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***Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of the Jesus the King*** by Matthew W. Bates. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. xvi + 234 pp., paper, \$24.99.

***Gospel Allegiance: What Faith in Jesus Misses for Salvation in Christ*** by Matthew W. Bates. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019. 269 pp., paper, \$17.99.

In his *The Gospel According to John* for the Pillar series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), D. A. Carson, in commenting on John 1:12-13, explained faith in Jesus by those who “received him” and “believe on his name” and that “such faith yields allegiance to the Word, trusts him completely, acknowledges his claims and confesses him with gratitude” (pp. 125-26). However, it is difficult to imagine that Carson had in mind the “salvation by allegiance” presented by Matthew Bates in *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of the Jesus the King*.

Bates is the assistant professor theology at Quincy University, a Franciscan Catholic school. His educational background and “Christian tradition” is quite ecumenical. He “received training as an undergraduate in the Reformed tradition (Whitworth University), at seminary in a trans-denominational Protestant environment (Regent College in Vancouver, BC), and at the PhD level at a Catholic institution (University of Notre Dame)” (p. 6). Although the author “grew up in a fundamentalist, King-James-Version-only Bible church” (p. 21), and claims the designation “Protestant” (p. 6), he participates “with reasonable comfort in a Catholic context” (p. 6) and has “regularly and gladly worshiped with nondenominational, Baptist, Presbyterian, Mennonite, and Evangelical Free churches” (p. 6).

In *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, Bates “attempts to explain in a forthright fashion the central biblical teachings about salvation, faith, works, and the gospel” (p. 9). In doing so, however, what he ultimately teaches is that salvation is by allegiance, that faith and works are not mutually exclusive, and the essence of the gospel is that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God as Lord. The book begins with a glowing foreword by Scot

McKnight of Northern Seminary and ends with a bibliography, author index, and index of Scripture and ancient writings (there is no subject index). In between there is an introduction and nine chapters, each divided into sections, with footnotes and “Questions for Further Thought” at the end of each chapter.

The author’s foundational premise is that faith (Gk. *pistis*) means, with regard to eternal salvation, “fidelity to Jesus as cosmic Lord or allegiance to Jesus the king” (p. 5). “Allegiance” is “the best macro-term available to us that can describe what God requires from us for eternal salvation” (p. 5). Indeed, “*allegiance alone* is required for salvation” (p. 13). Therefore: “‘Faith’ and ‘belief,’ insofar as they serve as overarching terms to describe what brings about eternal salvation, should be excised from Christian discourse. That is, English-speaking Christian leaders should entirely cease to speak of ‘salvation by faith’ or of ‘faith in Jesus’ or ‘believing in Christ’ when summarizing Christian salvation” (p. 3).

Bates built his whole case on the idea that “*pistis* (and related terms) can and does sometimes mean faithfulness, fidelity, or loyalty—that is, terms synonymous with the English word *allegiance*” (p. 78). To prove his case, he misrepresented the entry on *pistis* in Frederick Danker’s lexicon (BDAG), appealed to two apocryphal works (3 Maccabees and the Greek additions to Esther) and Josephus, and then simply redefined *pistis* in the Pauline Epistles (pp. 78-84). Bates basically ignored the verb form *pisteuo*, which is found over 100 times in John’s Gospel. Bates is simply teaching salvation by works.

The offer of salvation is free, but it absolutely *does* come with strings attached. Obedient loyalty to the king is required as a condition of acceptance (p. 104).

*Pistis* is not the polar opposite of works; rather *pistis* as ongoing allegiance is the fundamental framework into which works must fit as part of salvation (p. 109).

So, in the final analysis, salvation is by allegiance alone. That is, God requires nothing more or nothing less than allegiance to Jesus as king for initial, current, and final salvation (p. 213).

Bates borrows what is bad from N. T. Wright, Calvinism, the New Perspective on Paul, and John Barclay’s *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). He makes no distinction between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment. He confounds salvation with discipleship. He believes a born-again person can experience spiritual death

if he does not persevere. His system makes assurance of salvation impossible. All this raises two questions: 1. What constitutes allegiance? 2. What happens to Christians after they die?

Bates did not spend a lot of time explaining just exactly what constitutes true allegiance. He disparaged salvation "predicated on successful performance of rules" (p. 110) and even though he said, "we are truly saved by allegiance alone" (p. 122), he also asserted, "*perfect* allegiance is neither demanded for salvation in this earthly life nor is it possible any more than is perfect faith (or zero doubt) as traditionally understood" (p. 122). Consequently, Bates asked, "how much allegiance is sufficient?" (p. 123). He then insisted, "allegiance cannot be quantified or enumerated," and said that "it is better to ask *what sort* of allegiance than *how much* allegiance" because "allegiance depends on what Jesus the king commands each of us individually to do" (p. 124). Bates acknowledged "our ongoing sin problems" (p. 122), but said that one must never entirely cease "the fight against sin" (p. 123) and not "persist" in doing "certain deeds" (the lists in Gal 5 and Eph 5) "without any repentance or modification" (p. 111). Doing so "will result in our exclusion from the kingdom of God and our destruction" (p. 111).

According to Bates, Christians are now only "indirectly justified and glorified" (p. 192). Those who remain loyal to the Messiah will be "*directly* justified and glorified in the future when each one passes through the final judgment" (p. 192). Therefore, what happens to Christians after they die? Paul said that they are absent from the body and present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8) but if no one's "final salvation" is determined until the last judgment, what happens to Christians after they die? Do they go to hell, purgatory, heaven, or limbo, or does their soul just sleep until the last judgment? If they are absent from the body and present with the Lord, can they be sent to hell at the final judgment when they are "assessed for eternal life" (p. 204)?

