eliminating sections of the original not essential to the message. In doing so, Blanchard retains the force of Baxter's prose and the wealth of Baxter's ideas. Compare Blanchard's revision of the following paragraph:

"O poor, deceived, wretched soul! There is nothing but a slender veil of flesh betwixt thee and that amazing sight, which will quickly silence thee and turn thy tune, and make them of another mind! As soon as death has drawn this curtain, thou shalt see that which will quickly leave thee speechless. And how quickly will that day and hour come! When thou hast but a few more merry hours, and but a few more pleasant draughts and morsels, and a little more of the honours and riches of the world, thy portion will be spent, and thy pleasures ended, and all is then gone that thou setteth thy heart upon; of all that thou soldest thy Saviour and salvation for, there is nothing left but the heavy reckoning." (Baxter)

"Your life is going and death is coming; and when death comes there will be not time to change your mind or amend your ways. You are only a heart-beat away from death, judgment, and condemnation. A few more days, a bit more fun, a few more honours or riches or pleasures or possessions and all of these will be over. You will then stand naked before God, with not a word to say in your defense." (Blanchard)

Blanchard's changes are significant, yet they clearly maintain the color and flavor of the original. Such restatement cuts through the wordiness of Baxter's text, reducing, for example, twenty-five small print pages of Baxter's preface into less than five pages of regular sized print.

Second, Blanchard has modernized Baxter's language and updated his illustrations. Consider the following illustration: "As a thief that sits merrily spending the money in

an ale-house which he hath stolen, when men are riding in post haste to apprehend him; so it is with you: while you are drowned in cares or fleshly pleasures, and making merry with your own shame, death is coming in post haste to seize upon you, and carry your souls to such a place and state, as now you little know or think of." (Baxter)

"You are like a thief sitting in a bar celebrating his latest haul, little knowing that the police are just around the corner and on their way to arrest him." (Blanchard)

Third, rather than using Baxter's Puritan style of setting forth "doctrines," "objections," "answers," and "uses," Blanchard has subdivided the material into chapters with short, inviting headings, such as "Man Unmasked," "God's Great Promise," "God's Word of Honour," and "God's Continuous Concern." For instance, Blanchard's chapter "The Guilty Fool," shortens and clarifies Baxter's chapter heading: "If after all this, men will not turn it is not long of God that they are condemned, but of themselves, even of their own willingness. They die, that is, because they will not turn." Blanchard also includes bold subheadings throughout, providing better organization and appearance, and making the new format inviting to modern eyes.

Fourth, Blanchard sets the entire book in the second person singular ("you") rather than Baxter's "us" or "them." The book is thus more intensely personal.

Finally, Blanchard's short, captivating title and illustrated cover make the book more attractive to the curious reader. Blanchard has done a masterful job of maintaining a balance between staying true to Baxter and reducing and thoroughly updating the wording. The result is a highly readable Richard Baxter that one could feel comfortable giving to any serious seeker.

One question remains: "Would Baxter approve?" Let us let Baxter answer for himself. In the introduction to *A Call to the Unconverted*, Baxter states his reason for publishing his

works in smaller, more affordable volumes rather than one large volume: "because I would not deter them by bulk or price, from reading what is written for their benefit." Surely he would approve of republishing his work in a version readable and appealing for our modern age. He would certainly agree to its continued use for leading seekers to the truth.

In reality, *Invitation to Live* is not a revision of Baxter's book. Instead Blanchard's treatment is a *dynamic equivalent* of Baxter's ideas rather than a wooden word-for-word revision. As such, it leaves the original work unmarred while allowing its vital message to reach forward into our age. The difference is significant and the model commendable.

Perhaps Blanchard has not only provided us with a helpful evangelistic tool; he may also have given us a pattern for getting other classic Puritan books into the hands of modern readers. Surely this can help bring about needed reformation in evangelistic literature, which is often mechanistic and shallow.

