

AFFLICTION

THE DIFFERENCE THAT FAITH IN CHRIST MAKES TO SUFFERING

ALSO

SALVATION
IN ROMANS

CLARITY IN
EVANGELISM

CONFERENCE
PHOTOS



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In April we had our annual conference at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX. The theme was Paul's letter to the Romans. In this issue, several of the articles were given as messages at the conference.

I have an article on the meaning of salvation in Romans. Does it always mean salvation from hell? I show that it does not.

Ken Yates explains how Christians should look at suffering differently than non-believers.

Philippe Sterling gives an overview of Paul's teaching about intelligent design.

Shawn Lazar challenges Baptists to rethink unclear ways of doing evangelism, in favor of clear message of life.

On page 18 there are some pictures from the conference.

This is our fourth 32-page issue of the magazine. Before that it was half that size. The responses have been overwhelmingly positive both to the content and to the typesetting. Many people tell us that they really look forward to getting each issue and that it is their favorite magazine.

We would like to boost our readership. The more people who read it, the more impact our writings will have. If you have family or friends in the US who would like to receive GIF for free, send us their names and addresses. You can email us at ges@faithalone.org or sign them up at faithalone.org.

Thank-you for your prayers. We are a small ministry and yet we produce six magazines, two journals, and one or more books each year, a national conference, and numerous speaking engagements. The more prayers for our ministry the better. ■