Does God require one's allegiance? Of course he does. He demands nothing less than perfect allegiance but this has nothing to do with obtaining salvation. In *Gospel Allegiance: What Faith in Jesus Misses for Salvation in Christ*, Bates was more tenacious in his claims in *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* that "good works will determine final salvation on the day of judgment" (p. 183). Indeed, he has a whole chapter on "how works are saving" (pp. 177-210); and not just saving but "fundamentally (not just congruently) saving" (p. 150).

After writing *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, the author "had many conversations about faith and the gospel" (p. 16). He maintains that he kept receiving "two basic questions about saving allegiance, one theological and the other pastoral: (1) How can we deepen our understanding of salvation

by allegiance alone? (2) What can we do to foster an allegiance culture in our churches and personal lives?" (p. 18). Although *Gospel Allegiance* "stands on its own," it is nevertheless "helpful to understand" how his "earlier book relates to this one" (p. 18). *Gospel Allegiance* "attempts a beginning by going beyond" his previous work by defining the gospel "more precisely" and exploring it "more thoroughly;" by making the book "more practical and pastoral," by going deeper; by approaching all the biblical texts "afresh" and adding "new ones to the discussion;" and, by being "more focused" on "the gospel, grace, and works" (pp. 18-19).

*Gospel Allegiance* is more of a popular book than *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*. The pages are smaller and the font is larger. Footnotes give way to endnotes. There is no bibliography. Although Scot McKnight has, again, a blurb on the back cover, this time there is no foreword. The "Questions for Further Thought" that appeared at the end of each chapter of *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* are replaced with more and different questions in an appendix labeled "Guide for Further Conversation." Like the author's first book, *Gospel Allegiance* has an index of Scripture and ancient writings, but this time there is neither an author nor a subject index. Readers also find a little more in this volume about the author's "Christian tradition." Although he was "raised in a conservative independent Bible church" (p. 21), Bates considers himself "an unusual Protestant" who does not think that his "Catholic or Orthodox brothers and sisters have rejected or compromised the content of the gospel" (p. 21), attends "Mass on occasion" (p. 20), and "would be happy to receive communion with the pope" (p. 22).

Every heresy taught in *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* is repeated in *Gospel Allegiance*, and then some. Good works can be integrated "into justification by faith alone if we see saving *faith* as predominately *allegiance*" (p. 185). Regarding the "books" and the "book of life" in Revelation 20, Bates claimed, "allegiance to Jesus the king determines individual listing in the Lamb's book" while the books record "the quality of allegiance" (p. 187). Although Bates never stated exactly what constitutes true allegiance, he is certain what does not represent it: "The gospel-allegiance model objects to any form of works righteousness that seeks to operate as a salvation system independent from (or within) allegiance" and "staunchly opposes any list of laws, rules, or deeds that must be performed by everyone in order to earn or maintain salvation" (p. 202), but "certain works or deeds, if they continue unchecked (apart from repentance), will exclude us from the kingdom of God and cause our destruction" (p. 182). Those who persist in unmodified unrighteous behavior will be excluded from eternal life" (p. 183).

The one thing that Bates said in his second book that this reviewer could wholeheartedly agree is this: "Nearly all Christians agree that works

are required for salvation. This includes all the major Protestant denominations as well as Catholics and Orthodox alike" (p. 185). The assertion is, unfortunately, the view of most Americans, "Christian" or otherwise. The gospel according to Bates will merely reinforce their error. His two books are of no value whatsoever other than for well-grounded pastors and teachers to see how someone can redefine faith in order to teach salvation by works.

— Laurence Vance  
Vance Publications (Orlando, FL)

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***Christ's Call to Reform the Church*** by John MacArthur. Chicago: Moody, 2018. 199 pp., cloth, \$19.99.

John MacArthur perceives the imminent need for the church to reform. A new reformation, as he understands it, would require a return to the five *solas* of the sixteenth century Reformation. Short of such an appreciation and adherence to the *solas* (pp. 177-94), any attempt for church revival will be superficial and temporal. Of late, the church has gotten sidetracked by any number of things, including social justice (pp. 9-11), attempts to attract unbelievers through worldly means (p. 99), minimizing theology (p. 25), subjectivism (pp. 4, 180-81), the prosperity gospel, and tolerance of the pagan culture (pp. 110-14). Depending upon the reader's perspective, MacArthur is either taking the opportunity to address topics about which he loves to discuss at great length or is offering insightful application of the text of Scripture. The latter choice is the opinion of this reviewer, fully realizing that these are well-worn themes in MacArthur's teaching ministry but obviously still pertinent.

The author chose to address his concerns through study of the seven churches of Asia found in Revelation 2—3. As such, *Christ's Call* is a helpful preaching/teaching commentary on these two chapters. As with almost all MacArthur's books, this one is based on sermons he has preached and then "polished" by an editor into book form (p. 195). As a result, this volume has a sermonic flavor that might displease the scholar (see D. A. Carson's negative critique of MacArthur's commentaries in the *New Testament Commentary Survey* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986; reprint, 2013] 50), but are most helpful to the average Christian, Bible teacher, or busy pastor. To such, a wealth of material will be found.