

**COMMENTARY ON AND REVIEW OF
K.C. MOSER'S
*THE WAY OF SALVATION AND THE GIST OF ROMANS***

By Dub McClish

Introduction

This chapter reviews two, rather than one book, both by the late K.C. Moser: *The Way of Salvation* and *The Gist of Romans*). The rationale for this dual review is the close relationship of the content of these books to each other, although published a quarter-century apart (*The Way of Salvation* in 1932; *The Gist of Romans* in 1957). The first book was essentially a compilation of material from his numerous articles published in *Firm Foundation* between 1922 and 1932. *The Gist of Romans* was Moser's response to a commentary on Romans, written mainly in response to *The Way of Salvation* (to which circumstance I will devote more attention subsequently). The theme of both of Moser's books (indeed of his life) was that emphasis upon the "plan of salvation" was "legalistic" and nullifies the doctrine of salvation by grace. Moser was a pioneering "grace-only" advocate.

Who Was K.C. Moser?

Kenney Carl Moser entered this world January 23, 1893, on his parents' farm near Johnson City, Texas. His father, J.S. Moser, a Texas and Oklahoma preacher/farmer (very common for those times), baptized K.C. when he was 19. After teaching 5 years in a one-room school, he enrolled in old Thorp Spring Christian College, near Granbury, Texas, as a preacher student in 1915. He preached his first sermon that same year. By 1918, Moser was on the Thorp Spring faculty as a music teacher.

His first full-time preaching work was in Normangee, Texas, beginning in 1919. Over the next four decades, he preached for ten or more congregations in Texas and Oklahoma, eventually retiring in Oklahoma City. In 1964, although Moser was 71, F.W. Mattox, then president of Lubbock Christian College and long-time Moser friend, called him out of retirement to join the school's Bible faculty. After a tenure of eight years, he retired a second time and died in 1976 at the age of 83.

Publication History

Moser's first published article appeared in *Firm Foundation* in 1919, when he was 26 years old. The next year, *Gospel Advocate* carried one of his articles for the first time, but the greatest proliferation of his material appeared in the former paper. Between 1919 and 1932, only ten of his articles appeared in *Gospel Advocate*, while thirty-nine of them made their appearance in *Firm Foundation*.

While Moser's articles ranged broadly in subject matter, as early as 1922 he introduced what was to be the great emphasis (if not hobby) of his subsequent preaching, writing, and teaching efforts, namely: Emphasis by Gospel preachers upon the plan of salvation constitutes "legalism" and nullifies the doctrine of salvation by grace. This theme dominated his articles in the 1920s and 1930s and became the mantra of both of his books, along with several tracts.

A Glance at the Books

The Way of Salvation

My copy bears the inscription, "Faithfully," and was autographed by the author as a gift to my late father-in-law, B.B. James. (While he and I never discussed Moser and his doctrine that I can recall, it is not in the realm of possibility that he agreed with the

Moser emphasis.) The book was originally published by Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, Tennessee, a great irony as we shall later see.

The Way of Salvation is a small book of only 174 pages, divided into a Preface (by Cled E. Wallace), a Review (by G.C. Brewer, which was published in *Gospel Advocate*, May 11, 1933, and was included in second and subsequent editions, of which my copy is one), followed by 9 chapters, with the following headings:

- Chapter 1—The Need of Redemption
- Chapter 2—The Way of Salvation
- Chapter 3—The Justification of Abraham
- Chapter 4—Repentance and Faith
- Chapter 5—Confession and Baptism
- Chapter 6—The Righteousness of God
- Chapter 7—The Gift of the Holy Spirit
- Chapter 8—Sanctification
- Chapter 9—Worship

The Gist of Romans is even smaller, containing only 136 pages. The brief (2-page) Preface is followed by a 16-page Introduction, in which Moser sets forth twelve items he believes are crucial to understanding salvation (e.g., the meaning of *salvation*, qualifications of the Savior, conditions of salvation, grace and mercy, faith, trust, et al.). This book is by no means a commentary in the traditional sense of exposition of each verse, as signaled by the fact that Moser titled it *The Gist of Romans*. The bulk of the book consists of the author's comments on only selected verses (those which he strings together to fit his doctrinal position) from each of the 16 chapters of the epistle, followed by 2 pages of Concluding Remarks.

I will quote numerous passages from both books that will illustrate his principal doctrinal errors. Concerning only a few of these I will present some refutation. I need not

provide more detailed refutation because another brother, contemporary with Moser and far more capable than I, has already soundly refuted his principal errors, as I shall discuss later.

Some General Observations

While Moser is not what I would call a good wordsmith, he writes plainly enough to get his point across. He has obviously done so, for the effects of his doctrine can be seen far and wide, especially since the rise of liberalism among brethren beginning in the 1960s. When one reads one of these books, he hardly needs to read the other, for their themes and emphases are one. In *The Gist of Romans*, Moser uses the chapter divisions of Romans (especially chapters 1–11) as the structural device for the doctrinal thrust he set forth in *The Way of Salvation*. In many instances he does little more than quote himself from the first book to the second. The principal difference between the two is this: Moser wrote *The Way of Salvation* as the crystallization of his doctrinal emphasis between 1922–32 (which emphasis he vigorously promoted the rest of his life). He apparently wrote *The Gist of Romans* in an effort to counteract the damage a 1945 commentary on Romans, written in large part in answer to his *The Way of Salvation*, did to his doctrinal contentions. Since Moser's two books are so parallel in content, most of the material I will quote will be from *The Way of Salvation*.