Jim Ehrhard

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Made in America: The Shaping of Modern Evangelicalism

Michael Scott Horton

Baker Book House (1991), 198 pages, hardcover, \$13.95

In America we take great pride in a government "of the people, by the people, for the people." But, in this spirit, have we created a religion of, by, and for the people as well,

a religion where people and culture determine the direction religion takes, where God serves the people rather than they Him? Alarmingly so, writes Michael Scott Horton in *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern Evangelicalism*. As today's evangelical Christian leaders attempt to address the rapid changes in our culture, numerous ideas have evolved espousing revised ministry techniques to meet the challenge of those cultural changes and to produce church growth. Such territory is tempting in the quest for "success," Horton warns, but costly in terms of biblical truth and our rich Reformation heritage of warm, passionate orthodoxy and historic continuity.

In a style reminiscent of the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer, Michael Horton paints a disturbing picture of contemporary evangelicalism which forces us to take a long look at what evangelicals are doing to market the Gospel, and beckons us to carefully weigh the accommodations we are making to our culture's wants and values at the expense of foundational biblical truth and godly values. Today, says Horton, "The test of creed is not its truth but its 'success.'"

Horton's stated purpose is "to examine the relationship between the biblical teachings and the contemporary realities shaping who we are as American evangelicals," and to contrast authentic evangelicalism characterized by the historic Christian faith grounded in the apostolic witness and rediscovered by the Reformers and the Puritans, with the "less authentic variety" of the "ideological or cultural evangelicalism that is so pervasive in America today." To accomplish this, Horton takes his readers through an historic survey of the evolution of American thinking beginning in the days of the earliest Puritan settlers and shows how such thinking shaped not only the culture but the evangelical faith as well.

In the Enlightenment, Horton observes the shift from the sovereignty of God to human potential. This shift was

paralleled in religion by the influence of Arminianism which emphasizes man's role in achieving salvation. This, Horton comments, was suited to the new American temper—a democratic creature-Creator relationship. Even the Great Awakening fostered by “the last Puritan” Jonathan Edwards and carried on by George Whitefield “disintegrated by an ensuing emotionalism” and “lost its reformed character as well as its intellectual framework.” By the Second Great Awakening existential acts of faith replaced objective content of faith in popular revivals, resulting in the loss of an historical continuity of faith. Evangelical Christianity was now well on its way to being “shaped for democracy” and adaptable to the spirit of “rugged individualism” characterizing the American frontier. Horton goes on to show how this individualism together with pragmatism and consumerism has created a new evangelicalism quite different from its historic roots in the Reformation.

Pragmatism has given birth to a “how to” Gospel which stresses evangelistic techniques over biblical content and moves preaching to a man-centered message. “If it works, do it,” Horton writes. “Christians have become utilitarian in our use of God and others.” In light of this, the mushrooming consumerism of contemporary society has precipitated a Madison Avenue response from evangelicals. Horton asks, “Do we (Christians) . . . deal in human fulfillment, purveying divine merchandise for the purpose of satisfying the market instead of the Creator?” He answers his own question with this sweeping indictment: “The biblical God celebrated by the American people was a civil servant who was elected by the people to serve their interests.” At this point Horton warns us not to adjust our ministries to accommodate consumer appetites in the interest of church growth. “In consumer religion,” he writes, “Christianity becomes trivialized. Its great mysteries become cheap slogans. Its majestic hymns are traded for shallow jingles. . . .” He follows

with a fascinating description of “Jesus’ church-shrinkage program.”

Horton claims that Evangelicals are giving in to one of Lucifer's most powerful illusions, self-fulfillment. This appears, he says, in three shapes: hedonism, narcissism, and materialism. Drawing from a variety of contemporary thinkers, cultural trends in the arts and music, and samplings from movies, Horton identifies the influence of these three shapes in the shift to man-centered theology and worship and the gospels of self-help, self-esteem and prosperity. In this shift to man-centeredness, “feelings” have become our criterion for judgment, resulting in subjective, privatized, personal faith. Evangelicals are demonstrating a “growing allegiance to the Modernist solution putting experience over propositional truth” resulting in sentimental faith.

