

**Book Title*****The Gospel According To Jesus***

John F. MacArthur, Jr.

**Hardcover:** 304 pages  
**Publisher:** Zondervan Publishing  
**Published:** May, 2008  
**ISBN-10:** 0310287294  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0310287292  
**Genre:** Theology  
**Reviewer:** Ronald H. Gann

bcc BRIDGEWAY  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH



As Christians living in an age where false teaching is as pervasive *inside* the Church as the smog *outside* it, we are called to emulate the Bereans of Acts 17 who, when confronted with the revolutionary doctrines of the apostle Paul, “*examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true*” (v. 11, NIV). In other words, that the Bereans were circumspect and willing to use the Old Testament to fact-check Paul’s teaching was an act deemed noteworthy by Luke (the writer of Acts). In point of fact, it earned the Bereans the commendation as a people of nobility.

Today, more than ever, we are called to be Bereans! We are called to fire the guns of higher criticism at anything that purports to be biblical, to include the published works of even the most reputable Christian authors. Despite the notoriety that often comes with their byline, we must not lose sight of the fact that their pens remain fallible, like ours, and they, too, are stricken with the same terminal disease that afflicts us all. Moreover, while their keen insights often help to illuminate and elucidate Scripture for the reader, they are just that: keen insights, never to be confused with *inspired* insights. So, in the spirit of the Bereans, when we read the *uninspired* works of our favorite authors and theologians we must do so with a deliberate eye always on the *inspired* Bible (1 Timothy. 4:6).

The venerable Dr. John MacArthur is one of those authors. “Dr.” John, with whom I’ve had the pleasure of meeting on two occasions, is by no means the “*apostle*” John (as he would be the first to admit). Yet at the same time, MacArthur writes on biblical topics with such incredible command, illumination, and erudition that it seems difficult at times to distinguish between the two. I found this to be especially the case with *The Gospel According To Jesus*, arguably the author’s most controversial work to date.

Following a conference in Orlando in 2007, during a “meet-and-greet” offstage, MacArthur openly admitted to me that *The Gospel According To Jesus* was the one book he had written that, despite being an international best-seller, ostracized him in the evangelical community. And today, over a decade later, his name still appears on the hit list of some, even after the dust has long since settled.

So this begs the question: Why? How could such a celebrated preacher, teacher, and writer like MacArthur provoke such an allergic reaction over one measly book—and one that is rich in Scripture and Protestant theology no less? The answer is because it’s no ordinary book. It is, in my opinion, a masterpiece; one which dares to tackle some of

our long-held (and therefore sensitive) traditions concerning salvation. And whenever a writer attempts to dispel error by venturing into areas where even angels fear to tread, he almost always invites a bull's-eye on his backside. And MacArthur was, and is, no exception to that rule

In a nutshell, *The Gospel According To Jesus* is a three hundred page Bible study, laden with footnotes, that argues in favor of the controversial teaching known as *Lordship Salvation*. What is *Lordship Salvation*? In brief, it is as follows:

Lordship salvation is the position [which maintains] that receiving Christ involves a turning in the heart from sin and, as a part of faith, a submissive commitment to obey Jesus Christ as Lord. It also maintains that progressive sanctification and perseverance must necessarily follow conversion.<sup>1</sup>

It's worth noting that what makes *The Gospel According To Jesus* truly a hotbed for controversy is not just the author's passionate argumentation in favor of *Lordship Salvation* but also the ferocious and unrelenting way in which he attacks its counterweight, commonly known as *cheap grace* or *easy-believism* (both of which assert that intellectual assent to the facts of the Gospel, followed by a simple prayer, is all that is required for saving faith, thereby making null and void obedience, repentance, and a changed life). Page after page, MacArthur indicts much of modern-day evangelicalism for its *cheap grace* mentality, to include seeker-sensitive churches that legitimize it from the pulpit. No opponent to *Lordship Salvation* (or proponent for *easy-believism*) is safe from the crosshairs of MacArthur's stinging rebuke.

Drawing upon Christ's parables as his primary proof-texts, the author expounds upon the questions: (1) *What does it really mean to follow Jesus*; and (2) *Is it enough to accept Christ as Savior or must one also surrender to Him as Lord*? In fleshing out the answers to these questions, the author presents a watertight case for *Lordship Salvation*, insisting that true salvation requires far more than intellectual adherence to the biblical data but must also include a form of suicide—a dying to self, as it were.

Like many books on the subject, however, MacArthur walks the unavoidable tightrope of trying to demarcate *Lordship Salvation* from *works-based* salvation—which is no easy thing given the degree to which both demand a person's obedience. And whether or not he is successful (that is, championing both grace *and* Lordship with the same swipe of the pen) depends really on the theological perspective of the reader. Be that as it may, having been accused of blurring the lines, MacArthur released an expanded edition in 2008 to further clarify the difference.

What I appreciated most about this book, apart from its sophisticated prose, was its entrenched Biblicism. Almost every page is a tutorial on how to study and interpret the Bible. What is more, by effectively making the case for *Lordship Salvation* with one carefully constructed argument after another, the author shows just *how* and *why* the Bible is to be the final court of arbitration—as opposed to our personal whims, denominational traditions, or wishful thinking. If this book demonstrates anything, it demonstrates that it's one thing to argue a theological point from tradition and theory but it's another thing altogether to make a case with Scripture and scholarship. And MacArthur avoids the former while excelling in the latter.

Going beyond the pages of the New Testament, *The Gospel According To Jesus* includes a lengthy Appendix that draws upon the teachings of titanic theologians who have graced the annals of Church history—particularly John Calvin (1509-1564), Martin Luther (1483-1546), Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), and others—all of whom either taught *Lordship Salvation* (as a matter of biblical fact) or decried *easy-believism* (as a matter of biblical principle). By including the Appendix, MacArthur makes no secret of his intent, the purpose of which is to convey to the reader (and his critics) that his teaching is neither new nor outside the bounds of historic orthodoxy. On the contrary, his stated purpose is to show the reader that by espousing *Lordship Salvation* he is only amplifying what Christ taught, what the apostles endorsed, what the patristic Church fathers believed, and what the Magisterial Reformers championed—namely, that saving faith includes obedience, repentance, and submission to the Lord.

Coupled with a little-known book entitled *Essential Christianity* written by Dr. Walter Martin (1928-1989)—a book which motivated me as a young believer to know better what I believed and why I believed it—Dr. John MacArthur’s *The Gospel According To Jesus* gave me a new appreciation for what it truly means to be saved, while also reminding me that obedience and submission are but twin byproducts of authentic saving faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). God expects nothing less from those whom He has predestined, regenerated, called, and saved.

The road to salvation is truly narrow, MacArthur contends in *The Gospel According To Jesus*, and the road to destruction is quite broad; a road which many foolish and self-deceived people willingly take, for although they acknowledge Christ in their minds they neither bend their knee to him in their hearts nor submit to His Word in practice. Convinced that intellectual belief, alone, is good enough to save; they doom themselves to eternal death. The reader beware, so says the author.

But don’t take MacArthur’s word for it. Nor should you take mine. Instead, like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, I encourage you to read *The Gospel According To Jesus* with an open mind and an open Bible, and then examine “*the Scriptures every day to see if what [the author] said was true.*”

—Ronald H. Gann

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.theopedia.com/Lordship\\_salvation](http://www.theopedia.com/Lordship_salvation)