Faithful brethren can heartily “Amen” some things in both books. His material on the action involved in baptism is as good as one would hope to find in a few words (*Way* 81–84). In his chapter on Sanctification, Moser makes worthy comments relative to discerning good and evil and church discipline (*Way* 162–64). While by no means agreeing with his comments on the meaning of *spirit and truth* in John 4:24,

nevertheless, his statements relative to worship versus formality and to attitudes that are conducive to worship are good (*Way* 167–68).

Moser relies heavily on modern speech paraphrases and free-wheeling one-man “versions” to shore up his contentions (e.g., Moffatt, Goodspeed, Weymouth, 20th Century New Testament), which reliance raises a red flag to careful Bible students. For example, to reinforce his ill-founded contention on the justifying effects of believing and confessing one’s faith on the basis of Romans 10:10 (a contention that would make any faith-only advocate jump for joy), he quotes the modernist James Moffatt’s translation: “For with the heart man believes and is justified, with his mouth he confesses and is saved” (*Way* 109). Had the *New International Version* of the New Testament been available in 1932 (published in 1973), Moser could (and likely would) have used it to the same end. It renders Romans 10:10 very much after the fashion of Moffatt: “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

Grace and Law, Faith and Works

The crux of both of Moser’s books is his complaint that the relationships between grace and law and faith and works were being misconstrued and erroneously taught by most brethren of his time. This theme is closely intertwined with that of antinomianism, discussed below, but it is so prominent in Moser’s theology that it deserves separate notice. He charges brethren with preaching a graceless “gospel” that legalistically relies upon compliance with law for justification. He therefore labors mightily and constantly to counteract this perceived error. Note the following examples:

And in the third [i.e., passage, Rom. 11:6] it is found that grace excludes works. This is so because the principle of grace and the principle of works are not compatible.... These two principles are everywhere represented as exact opposites (*Way 36*).

It is forgotten that grace and works are naturally opposed... (*Way 39*).

Strange that men will plead for a doctrine [i.e., that we are under Divine law in the Gospel age] that makes void the grace of God and seals their own condemnation. But they are still doing it! (*Way 52*).

Grace and faith mutually imply each other, as do law and works; and grace and works, as well as law and faith, mutually exclude each other (*Way 53*).

But Jesus did not bring *law*, nor did Moses bring *grace* (*Gist xi*, emph. in orig.).

Law brings *obligations*; grace brings a *Savior*" (*Gist xviii*, emph. in orig.)

The legalist glories in law, human righteousness, and rituals until he learns of Christ, grace, faith, and the spiritual. The law becomes "refuse" (*Gist 1*).

Mercy annuls the operation of law, just as law makes void mercy. The principles of law and grace cannot exist together (*Gist 17*).

These are but samples of a multitude of Moser's expressions on the same theme. Part of his excitement over this subject stemmed from his own misconceptions of the Truth, and part of it came from his erection of doctrinal "straw men" that did not and do not actually exist.

Calvinistic Inclinations

While we cannot describe Moser as an ultra-Calvinist, we may correctly characterize him (along with many who have come along in more recent years) as at least a "semi-Calvinist." That is, he has (as other brethren since him—and perhaps because of him—have) adopted significant parts of Calvin's theological system, sort of a "Calvinism-lite." Moser's Calvinistic leanings include antinomianism, imputed righteousness, and the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, as the following examples demonstrate:

Antinomianism

One does not read much from either of Moser's books before encountering what becomes a constant drumbeat that lambastes "legalism" and "legalists." His definition and use of these terms smacks loudly of Calvinistic antinomianism. Antinomianism consists of rejection of or opposition to law (from the compound of two Greek words, *anti*—against and *nomos*—law). John Calvin's five-point doctrinal system includes the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace. A third point of his theology is perseverance of the saints, which holds that those among the elect cannot be lost, regardless of their convictions or behavior. These terrible triplets deny the need for and/or the efficacy of human works of obedience in response to Divine commands (i.e., law). Per Calvinism, man's salvation is all up to God, which He foreordained person-by-person. Men can (and need) do nothing to effect their own salvation. Thus Calvinism logically makes Divine law to which men are accountable irrelevant. Calvinism is therefore antinomian by definition.

In theological terms, the polar opposite of antinomianism is legalism, which emphasizes the human works of law-keeping (rather than faith in Christ's atonement and in God's grace) as the pre-eminent principle and means of redemption. Dedicated and knowledgeable Bible students cannot accept either legalism or antinomianism: Abraham **was not** saved by his works (of perfectly keeping God's law) (Rom. 4:1–4); Abraham **was** saved by works (of obedience to God's law) (Jam. 2:21–24). Both Paul and James use this patriarch's justification by God as a pattern of justification for all who will be saved in every age.

