

Recovering the Real Lost Gospel: Reclaiming The Gospel as Good News. By Darrell L. Bock. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010. 146 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

I've known the author since he was one of my professors in the doctoral program at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS). In the late 1990s he and I had a public discussion in front of about 150 DTS students on the topic of this book.

Bock has the ability to clearly communicate the prevailing views of Evangelical scholars on just about any topic, the gospel included. This work has only a handful of footnotes and only two citing an author other than Bock himself (p. 13 fn. 6, p. 84 fn. 5). That shows that this is not being put forth for scholars but for laypeople and for Bible college and seminary students. However, his words reflect what is seen repeatedly in the current scholarly literature about salvation and the gospel. He easily could have quoted scores of scholars who agree with him. That makes this very helpful since it is a primer on what current scholarship thinks about salvation and the gospel.

Pastor Rick Warren in the foreword says, "Darrell [Bock] demonstrates that the real gospel encompasses far more than just a transaction for sin, or a therapy for self, or a transportation to heaven. The gospel is transforming! It transforms everything about us, in us, around us, and for us. It does what we could have never done for ourselves" (p. vii).

Similarly three of the endorsers mention "the transformative power" of the gospel (Ed Blum, p. i), the "connect[ion] the gospel and the cross [have] with the life of discipleship" (Timothy George, p. ii), and "the nature of the gospel as the fullness of life in the Spirit for everyday Christians" (Michael J. Wilkins, p. ii).

Though Bock does not believe that the gospel only concerns "a transaction for sin," or "transportation to heaven" as Warren rightly notes, he does believe that in order to make it to heaven one must yield his life to Christ and must experience a transformed life (see, for example, pp. 98, 104, 106, 125-132).

JOTGES readers would be especially interested in Chap. 6, "Embracing the Gospel: Repentance and Faith" (pp. 89-110). The proper response, that is, the saving response, to the gospel requires both repentance and faith, he says. There must be a "change of direction that comes with the response to the gospel" (p. 89). He says that repentance is a change of mind "about God and our relationship with Him..., rethinking the way we relate and respond to

God..., and it can also touch on how we relate to others,” (p. 92), which he calls the “ethical impact” of the call to repent (pp. 92-93).

It should be no surprise that when Bock discusses what faith is, it is not simply believing, but includes an openness to God and to being led by Him. “Faith...is not static. That is, we do not have faith in a moment; it is an ongoing state...*faith is not a one-time act*; it keeps going. When we equate faith with belief, we are talking about an ongoing faith, not merely a moment of intellectual assent. This why trust, or reliance, is better a synonym than belief. This faith means that we are open to God and responsive to Him. *Without that responsiveness, faith is not faith*” (p. 98, emphases added).

A few pages later he adds, “However, this faith is not merely an act in a moment; it is an orientation that opens us up to respond to God and be led by Him. It leads us into following His path, because we trust Him (Eph 2:10)” (p. 104). And again two pages later he repeats, “Faith is not a mere act taken in a moment; it is a fresh orientation of responsiveness to God” (p. 106).

The concluding chapter starts with a discussion of Luke 15 and especially the parable of the prodigal son, which Bock says “is mis-named.” He says that, “It really is about the Compassionate Father” (p. 130). He says, “This dynamic [God’s love of us causing us to love Him in return] explains *how Jesus could teach that the way to eternal life was to love God with all our being*. Faith in God means entry into His love that causes us to love and respond to Him in return” (p. 130).

This is a sophisticated presentation of Lordship Salvation. Yet it is explained in a very irenic way. Bock’s discussion lacks some of the harsher tones found in some presentations of Lordship Salvation.

As an example of the irenic tone, Bock ends the concluding chapter with a discussion of Luke 7:36-50 and the sinful woman who was so grateful to have been forgiven by Jesus. He then gives what he calls “a modern version of Jesus’ story” (p. 132). A couple cannot pay their mortgage and are about to lose their home. The lender calls them in and “asks where the payments are, and you tell him you cannot pay.” But then “he reaches into his desk and begins to write. He hands you the mortgage and a check...He has just paid your [entire] mortgage. You are free to go with the house now fully yours. Undeserved, your debt is paid. Now if that happened, I bet you’d be grateful to the lender. In fact, I bet you’d be willing to tell others about your great lender” (p. 132).

The last illustration does not say anything about the ongoing nature of faith, about the need to love God in return, about the

change in direction needed, etc. Is Bock contradicting himself? While one could understand the closing discussion in that way, a more balanced understanding is that Bock expects the reader to remember all that he has said and discussed about repentance and faith and responsiveness to God until this point. For Bock everlasting life is a gift of God's grace *and* it is something that is only received as one continues to love God with his whole being until death. While that is confusing, it is an accurate reflection of the current state of theological scholarship.

I recommend this book. It is well worth reading and having.

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