Earnest evangelicals will find Horton helpful not only in analyzing the current conditions and how we arrived here, but in responding in a way which will reconnect us with our forefathers in the faith, the larger community of saints who have gone before.

Horton warns that experience-centered religion is a religion of the moment, not of a lifetime. It is the product of the sequence of romanticism, transcendentalism, existentialism, and finally the “New Age rage,” characterized by individualism, gnosticism, positive mental attitude, therapeutic well-being and secular eschatology.

Horton observes perceptively, “After a number of rounds (from Arminianism to deism to Unitarianism to Romanticism to Transcendentalism to existentialism to the New Age Explosion), we have suffered successive blows to the Christian faith. We helped by watering the message down in an effort to accommodate rather than challenge the culture. We thought it would help reach people, but, instead, it looked like a cheap imitation of what they had.”

In a treatment not as thorough as his foregoing analysis,

Horton urges evangelical Christians to recognize the profound influences of American culture on us and urges us to “stop mimicking the world in its search for self-actualization, the inner self and other forms of narcissism.” We need to renew our understanding of what we believe and why we believe it. We need to return to an authentic Christian lifestyle which will often be counter-culture as it springs from deep-seated convictions rooted in biblical propositional truth. These convictions will be ours as we grow in the “grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ” as He is revealed in the objective truth of Scripture.

Horton calls evangelical Christians to make every effort to reclaim their connection with the “communion of the saints” by identifying with a “coherent body of beliefs among evangelicals,” biblically based ideas and strategies which speak with conviction and “produce a coherent body of values.” In short, Horton urges us to rediscover the strategy of the apostolic church in Acts 2:42ff: the proclamation and exposition of Scripture, commitment to community, the frequent celebration of communion, a life of common (corporate) prayer, and church discipline. Ours is not to offer utilitarian faith that competes with other self-help programs. Ours is to start with fundamentally different questions emphasizing the human dilemma with God and God’s gracious work toward solution in Christ.

This book will alarm and challenge any reader jealous for God and our evangelical faith. It is *must* reading for anyone who cares about evangelical Christianity and its lost heritage of “reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God.”

Dr. John G. Vosnos
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Lake Forest, IL

Reformation Thought: An Introduction

Alister E. McGrath

Basil Blackwell (1989), 212 pages, paperback, \$19.95.

It is not often that I spend \$19.95 for a paperback book! At that price I feel that I deserve a more substantial addition to my library. But since I do not buy books, generally speaking, to adorn shelves, I spent the money on this small book, and with no discounts either. One thing is certain; the book is overpriced, but the money spent and the time invested carefully reading were well worth it. If I were to teach Reformation history or theology I would insist the class read this volume.

When it comes to church history and teaching it, especially to non-specialists, one searches almost in vain for texts that are accurate as well as readable. Often “popular” (i.e., readable) history is seriously flawed. I have in mind, as an example, many of the more popular books arguing for a “Christian” America. On the other hand, historical books are frequently overly technical and thus useful only to highly trained academics. Dr. McGrath is a highly trained academic with a remarkable ability to communicate plainly and powerfully. He is the author of a number of books on doctrinal subjects which can be found in most Christian bookshops. He is also the author of a number of more academic and technical works such as *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* (1985), *The Making of Modern German Christology* (1986), *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Doctrine of Justification* (1986), and *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (1987). The present book falls into the category of an introduction, and is thus academic in a sense, yet at the same time readable to most serious laymen who want to understand the background and historical vortex of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Perhaps the most important question this book asks is, "What is humanism, and what relation does it have to the Reformation?" The modern reader, who is not trained in history and the evolution of ideas, might immediately ask, "What does humanism have to do with anything good in the church or its thought life?" Dr. McGrath will help remove this confusion by showing that the way we use the term "humanism" today is often quite different from the way the term was used previously. He says, "When the word 'humanism' is used by a twentieth-century writer, we are usually meant to understand an anti-religious philosophy which affirms the dignity of humanity without any reference to God. 'Humanism' has acquired very strongly secularist, perhaps even atheist, overtones." (p. 27)