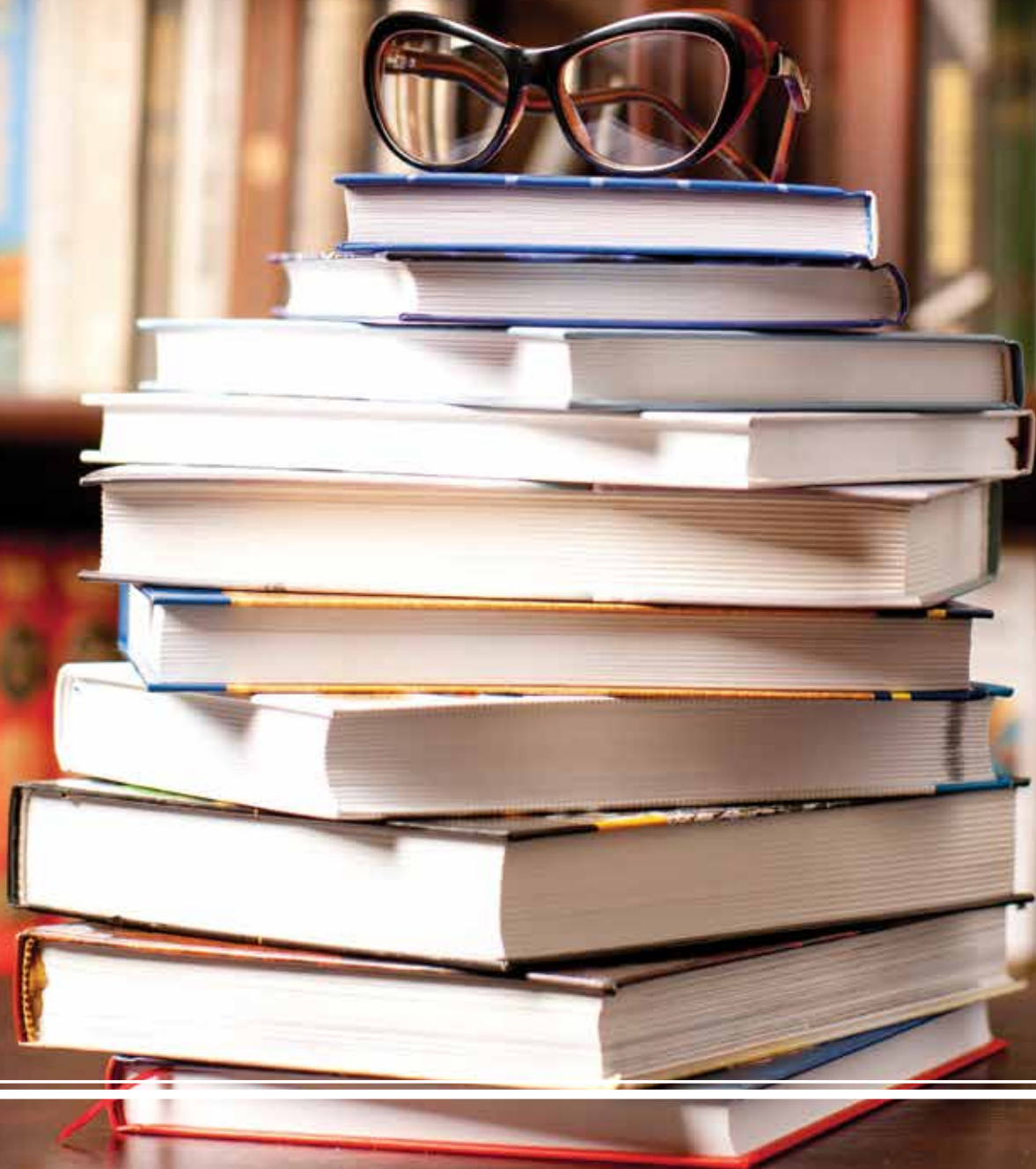


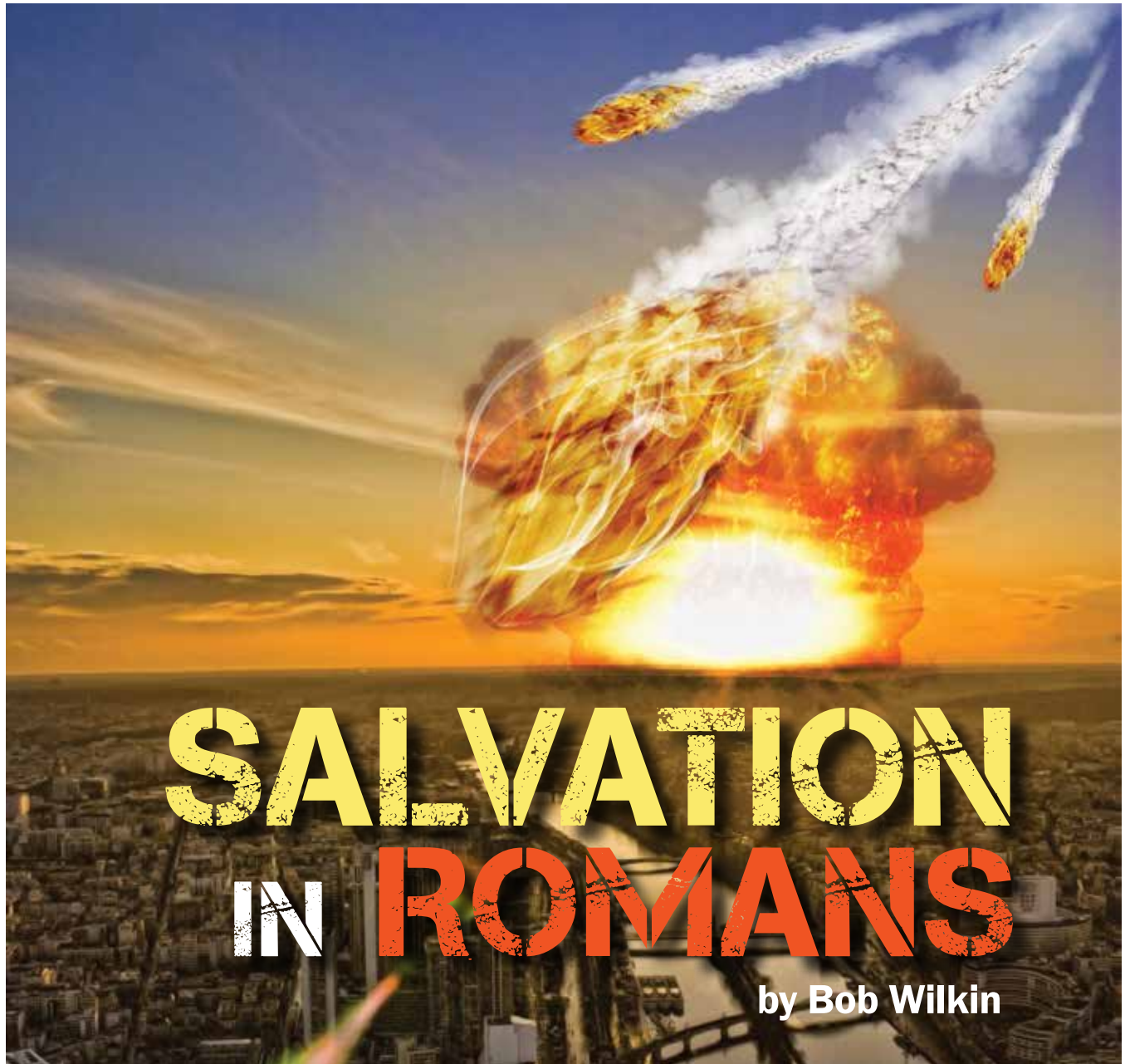
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SALVATION IN ROMANS