Denominational liberals pejoratively hurl *legalist* at anyone who dares question their Scripture-wresting pronouncements relative to grace and obedience to Divine law. Moser blazed the trail for recent generations of liberals in the church, likewise pejoratively casting as “legalists” all who did not subscribe to his redefinition of legalism:

1. Emphasis upon the New Testament as “law” (in spite of the fact that inspired writers so describe it: Rom. 8:2; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; Jam. 1:25; 2:12)
2. Emphasis upon the necessity of obedience to the New Testament in order to be saved (in spite of the fact that the New Testament emphasizes it: Mat. 7:21–23; Luke 6:46; 2 The. 1:7–9; Heb. 5:8–9; Jam. 1:22; 1 John 2:3–6; et al.).
3. Emphasis upon the New Testament “plan of salvation” (in spite of the fact that the New Testament sets forth such a plan, apart from which none can be saved, as exemplified in such passages as Mark 16:16 and in the accounts of conversion in Acts).

The following citations are representative of Moser’s numerous fulminations against what he styles as “legalism”:

The legalistic error he [Paul] was fighting ruled Christ out entirely.... Strange that men will plead for a doctrine that makes void the grace of God and seals their own condemnation. But they are still doing it! (*Way* 52).

But Christianity is not a legalistic system consisting of law and works, but a system of grace, the blessings of which are conditioned on faith (*Way* 67).

Furthermore, if saving faith precedes repentance, then faith is nothing more than belief of facts. This is legalistic faith, and necessarily places man under law (*Way* 68).

Instead of James (1:25) saying that man under Christ is under a pure legalistic system that enslaves, he is particular to assert that he is under a “perfect law, the law of liberty” (*Way* 74).

Still others imagine the power of the blood has been transferred to a *plan*. This is to degenerate Christianity into a crude legalism. Absolutely nothing is to be gained with

thinking people by such absurd positions. The Bible offers no excuse for them (*Way* 107).

It would be most difficult to find a more unphilosophical and unscriptural theory than that Christ arbitrarily selected certain things as conditions of salvation. This is a modern discovery! It was begotten by a legalistic conception of Christianity (*Gist* xi).

A poor “salesman” sells sinners on “terms of pardon,” instead of *Christ*. Inspired “salesmen” sold *Christ as Savior*, not the *conditions* leading to him. They converted sinners to *Christ*, not to a “law of pardon” (*Gist* xviii, *emph. in orig.*).

“Schemes” and “plans” legalistically conceived avail nothing. *Sinners need Christ* (*Gist* 8, *emph. in orig.*).

A spiritual death to sin, a spiritual resurrection with Christ, and a trust in the blood of Christ, rather than a talismanic performance of certain “steps,” make one a child of God (*Gist* 14).

As with all Calvinists (or those infected with this element of Calvinism), Moser fails to see his glaring inconsistency regarding the relationship between law, sin, grace, and justification. He despises any concept of justification of sinners that involves law, and constantly (in both of his books) turns to Paul’s Romans letter for his proof-texts. He utterly misses (or ignores) the incontrovertible (both theologically and logically) principle **this same Paul stated repeatedly in Romans**, that sin does not exist in the absence of law:

But where there is no law, neither is there transgression (4:15b).

But sin is not imputed when there is no law (5:13b).

For apart from the law sin is dead (7:8b).

The concepts of *justification*, *grace*, *guilt*, and *sin* are all meaningless if men are freed from all law by and under the Gospel. The need for grace, predicated upon the need for justification, is nonexistent apart from the guilt of sin. But, as Paul sets forth explicitly above (and as the Bible teaches implicitly everywhere), it is impossible to sin

(i.e., transgress God’s law [1 John 3:4]) where no law exists. So here we logically and Scripturally have all of the antinomians by the throat—whether in the era of Augustine, Calvin, Moser, or ours: No law—no sin, no sin—no guilt, and thus nothing from which to be justified, which justification predicates the need for God’s grace. Moser and his type constantly intone that law and grace, as oil and water, do not mix; law keeping voids the grace of God, he avers. Bible students fully acknowledge this truth—**if this statement is taught as the Bible teaches it**. However, Moser and friends never “get it” that their crusade against **even the idea of the existence** of spiritual law under Christ completely voids the grace of God by destroying any need for it. **Antinomianism thus implies universal salvation.**

Imputed Righteousness

Yet another Calvinistic doctrine in which Moser dabbles is imputed righteousness. Calvinism holds that the perfect personal righteousness of Christ is transferred or imputed to the sinner when he attains “saving faith.” By this means, in Calvin’s system, the erroneously alleged depravity the sinner inherited from all the way back to Adam is cancelled, and he instantly becomes perfectly righteous and incapable of further sin. A phrase in one of the hymns we frequently sing likely is a reflection of this dogma in the mind of the song-writer: “Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.”

Moser’s statement of this heresy is as follows:

Attention has already been called to the importance of the principle of imputation under Christ. Just as the disobedience of Adam is imputed to the whole human race, so is the obedience of Christ imputed to those who have faith in him. We die, not because of personal sins, but because of our fleshly relationship to him who represented the whole race. Just so we live—not because of personal, subjective

righteousness, but because of faith in Christ. That is, Adam's sin becomes the sin of all mankind—"for that all sinned." And the obedience of Christ becomes the righteousness of the believer. The believer does not have to depend upon his own imperfect obedience. He pleads the obedience of Christ. Christ is his righteousness (*Way 118*).