McGrath tells us, "The term 'humanism' was first used in 1808, to refer to a form of education which placed emphasis upon the Greek and Latin classics." Concludes McGrath in his chapter on "Humanism and the Reformation," it "was essentially a cultural programme, laying emphasis upon the promotion of eloquence, which appealed to classical antiquity as a model of eloquence." (p. 32) It was "concerned with *how ideas were obtained and expressed*, rather than with *the actual substance of those ideas*." (p. 32) Such humanism can best be expressed in the slogan *ad fontes* - back to the original sources. When applied to the church, adds McGrath, "...the slogan *ad fontes* meant a direct return to the title-deeds of Christianity—to the patristic writers, and supremely to the Bible."

McGrath then evaluates how such humanism interacted with the theological reformation that began in Europe under the leadership of men like Zwingli and Luther. In the earliest days in Zurich, under Zwingli, reformation was an educational process and was essentially a human action. After 1520 this began to shift. In Luther's case, and thus in Germany, reformation was viewed much more in terms of

recapturing theological truth and in preaching the gospel of God's grace. Luther and Karlstadt used the textual and philological skills of humanism, but for the purpose of getting back to the Scriptures, which were the record of God's gracious promises of salvation. As a result of this theological recovery B.B. Warfield noted that, "The Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the church." Luther, who shared much in common with the humanists of his time, finally parted with them most openly over the doctrinal issue of the human will, which is of course related to the whole matter of salvation by *grace alone*. (In this light, consider the article in this journal by Tom Wells, which deals helpfully with this matter.)

McGrath moves from this discussion of humanism to a less easy to understand discussion of "scholasticism." This movement of thought is, likewise, important to our understanding of the Protestant Reformation. Concludes McGrath, in one of the best simple definitions that I have read:

"This, then, is the essence of scholasticism: the demonstration of the inherent rationality of Christian theology by an appeal to philosophy, and the demonstration of the complete harmony of that theology by the minute examination of the relationship of its various elements."

Later McGrath adds to this a further helpful comment by saying: "Each scholastic system tried to embrace reality in its totality, dealing with matters of logic, metaphysics, and theology. Everything was shown to have its logical place in a totally comprehensive intellectual system." (p.52)

Against the background of humanism and scholasticism men like Martin Luther did their writing and thinking. Without some understanding of this we cannot understand the Protestant Reformation adequately. McGrath allows the reader to have a basic sense of this fact, and he does it well.

After this important section of the book McGrath comes to "The Doctrine of Grace." (Chapter Five) Here he shows that, "Luther stepped on to the stage of human history on account of an idea. That idea convinced him that the church of his day had misunderstood the gospel, the essence of Christianity. It was necessary to recall it to fidelity, to reform initially its ideology, and subsequently its practices." This whole idea is summed up in the Latin phrases, *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, i.e., salvation is solely by grace through faith alone! Luther's conversion, so obviously related to his coming to grasp the meaning of forensic justification, i.e. something done for the sinner *outside* of himself, became the renewal experience which was linked powerfully to theological recovery.

After dealing with the material principle of the Reformation, which is justification by faith alone, McGrath comes to what is often referred to as the formal principle, *sola scriptura*, or the Scripture alone. Scripture was to be the quarry from which all ideas and practices were hewn, but, as we are shown here, this was much more easily stated than practiced. McGrath says, "If the Reformers dethroned the pope, they enthroned Scripture." (p. 95) The struggle came concerning how the Scripture was to be interpreted, and by whom. The principle of the clarity, or perspicuity, of Scripture, often referred to by Protestants, was "...quietly marginalized, in the light of the use made of the Bible by the more radical elements within the Reformation." (p.115)

Chapter Seven deals with the doctrines of church and the sacraments, while the final chapter addresses the church/state views of Luther, Calvin, Bucer and Zwingli. These chapters show as well that the Reformers were far from a monolithic uniformity in some of their beliefs and practices.