by Bob Wilkin

In everyday English, the words *save* and *salvation* refer to a wide range of deliverances. The same is true in the Bible. Both in the Old Testament (written in Hebrew) and in the New Testament (written in Greek), the words *save* and *salvation* refer to many types of deliverance and not just to deliverance from hell. In fact, did you realize that there are no uses of the words *save* or *salvation* in the OT that refer specifically to deliverance from hell and the gaining of eternal life? Not one!

And did you realize that in the NT only three in ten uses of *salvation* (*sōtēria*) and *save* (*sōzō*) refer to salvation from eternal condemnation and to obtaining eternal life? Only three in ten. It is my contention that the

meaning of *save* and *salvation* in Romans is consistent with its primary usage in the NT. It doesn't refer to salvation from hell. It means deliverance from difficulties in this life.

Being Saved in Romans 10:13

The verb *save* (*sōzō*) occurs nine times in Romans and the noun *salvation* (*sōtēria*) four times.

I am convinced that Romans discusses the salvation of believers, not the salvation of *unbelievers*.

I think the easiest place to see that in the thirteen occurrences of these words is in Rom 10:13-14:

For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be

saved.” How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not [already] believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not [already] heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher [already being present]?

Verse 13 is commonly understood as an evangelistic verse. As the next verse shows, that is totally wrong. Believing in Jesus must occur *before* one can call on Him. That is what v 14 says. The people believe (and according to Jesus, everyone who believes in Him has everlasting life, John 3:16), *then* they call upon the Lord to be saved.

Did you know that Rom 10:13 is actually a quote of an OT verse? It is from Joel 2:30-32 which talks about cosmic signs and is clearly not discussing just any time in history, but the end of the seven-year Tribulation Period. At that time Israel will be surrounded by Gentile armies which are about to destroy her. But believing Jews will cry out to the Lord and He will save them from destruction at the hands of the Gentiles.

Both in Joel 2 and in Rom 10:13-14 it is clear that it is believers who are calling on the Lord and that the salvation is deliverance from calamity in this life. The issue is not regeneration.

Other Uses of *Save* and *Salvation* in Romans

All of the uses of *save* and *salvation* in Romans fit the idea of deliverance from God’s wrath. Not even Rom 8:24 is an exception, though it might appear to be so. I do not have space to go through all the other twelve passages, so I have selected a handful that I believe illustrate what we see in all of them.

Romans 13:11. Paul says, “...it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now *our salvation is nearer* than

when we first believed” (italics added).

Salvation from what?

This is probably the second easiest of the thirteen uses in Romans to see that regeneration is clearly not in view and the salvation of believers is in view.

Notice that he says “our salvation.” Clearly that must be the salvation of believers.

Notice too that the salvation is yet future. This is not the past salvation that Eph 2:8-9 speaks about. This is our future deliverance from some-

“There is not a single verse in the Bible that indicates that God’s wrath is eternal. In my view His wrath is only temporal. Once the Great White Throne Judgment concludes and people are sent to the lake of fire, God’s wrath will be over.”

thing. But from what? Zane Hodges says, “It will be a final and complete deliverance *from wrath and from a futile penal-servitude of sin*” (italics his). The issue is our future glorification, not our present regenerate status.