Direct Operation of the Holy Spirit

Moser titles one of his chapters in *The Way of Salvation*, "The Gift of the Holy Spirit." After devoting the first few pages thereof to setting forth the doctrine of the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit (with which I agree), he then discusses "The Function of the Indwelling Spirit," followed by a discussion of "The Fruit of the Spirit." He very plainly teaches the Spirit's direct help, apart from and in addition to His Word, by means of His indwelling. As many brethren do (both among those who deny as well as those affirm the personal indwelling of the Spirit), Moser apparently assumes without warrant the following equation: *Personal indwelling of the Spirit = Direct operation of the Spirit*. Note some of Moser's statements to this effect:

The Holy Spirit is given the child of God for the purpose of crucifying lust and thus enabling man to live righteously (*Way 71*).

It is called the "law of the Spirit" [Rom. 8:2] because the Spirit in man is the source of this new tendency toward righteousness (*Way 73*).

By means of the indwelling spirit, then the deeds of the body are put to death.... The "mind of the flesh" is overcome, and, by means of the spirit, the child of God possesses the "mind of the Spirit" (*Way 135*).

The flesh is crucified by means of the Spirit, since the conflict that gave the victory was between the flesh and the Spirit. Here, then, is plenty of work for "the Spirit of God that dwelleth in you" (*Way 136*).

In designating the Spirit as the source of these graces [Gal. 5:22–23], the apostle does not mean to separate the fruit of the Spirit from the person's effort in whom the Spirit dwells. The person being influenced by the Spirit brings forth these graces.

They are the work of both man and the Spirit, but primarily of the Spirit, because he incites them (*Way*, pp. 138–39).

Hence the leading of the Spirit contemplated in our text (Rom. 8:14) is the incitement to righteousness of the indwelling Spirit. It is man who produces the “fruit of the Spirit.” But it is the man who is ruled by the Spirit “that dwelleth in you,” just as the man who is dominated by the “law of sin” fulfills the lust of the flesh.... Let us not be afraid that we shall be robbed of the glory of overcoming the devil! It does not belong to us (*Gist* p. 82).

One is made to wonder if Moser might be one of the great influences in Mac Deaver’s departure from the Truth into the “never-never land” of direct operation of the Holy Spirit he has been trumpeting since 1996. Had I not provided context and citation of sources for the foregoing quotations, it is most likely that knowledgeable brethren would have opined that they came from Deaver’s pen. As must all who advocate the Spirit’s direct impact and influence (“incitement,” ala Moser) in leading the Christian into paths of righteousness, Moser sees and seeks to deflect one of the great problems of his error: If the Spirit is “primarily” responsible for the Christian’s right behavior, He (not His host) deserves the credit (“glory,” ala Moser). However, all of these “direct-operation” advocates refuse to grapple with the other side of that coin: If the Christian misbehaves, the Spirit deserves the blame. By their doctrine, the Saint who hears, “Depart from me,” from the Righteous Judge, may rightly plead, “But Lord, it’s the Spirit’s fault; He didn’t provide enough strength when I was tempted.” While the New Testament teaches that the Spirit strengthens us and bears fruit in us (Eph. 3:16; Gal. 5:22–23), but He does so through His Word (Eph. 6:10–17; Col. 1:5–10).

Historical Notes Regarding Moser and His Influence

[**Note:** The following section borrows heavily from material I previously wrote on this subject, See *Works Cited* for documentation.]

“The Man or the Plan” Discussion

In the early 1960s I was a young preacher, not long out of Abilene Christian College. I well remember the lively discussion among brethren of “the Man or the plan” controversy. It arose from the accusation some brethren began making at the time that Gospel preachers had been too “negative” and “dogmatic” and had emphasized the plan of salvation too much and the Lord and His redemptive work too little.

Reuel Lemmons, editor of *Firm Foundation* at the time, opined that those who thus argued (whom he styled the “liberal left”), were seeking to foist a dangerous theological shift on churches of Christ. He predicted that, with the easing of the anti-ism controversy in the 1950s, the next battle would be with liberalism, signaled by those who were contending for less emphasis on the Gospel plan and more on Jesus and grace, and he was right. (Ironically, Lemmons over the next twenty years moved so far leftward that he became a standard bearer for that “liberal left” element. He lost his editorial chair with *Firm Foundation* in 1983 when sound brethren purchased it. However, Alton Howard gave Lemmons’ liberalism a new platform when by founding *Image Magazine* for that very purpose.)

The K.C. Moser Factor

The 1960s push among our brethren for the “Man over the plan” (essentially advocating salvation by “grace only”) did not begin in at that time, however. Likewise, the veritable explosion of “grace-only” advocacy among liberal preachers, authors, and professors among us in the 1980s and 1990s also has much longer and deeper roots than the discussion that erupted in the 1960s. In fact, as subsequent documentation will

demonstrate, the latter appearance was merely a reincarnation from four decades earlier.

John Mark Hicks wrote two articles on Moser in 1995, appearing in *Restoration Quarterly* (a magazine published by Abilene Christian University) (see Hicks in *Works Cited*). He has bounced around in various liberal circles over the past several years, and at the time he wrote the articles, he was a staffer at Family of God at Woodmont Hills, Nashville, TN (Rubel Shelly's domain for several years before he moved to Rochester, MI a few years ago). Hicks is among the leaders of the current crop of "grace-only" advocates. To him, Moser is doubtless a spiritual giant and hero. Hicks's articles are interesting, both because of some of the history of the period covered, but also because they reveal the liberals' evaluation of how influential Moser was and is regarding the proliferation of *grace-only* theology in the church presently. The names of some influential men who endorsed and encouraged Moser and his views, as revealed in Hicks' first article, may surprise some readers when I cite them.