Appendices include a glossary of theological and historical terms, bibliographies, various reference guides and a chronological listing of key political and intellectual events

in the Protestant Reformation. These can be helpful for the reader who desires to dig deeper.

McGrath is an expert in this field, and he writes so that he can be understood. I found his manner genuinely stimulating to my own thought and understanding.

A great weakness of the book is its treatment of the Protestant Reformation as a movement primarily limited to the "Magisterial Reformers" (i.e., Luther, Calvin, etc.) The whole movement known as the Radical Reformation (including men like Hubmaier, Simons, etc.) is passed over with a few comments. As a step-child of certain elements of that movement I feel that Dr. McGrath does not do justice to the pluralism of this body of reformers. He treats it almost as if it fits into a rather neat set of categories, which historians in more recent years have acknowledged is just not the case at all.

All in all this volume should help ordinary readers who wish to understand some of the major currents of reformational thought. If you would like to "get a handle" on the Protestant Reformation and its struggles in the sixteenth century read McGrath. You may have to special order a copy from an all-purpose bookshop, but it will be worth it!

Dr. John H. Armstrong
Editor

Christian: Take Heart!

Tom Wells

Banner of Truth, 1987, 174 pages, paperback, \$6.95.

It is never easy for a reviewer to be completely objective when reviewing the work of a friend. By the same token, if

one finds a good meal he genuinely wants to share it with others who could benefit from the feast, regardless of who cooked the meal. Such is my feeling as I comment on this little book.

Pastors often look far and wide to find helpful and theologically faithful books to assist their own growth and that of their people. For a book to be both popular, i.e., accessible and readable to common people, and at the same time thoughtful and profound is rare. This book is both.

Wells's thesis is that Christians need to be encouraged. He believes many (maybe most?) are not encouraged in their discipleship. The reason he offers, principally, is quite straightforward—the teaching most believers have received concerning the living of the Christian life is sadly mistaken. His pastoral confession is stated in these contrite words:

“In a way, this book is a confession. I too have been a thief. I have stolen God's Word from His people. I did not do it as blatantly as those we used to call ‘the liberals.’ No, my own way was much more subtle. When I looked at the liberals I said, ‘I'd rather see than be one.’

“But I also robbed God's people. Not in a wholesale way, but piecemeal. I, and others who thought like me, robbed God's people of one class of promises. It seems characteristic of much preaching today, even by godly men, to rob God's people in this way. Of course that does not excuse me. I mention others for this reason: many of you who read this are teachers in one way or another. You are preachers, or Sunday School teachers, or parents. Consider carefully what I write. I hope to help you as I have been helped.”

As one who confesses to robbing God's people in my ministry, I take Wells's words personally and quite sincerely. His book helped me understand more particularly how I had committed such a serious error and how to correct it.

In what way does Wells believe we have robbed God's

people in our teaching? He believes that we have robbed God's people of the very specific and clear statements that the Word makes about true Christian believers. We have continually put human conditions on statements like John 7:38 where Jesus says, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” And in verse 39 John adds this interpretative word, “By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.” Wells confesses that at one time he would have told his hearers that if you are a Christian God *wants* the Holy Spirit to give you such power. But the problem, says Wells, is this is simply not what the verse is saying. He uses Romans 6:14 where Paul says, “Sin shall not be your master...” to illustrate the same point. He observes, “They (texts like these cited) are plain statements of fact about believing.” He believes it is a *distortion* to teach that these are things God hopes to do in believers, or wants to do, but in some way cannot or does not. He concludes, soundly I believe, “The Holy Spirit comes to live in, and in varying degrees to flow out of, every believer. Every believer without exception!” (e.g., pages 9-11)

In the first chapter Wells suggests to the reader that the most significant thing one might learn from his book is this: “*The Christian life is a life characterized by righteousness and marred by sin.* If we do not see the difference between what is *habitually* true of a man and what is *occasionally* true of him, we miss the great distinction. And a biblical one!” If the reader gets this idea soundly planted in his mind and uses it wisely he will help both himself and those he serves in the teaching of the Word.