Romans 5:9-10. Near the start of his sanctification section of the letter Paul says, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, *we shall be saved from wrath through Him*. For if when we were enemies

we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life*” (italics added).

Salvation from what?

Notice that Paul specifically speaks of salvation “from wrath.” Many misunderstand this because they think that wrath means eternal condemnation. However, the lake of fire and eternal condemnation are never called *wrath* in the Bible. In the first edition of my book *Confident in Christ*, I spoke of God’s temporal wrath as compared with His eternal wrath. I now realize that was a mistake.

There is not a single verse in the Bible that indicates that God’s wrath is eternal. In my view His wrath is only temporal. Once the Great White Throne Judgment concludes and people are sent to the lake of fire, God’s wrath will be over. He will never be angry again. The lake of fire is about people justly reaping the corruption they have sown for themselves, it is not about God’s wrath.

Ken Hornok makes this excellent observation:

What is tragically overlooked is the link between the word wrath (*orgē*) in 1:18 and 5:9. When wrath is already fully defined in 1:18ff, and the definite article appears before the word wrath in 5:9, this article of previous reference looks back to the initial mention. Thus one can be delivered from the corruption of sin now. This is not a reference to some event that occurs after this life. This is best viewed as an aspect of what is called *progressive sanctification* or the concept that *we are being saved*.¹

Notice that in v 10 Paul does *not* say, “We *have been* saved by His death.” He is not speaking of regeneration, as he was in Eph 2:5, 8 (“you have been saved”). He is not speaking of a past salvation, but of a future

one. And it is not gained by virtue of Jesus' substitutionary death, *but by virtue of His resurrection life.*

Paul is saying in Rom 5:10 that our deliverance in this life from God's wrath is achieved by means of Jesus' resurrection life empowering our lives. That is what the rest of Romans 5-8 goes on to show. Rom 5:9-10 is not about regeneration or justification. It is about being delivered from God's wrath in this life by means of the life of Christ being manifested in us.

Ken Hornok comments on the importance of understanding salvation in Romans correctly:

It is of utmost importance to the argument of Romans that we not impose the concept of being declared righteous (the transfer of God's righteousness to those who believe) onto the words "saved" and "salvation" in the book of Romans. The idea of being saved or delivered from the power of sin throughout Romans always has reference to sin's dominion in the life of the believer rather than to deliverance from sin's penalty.

Romans 3:21-4:25. Guess what? There is not one use of the words *save* and *salvation* in the justification section of the letter. That is quite telling. That is not an argument from silence. It is an argument about silence.

Romans 11:26. Paul says, "And so *all Israel will be saved*, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob...'" (italics added).

Salvation from what?

This is referring to the end of the Tribulation. At that time all of Israel will be delivered from Gentile domination and from her current bondage to sin. The entire nation will be believers and in fellowship with God at the end of the Tribulation. No unbelieving Jews and no unfaithful believing

Jews will survive. All the survivors will be both believing and in fellowship with God. Hodges calls this deliverance, "this triumphant spiritual revival."

Most of the uses of *save* and *salvation* in Romans 9-11 involve the future deliverance of Israel from Gentile domination and from sin's bondage (cf. Rom 9:27; 10:1, 9-10, 13).

Romans 10:9-10. "...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, *you will be saved*. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made *unto salvation*" (italics added).

Salvation from what?

These verses discuss both justification (righteousness) and deliverance from wrath (salvation). They show that justification is by faith and that deliverance is by faith plus confessing Christ. When linked with Rom 10:13, it is clear that believers are the ones who are being saved from God's wrath, not unbelievers.

These verses can be used in evangelism, but only if you show that righteousness is by faith and that the salvation here is not regeneration. That can be tricky, so I wouldn't recommend using Rom 10:9-10 for evangelism.

Romans 1:16-17. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for *it is the power of God to salvation* for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek [italics added]. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, '*The just shall live by faith.*'"

Salvation from what?

Of course, many think that the expression *the gospel of Christ* refers to the promise of everlasting life to all who believe in Him. Thus

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they naturally see the salvation here as deliverance from eternal condemnation.