The Hicks articles are also interesting in that they confirm what some others and I have been stating for several years—K.C. Moser is the principal source in the church of the *Man-or-the-Plan* (or better, *Demote-the-Plan-of-the-Man*) contention of the 1960s. In other words, K.C. Moser was a liberal long before liberalism was "cool" among our brethren. His influence is no less felt in the ever louder "grace-only" voices of the past thirty years that openly proclaim the doctrine that "salvation is by grace, period" (some have gone so far as to launch a "grace-specific" Website, appropriately named, "Grace-Centered Magazine").

Moser began early in his writing career to attack his perception of “legalistic” preaching relating to grace and the plan of salvation. In forty articles from his pen in this period, almost half of them treated the themes of grace, atonement, faith, and works and their relationships to each other. As far as I can discern, he originated the *Man-or-Plan* phrase and first applied it to his ideas on grace in a *Firm Foundation* article in the early 1930s (which article drew an immediate rebuttal from R.L. Whiteside in *Gospel Advocate*).

By 1932, Moser had all but ceased writing for *Firm Foundation* (likely due to editor G.H.P. Showalter’s disagreement and weariness with his hobby) and began writing for *Gospel Advocate* (ironically, with which journal Whiteside, who became one of Moser’s strongest antagonists, had strong connections). That same year The Gospel Advocate Company, owner of the paper, published Moser’s first book, *The Way of Salvation*. As earlier indicated, this book incorporated material from his numerous articles on the grace/legalism theme. C. Leonard Allen, an ACU-related liberal, summarized the intent of Moser’s book as a correction of a “displacement of the cross and God’s grace” (123).

Wallace, Showalter, and Whiteside

It is a strange paradox that The Gospel Advocate Company published Moser’s book. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., who had nothing but antipathy for Moser’s *grace-only* doctrine, was editor of *Gospel Advocate* when the book was published, but he obviously had no control over book publication. Upon its publication, Wallace referred to Moser’s book editorially, but with criticism. The book apparently generated little notice at first, except for Wallace’s negative reference. Stranger still, in 1933, Moser was appointed

(likely by Leon B. McQuiddy, owner of the Gospel Advocate Company—surely not by Wallace, the paper’s editor) to head the “Text and Context” department of the *Advocate*.

A most interesting historical vignette, titled “An Important Transcript,” concludes *The Present Truth*, the last book (1977) that came from the pen of Foy E. Wallace, Jr. This brief essay, written forty-five years after the occurrences it describes, relates entirely to K.C. Moser and his influence in the 1930s. Wallace’s words demonstrate that he was still much concerned about Moser’s book (*The Way of Salvation*), doctrine, and influence as they related to Wallace’s editorship of the *Advocate*. The Wallace piece also deals with his brother Cled’s writing the introduction to *The Way of Salvation*. Wallace explained that Cled did so merely out of personal friendship with Moser and from “the goodness of his heart,” but that he only commended some of Moser’s “personal qualities, rather than endorsing Moser’s positions” (Wallace 1036).

Wallace further related that Moser’s attempts to “inject his peculiar ideas on ‘repentance before faith’ and the ‘conditions’ of salvation were so contrary to the gospel” as to provoke opposition from the other staff writers (particularly H. Leo Boles, F.B. Srygley, R.L. Whiteside, and C.R. Nichol). Moser lasted only a few months in charge of his department, his departure from which Wallace succinctly explained: “He was dropped from the staff” (1036). Wallace further relates that soon after Moser’s departure for the *Advocate*,

G.H.P. Showalter, editor of the *Firm Foundation*, and R.L. Whiteside, exposed his “saved by the man, not by the plan” and “salvation by faith” hobby as being contrary to the gospel plan of salvation, and as being no more nor less than denominational doctrine (1036).

Also in 1933, Whiteside began a series of articles in the *Advocate* on Romans, directly responding to and answering material in *The Way of Salvation*. These articles

later formed the basis of Whiteside's *A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome* (which I deem to be among the best ever written on Romans; I treasure my copy of the second edition, inscribed with Whiteside's compliments on March 2, 1949, to James E. Chessor, who in turn, gave it to B.B. James, my father-in-law, who passed it on to me). When I remarked earlier that a refutation of Moser's doctrinal scheme was already available, and had been for some years, I had Whiteside's commentary.

In yet another irony, Cled Wallace not only wrote the "Preface" to Moser's *The Way of Salvation*, but he also, in combination with his brother, Foy, and C.R. Nichol, wrote a most complimentary "Introduction" to Whiteside's commentary—the main purpose of which, remember, was to answer Moser's book (Whiteside 3–5). The following quotes are samples of how specifically the erudite Whiteside aimed at Moser's doctrine in his commentary and how dangerous he considered that doctrine to be:

Moffatt's rendering of this verse, as quoted by K.C. Moser, in *The Way of Salvation* [45], cannot justly be considered a translation at all: 'Then what becomes of our boasting: It is ruled out absolutely. On what principle? On the principle of doing deeds? No, on the principle of faith' (Whiteside 92)..