It is, therefore, appropriate that Wells begins with an attempt to answer the question (Chapter 2), “What is a Carnal Christian?” After tracing this common teaching to its sources, Wells concludes, “In a believer, a carnal or fleshly walk can only be temporary or partial. There is no such

thing as a *characteristically* carnal Christian.” (p. 22) A sample of Wells’s wonderful ability to put it plainly and correctly comes at the end of this same chapter when he concludes: “An obedient walk is not a cause of salvation, it is an effect of God’s working in the soul. The *cause* of our salvation—or, one part of our salvation—is beginning to walk as God wants us to walk. We do not take our steps perfectly. We fail in some instances and in some circumstances. Far too many! But, if we are truly believers, our lives are characteristically right. However strange it may seem to us to say this, John insists that it is so. God is at work in each of His people to make them like His Son. What a wonderful fact! Christian, take heart!” (p. 24)

Answering the question regarding the “carnal Christian” leads to chapters entitled: “What About Assurance?,” “Abiding in Christ,” “The Spirit-Filled Life,” “The Psychology of Defeat,” “The Sins of the Christian,” “Are all Christians Alike?,” and “Once Saved, Always Saved?”. In these, and a number of other chapters, the author displays a careful handling of biblical texts, a consistent understanding of progressive sanctification, and a straightforward aversion to the errors of modern perfectionism.

In a chapter entitled, “The Christian and his Teachers,” Pastor Wells corrects two errors quite prevalent in our day of individualism. First, he shows how important it is that we have teachers, and teachers who are well trained in the disciplines necessary for a solid ministry. Later, in the same chapter, he warns of another danger, that of improperly choosing our teachers. He builds a strong case on 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 for teachers being judged according to what they teach, i.e., its truthfulness and faithfulness to the Word of God. One of the most needed warnings in the book follows when he says: “Some men think it is a small matter whose teaching they sit under. ‘He is a good man,’ they say. ‘He is a man with leadership ability.’ Or, ‘He is a great

speaker, I would listen to him by the hour.’ Or again, ‘My children like it there. That’s important to me.’ All of those things may be true, and much more. But here is the acid test: is the preaching carefully and painstakingly true to the word of God? That is *the* question. Does the preacher exalt the work of God in the soul? Is Christ the *all-sufficient* Savior in his eyes? Or is there much *more* beyond Him? I warn you: these questions are nearer to the heart of God than all the eloquence or leadership ability or appeal to young people, in the world.” (p. 97,98)

Wells goes on to show how we substitute other criteria for evaluating a ministry. We ask, “Will this ministry fill the church?” In our age of “church growth” techniques and seminars we need to hear this clear call to true success. Based on Isaiah 55:11 Wells properly concludes, “God says plainly that the preaching of His Word will *always* accomplish what He pleases. The Word of God is *always* successful.” (p. 98)

This helpful little book concludes by showing how “the chickens have come home to roost.” The old two-level doctrines about sanctification, as seen in the errors inherent in “carnal Christian” teaching, have sown a field full of new weeds which hinder the church’s reformation in truth and make prayer for true revival theologically shallow at best.

We need teachers, like Tom Wells, who write in clear, simple, straightforward style and who take us back to the depths of the older paths of biblical teaching. Revival, if genuinely given by God, must come to our sin parched soil, but I pray it will come to hearts and minds prepared by sound teaching like that in *Christian: Take Heart!*

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Editor