However, the gospel of Christ is much wider than Christ's promise of eternal life. It is the good news of Christ's entire life. It is the good news concerning His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. While that is the *basis* for salvation from eternal condemnation—the events which make the promise of life possible—that is not what Paul is discussing here.

Here Paul is discussing deliverance from God's wrath, which he makes clear by immediately discussing wrath in the verses which follow (Rom 1:18-32). That deliverance is also based on Jesus' death and resurrection. As Paul makes clear in the sanctification section of the letter, it is Jesus' death and resurrection that make it possible for the Spirit of God to give life to our mortal bodies with the result that we live righteously.

Make no mistake. No believer could live a godly life except for the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is a powerful message for the believer as well as for the unbeliever.

What Difference Does It Make How We Understand Salvation in Romans?

First, we evangelize much differently. We make it harder for a person to be justified if we think that salvation in Romans refers to regeneration. If a person thinks that believing in Jesus is not enough to be born again, but that he must also confess Christ publicly and live a godly life, then he believes in works salvation.

Second, we explain assurance much differently. We make assurance impossible because we will end up teaching people that assurance is found not simply in believing in Jesus, but also in our baptism, in our

witnessing for Christ, and in all the works which we do. Since our works are not perfect, assurance becomes impossible.

Third, we miss the point of the letter to the Romans. Paul's concern was not to save the people in the church of Rome *from eternal condemnation*. That was already true of them.

Paul had several purposes in writing this letter. One was to make sure that the believers in Rome knew how

“It is Jesus’ death and resurrection that make it possible for the Spirit of God to give life to our mortal bodies with the result that we live righteously.”

to be delivered *from God's wrath in this present life*.

He wanted to teach them how to set their mind on the things of the Spirit and not to set their mind on the things of the flesh. He wanted them to avoid the frustrating legalistic experience he had early in his Christian life (Rom 7:13-25).

And, of course, Paul wanted the believers in Rome to remember the Judgment Seat of Christ when each servant of Christ will be judged by Him (Rom 14:10-12). The issue there is not eternal destiny, but eternal reward.

Conclusion

Understanding the Scriptures requires that we seek to understand what the author meant by the words he used. Christian lingo is dangerous because it makes people think they know what words like *save* and

salvation mean. As a result, many do not even give a moment's thought as to what *save* and *salvation* mean in Romans. And when you try to explain that Paul was actually talking about deliverance from God's wrath, not salvation from hell, people may think you're nuts.

I suggest you start with Rom 10:13-14. It is easy for people to see that the salvation in view there is of believers, not unbelievers. Once you have that down, it is good to go to Rom 13:11. It is easy to see that it speaks of a future salvation, one that isn't the same salvation as the past salvation of Eph 2:8-9. Possibly from there you can gradually show them what all thirteen uses of *save* and *salvation* mean in Romans.

My hope is that we all live with the right mindset day by day so that we might experience freedom from sin's bondage and the wrath associated with that bondage. And my hope is that we teach other believers about the need to have the right mindset in order to be victorious in their Christian experience as well. ■

Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

1. The quotes in this article from Ken Hornok come from a workshop he had planned to deliver at the April 2014 GES Conference.

Intelligent Design or Naturalism?

THE RELEVANCE OF ROMANS 1:18-32

BY PHILIPPE R. STERLING

Stephen King told NPR in a recent interview that he believes in God and intelligent design.¹ “If you say, ‘Well, OK, I don’t believe in God. There’s no evidence of God,’ then you’re missing the stars in the sky and you’re missing the sunrises and sunsets and you’re missing the fact that the bees pollinate all these crops and keep us alive and the way that everything seems to work together.” The cosmos, he tells NPR, is “built in a way that to me suggests intelligent design.”

The Apostle Paul explains in Rom 1:18-23 that mankind has an awareness that the universe was designed, but many suppress this knowledge. Design is such an observable feature of living things that even biologist Richard Dawkins, an ardent atheist, begins his book *The Blind Watchmaker* with the statement: “Biology is the study of complicated things that *give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose*.” Working under the assumptions of scientific naturalism, he goes on to explain in the rest of the book how this “appearance of having been designed” is false. (See also, Stephen Hawking, *The Grand Design*, 180: “Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing,

Two Facts (v 18)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Rom 1:18).³

Verse 18 summarizes the theme of the passage. It sets forth two facts. First, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of human beings. Second, human beings suppress the truth about God.