To me it seems inexcusable that a person should so misunderstand Paul as to draw the following conclusion: "Indeed, it seems to be difficult even at the present time for many to grasp the idea of righteousness that does not depend on human effort." Surely the author [*Way* 115] did not properly consider the import of his words. If a Universalist or an Ultra-Calvinist had penned such words, we would not be surprised. Not only am I not able to grasp the ideal of a righteousness that does not depend on human effort, but I do not believe there is such righteousness in any human being. If a human being is made righteous without any human effort, then why are not all righteous? It is certain that the most of them are not making any effort to attain to righteousness (Whiteside 93).

If people would quit arraying the commands of God against the grace of God [a reference to Moser's doctrinal thrust], they would have a clearer vision of the scheme of redemption. God's grace is in every command he gives (Whiteside 97).

It has been erroneously assumed and falsely argued that to impute a thing to a person is to put to his account something he does not have, or somewhat more than he has. The Presbyterian and Baptist Confessions of Faith, and a host of theologians of both schools, teach that the righteousness of Christ is imputed, or credited, to the sinner. I was sorry to see it also taught in *The Way of Salvation* [118]. The doctrine is wholly without Scriptural support (Whiteside 98).

As earlier indicated, another interesting twist in the saga between Whiteside and Moser is that, just as Whiteside's Romans commentary was basically a response to Moser's *The Way of Salvation*, so Moser's *The Gist of Romans* was a response to Whiteside's commentary. Thus Moser quotes Whiteside [96] as follows:

The principle of works is so important in this epistle, and so difficult for many to understand, that a further study seems justifiable. For example, note this statement: "If all works are eliminated, faith itself is eliminated, for faith is a work." Then the words of Jesus in John 6:29 are offered as proof. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (*Gist* 48).

Hicks relates that no sooner had Whiteside begun writing his rebuttals to *The Way of Salvation* in *Gospel Advocate* in 1933, *Firm Foundation* editor, G.H.P. Showalter, wrote in an editorial that he "regarded Moser as a traitor who had sided with the Baptists" (*Historical* 5).

Wallace also noted in his 1977 comments on Moser that the Baptist debater, Ben M. Bogard, whom several brethren debated in the 1930s, endorsed Moser's book and taunted brethren with it when debating them. After referring to Moser's theology as "denominational doctrine," Wallace wrote:

In fact, Ben M. Bogard, the reputed Baptist debater declared his acceptance of the Moser book with endorsement in his Baptist paper, and paraded it in debate against our own debaters who were compelled to publicly repudiate it (1036).

Well did Bogard count Moser's book for his cause, as can be seen when one compares some of Moser's statements with one of Bogard's assertions in his 1938 debate with N.B. Hardeman:

I am going to maintain that there is no act at all that any man in the Old Testament time or the New ever had to perform in order to be saved. Salvation is received by faith, and faith is the only thing you can do without doing anything (*Hardeman-Bogard* 93).

(Is it not strange that Baptist Bogard could recognize Baptist doctrine in Moser's book, but some influential brethren of Moser's day could not and some of our time cannot?)

It is no wonder that Wallace, Whiteside, Showalter, and others described *The Way of Salvation* as "contrary to the gospel plan of salvation" and "no more nor less than denominational doctrine" (1036). Wallace, after the passing of almost half a century, still regretted that the Wallace name had in any way lent credibility to Moser:

My deceased brother Cled E. Wallace, expressed regret for having allowed his name to be so connected and mis-used to promote positions to the hurt of the New Testament plan of salvation to which his own writings were always so true. And I personally regret having contributed to its [i.e., *The Way of Salvation*] circulation in its earlier stages by announcements in the *Gospel Advocate* (1036).

It is clear from the foregoing material that Moser's doctrine was not welcomed by some of his most influential contemporary writers and preachers.

Brewer, Thomas, Mattox—and Moser

Unlike Wallace, Whiteside, and others, Hicks documents the fact that G.C. Brewer, prominent preacher and generally considered a stalwart defender of the faith (also an *Advocate* staff writer under Wallace in the early 1930s), wrote an extremely

favorable review of the Moser book. The *Advocate* published the review (“Read This Book”) in its May 11, 1933 edition, a year after the book was published. In subsequent editions (as in my copy), Brewer’s article became the “Introduction” at the beginning of the book. He began by calling it “One of the best little books that came from any press in 1932...” (*Way* 8). In keeping with his unqualified and numerous glowing compliments of Moser’s work, Brewer concluded his review as follows:

Every reader of the Gospel Advocate should order a copy of *The Way of Salvation* and read it two or three times. It will enlarge his vision and refresh his soul. I commend this book heartily. If there is a conclusion in it with which I differ, I do not now recall it.

While Wallace rightly judged Moser’s doctrine as borrowed from the denominations, Brewer clearly viewed it as an antidote for a perceived “legalism” among brethren. We can only imagine the tensions in the *Advocate* offices between Wallace, Whiteside, and others, in their opposition to Moserism on the one hand and Brewer in his role as a one-man Moser pep squad on the other.

In 1937, Moser published a booklet, which he titled, *Are We Preaching the Gospel?* in which he accused brethren of preaching an “abstract plan” of human works rather than grace received through faith. Moser published yet another booklet in 1952, titled, *Christ Versus a “Plan.”* Brewer also praised and promoted these tracts.

That same year (1937) Brewer made his own mark on the *grace-versus-works* theme in a speech on “Grace and Salvation” at the Abilene Christian College Lectureship. The late J.D. Thomas, in his first year as director of the lectureship, purposely assigned him this topic because he agreed with Brewer and Moser, according to liberal Hicks (*Historical* 7). Brewer apparently accomplished Thomas’ goal, for he counted Brewer’s lecture a “pivotal turning point” in doctrine for the church. Thomas was

definitely a Moser acolyte, as demonstrated in two of his books (see Thomas, Works Cited). If nothing else, Brewer's sermon lent some credibility to Moser's unrelenting theme.

Moser published his final book, *The Gist of Romans*, in 1957. Brewer died of cancer in 1956, and thus never saw Moser's last book. Given his previous support of Moser's doctrine, had he lived to see it, one can easily imagine his giving it high marks. When I arrived on the ACC campus in 1957, after three years at Freed-Hardeman College, some unknown benefactor made a copy of this book available to me (as I presume he did to all ACC Bible majors). Obviously, someone wanted to influence young wanna-be preachers with Moser's doctrine (in retrospect, J.D. Thomas, then head of the Bible Department, may well have been the benefactor).

As previously mentioned, in 1964 F.W. Mattox, president of Lubbock Christian College and long-time friend of Moser's, called him out of retirement to join the school's Bible faculty. His eight years at that school gave him countless opportunities to influence preacher students as well as countless other young people. His tenure there also gave him new credibility and a new platform for his errors. Hicks reports an interview with the late Jim Massey (reputed to be an exponent of "all grace, no law"), fellow teacher with Moser at LCC. Massey told Hicks that Moser, because of his doctrinal emphasis, was referred to as "the Baptist preacher" on the Bible faculty by his fellow teachers—which I would agree was very near accurate, but far short of amusing.

The Dormant Seeds Sprout

Seeds can lie dormant for years or even centuries, awaiting just the right conditions to germinate and spring to life. This power is in the Gospel seed (Luke 8:11),

and, unfortunately, in the seed of error as well. In his book, *Distant Voices: Discovering a Forgotten Past for a Changing Church*, C. Leonard Allen avers: “The efforts of Moser stand directly behind some of the theological shifts occurring among contemporary Churches of Christ” (169). Allen, a vocal change agent and an advocate of the *Man-over-the-plan* credo, should know—as I believe he does.

This being so, to read Moser is to read source material for some of the wild and heretical statements concerning grace among us over the past forty-plus years.

Compare the following statements with some of Moser’s (and Bogard’s!) quotes and emphases referenced above (Dodson 114):

Nobody has any right to preach anything other than the Gospel of pure grace. We are saved by grace plus nothing. You are saved by faith period. There is nothing you can do to be saved (1982, the late Glen Owen, at the time an elder, Highland Church of Christ, Abilene, TX).

If one is to be saved, it must be totally by grace.... I was brought up on the “Christian duty” concept. All facets of discipleship became one’s duty. And when a person forsook the Lord, he was “out of duty.” Such a concept is foreign to the New Testament (1984, the late Cecil Hook, author, *Free in Christ*).

Why are we afraid of grace? Why must grace always be explained?... Are we focusing upon God’s grace or man’s performance?... Too many believe, “Do your best and God will do the rest.” This is blasphemy, but it dies hard.... Any retreat to law is a denial of grace.... Grace and law are mutually exclusive (1984, Charles Hodge, author, *Amazing Grace*).

I believe deeply that the New Testament teaches that salvation is a free gift of God period. You are saved by grace alone (1989, Randy Mayeux, at the time with Preston Road Church of Christ, Dallas, TX, but later left and started his own denomination).

At the heart of my own belief is the conviction that we are saved by grace. What do I mean by this statement?... There is no human part of salvation! (1991, Randy Mayeux).

It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation (1990, Rubel Shelly, preacher, Family of God at Woodmont Hills, Nashville, TN).

Our salvation arises entirely and only from grace.... It is entirely of grace through faith.... My salvation is on grace alone. Not by anything I've added to it. He didn't do 98% of it and I have to add 2%... (1991, Rubel Shelly).

To say that we are saved by Christ's work plus our work is to suggest that the work of Christ at the cross was inadequate. To say that God does 99% and we do 1% undermines what Christ did at the cross (1991, Denny Boultinghouse, then editor, Image Magazine; he obviously took sorry notes on Shelly's foregoing pronouncements).

I spent too many years of my Christian life not knowing what grace was. The only thing I knew for sure was that "we" didn't believe in it.... We are saved by grace plus nothing.... God does it all.... We keep trying to place conditions on our receiving it (1991, Jim Hackney, Midtown [now Heritage] Church of Christ, Fort Worth, TX).

[Grace is] the only thing that does save you.... Our works have nothing to do with our salvation (1991, Randy Fenter, then preacher at MacArthur Park Church of Christ, San Antonio, TX).

Salvation is not a human achievement but the free gift of God.... Can you see that there is absolutely nothing you can do to heal our alienation? (1992, Bill Love, author, *The Core Gospel: On Restoring the Crux of the Matter*).

Response and Conclusion

No one can believe the Bible and not believe in salvation by grace. However, no person who ever lived or ever will live will ever be able to find even a hint of "grace only" doctrine in Scripture as some now teach, though some of them may have seventeen terminal degrees. While contemporary change agents got it from Moser and his generation, Moser did not originate it. Its roots reach all the way back to John Calvin's theology in the sixteenth century, whose roots go all the way back to Augustine in the fourth century.

If salvation is by grace alone, then why are not all saved? God wills that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and His saving grace has appeared to all men (Tit. 2:11). Yet, the Lord said that few will be saved (Mat. 7:13–14). As Whiteside described Moser’s doctrine, the *grace-only* doctrine quoted above is little more than thinly disguised universalism.

Some of the liberals, unlike strict Calvinists, at least concede (in their modified, semi-Calvinism) the requirement of faith in the sinner. However, by stating the necessity of the “work” of belief (as the Lord thus labeled it, John 6:28–29, though Moser denies it), they unravel their entire *grace only-no works-no conditions-no law* heresy. To allow even one condition undercuts their *grace-only* premise utterly.

One verges on irrationality to contend simultaneously for two “exclusive” factors of salvation. One who says in the same breath that salvation is “by grace plus nothing,” then adds “by faith period,” and further pontificates that “there is nothing you can do to be saved” needs a caregiver. *Grace plus nothing* excludes faith. *Faith period* excludes grace.

I saw a denominational billboard a few years ago with three statements on it:

GRACE ONLY!

FAITH ONLY!

SCRIPTURE ONLY!

Although I laughed when I saw it, in truth, these words expressed a tragic misconception and impossibility. One expects such from Protestant denominational sources, for it has been their stock-in-trade since Luther and Calvin. However, I am still shocked when those who are members of churches of Christ preach such heresy.

Salvation is neither by grace only nor by faith only; and if one takes Scripture only he will know better than to spout either of the former salvation “only” claims.

The charges are false that any faithful saint is “afraid of grace,” that we do not believe in it, or that we do not understand, preach, or emphasize it. All who preach “the whole counsel of God” both believe in it and preach it. Every sermon that mentions the Christ, the church, the cross, inspiration, repentance, Heaven, Hell, and even baptism and the law of Christ, declares and emphasizes the grace of God. Rather than excluding all of the foregoing (and many other matters, including works of obedience on our part), God’s grace and mercy **includes** them. The problem liberals have with faithful brethren is not that we do not preach “grace,” but that we do not preach their **perversion** of it.

Scriptural dogma includes “the Man **and** the plan.” Men who choose one in favor of the other digress and will soon be apostates if they do not repent. Our Lord, by self-imposed limitation, cannot/does not save apart from His plan (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 20:32; Rom 1:16; 2 The. 1:7–9; Tit. 2:11–3:5; et al.). Likewise, the plan is but a lifeless, powerless, human instrument apart from the crucified, risen, enthroned Savior. There is no such thing as “grace-only” salvation unless one concedes the existence of universal salvation. God’s grace which brings salvation is “free” in that we cannot earn or merit it. However, it is not free from the standpoint of God-given conditions men must meet to receive it. Paul’s summation of God’s great plan cannot be improved upon: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

Works Cited

NOTE: All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Allen, C. Leonard, ***Distant Voices: Discovering a Forgotten Past for a Changing Church.*** Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1993.

Allen, C. Leonard. ***The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World.*** Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990.

Dodson, Robert. "The Pattern of Our Justification by Faith in Christ." @ ***Studies in Romans.*** Ed. Dub McClish. Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1996.

Hardeman, N.B. and Ben M. Bogard. ***The Hardeman-Bogard Debate.*** Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1938.

Hicks, John Mark. "K.C. Moser and Churches of Christ: An Historical Perspective" @ ***Restoration Quarterly*** 37.3 (1995).
http://www.acu.edu/sponsored/restoration_quarterly/archives/1990s/vol_37_no_3_contents/index.html

Hicks, John Mark. "K.C. Moser and Churches of Christ: A Theological Perspective" @ ***Restoration Quarterly*** 37.4 (1995).
http://www.acu.edu/sponsored/restoration_quarterly/archives/1990s/vol_37_no_4_contents/index.html

McClish, Dub. "Revisiting 'The Man or the Plan' Discussion." @ ***THE GOSPEL JOURNAL.*** Ed. Dub McClish. May 2004.

Moser, K.C. ***The Gist of Romans.*** Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., 1958 rev.

Moser, K.C. ***The Way of Salvation.*** Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., 1932.

Thomas, J.D. ***The Biblical Doctrine of Grace.*** Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1977.

Thomas, J.D. ***Romans.*** Austin, TX: Sweet Pub. Co., 1965.

Wallace, Foy E., Jr. ***The Present Truth.*** Fort Worth, TX: Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Pub., 1977.

Whiteside, Robertson L. ***A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome.*** Denton, TX: Inys Whiteside (privately published). This book is now being published by Truth Bookstore, Bowling Green, KY.

Note: This MS was written for and an oral digest of delivered at the Spring, Texas Church of Christ Contending for the Faith Lectures, February 28–March 3, 2010. It was published in full in the lectureship book, *Profiles in Apostasy No. 1*, ed. David Brown.