The wrath of God is His settled hatred of sin that is continually expressed in giving people over to their sinful folly. This is more fully developed in vv 24-32. God gives

his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Rom 1:19-20).

Verses 19-20 serve as an explanation of how human beings suppress the truth about God. First, what can be known about God is plain to human beings, for God has shown it to them. Second, since the creation of the world, God’s eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen through what has been made. The conclusion is that human beings are without excuse.

Creation provides a partial revelation of God. God’s revelation is

“SUPPRESSION DESCRIBES AN ACTIVITY WHICH IS DIRECTED AGAINST THE TRUTH. IT IS AN ACTIVE OPPOSITION TO GOD’S NATURAL REVELATION THROUGH HIS WORKS, OPPOSITION THAT SEEKS TO HOLD IT BACK. THIS TENDENCY IS ON DISPLAY IN OUR DAY.”

ing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to ... set the universe going.”)

A modern intelligent design movement has arisen to counter the claim of scientific naturalism with great ensuing controversy.² An analysis of Rom 1:18-32 can help to understand why there is a controversy.

The Message of Romans 1:18-32

God is revealing His wrath from heaven against all human beings who are without excuse, who suppress the obvious truth from the created order about God’s eternal power and divine nature, and who exchange God’s glory for idolatry. The revelation of God’s wrath consists of a three tiered abandonment to sexual impurity, immorality, and idolatry.

people over so that they will experience the ruin of their sin and perhaps call out to Him for deliverance.

Human beings suppress “the truth.” In context “the truth” is a summary of the content of natural revelation.⁴ It refers to God as He reveals Himself through His works in creation and the created order.

Suppression describes an activity which is directed *against the truth*. It is an *active opposition* to God’s natural revelation through His works, opposition that seeks to hold it back. This tendency is on display in our day.

Reality of Natural Revelation (vv 19-20)

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For

ongoing. He created the world out of nothing and arranged the heavens and the earth to be governed by natural laws. Everyone can know that God created the world, but the cosmos doesn’t tell us everything there is to know about God. All theological knowledge does not fall under the category of self-evident truth.⁵ The phrase “what is knowable” may be taken to imply that some things are unknowable. What Paul thinks of as knowable is defined in v 20 as God’s invisible attributes, specifically His eternal power and deity. These attributes are seen clearly by means of the creation of the world. That is to say, the visible creation testifies to the awesome power, and hence the Deity, of the Creator. Eternal power and Deity are amply attested by nature, but other realities are not. The gospel Paul proclaims is a special divine revelation



and is not deducible from the natural world.

The objective natural revelation is evident to all human beings and bears witness to God's eternal power and divine nature. This renders humanity without excuse in suppressing this knowledge of God.

Humanity's Rejection of Natural Revelation (vv 21-23)

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things (Rom 1:21-23).

Verses 21-23 explain why human beings are without excuse in suppressing the knowledge of God from creation. They are without excuse because although they know God they refuse to honor Him.

Mankind does not give God the honor and thanksgiving that is due Him as Creator. Their refusal starts a process. Human beings become

futile in their thinking. Their senseless hearts are darkened. They become fools. Their folly expresses itself in idolatry and they exchange the glory of the immortal God with the image of a mortal man or animal.

Zane Hodges pithily captures the modern attitude:

Despite many centuries in which the intellectual elite of Western civilization have played down this simple form of argumentation, it remains as valid as ever. The view that the cosmos as we know it could have developed without the activity of a creating Agent, is in the final analysis, an absurdity. It defies all rationality and common sense. The greater the complexity of a system, the more emphatically that system testifies to a Designer...⁶

The supreme Intelligence that is so obvious in our cosmos, and becomes more and more obvious as new discoveries are made, is excluded from human calculations. Thus, even today, *claiming to be wise*, the wise have become fools.⁷

Instead of turning to God, mankind adopts naturalism. But naturalism cannot bridge the gap from nothing to something (creation), from something to life (complexity), and from life to self-conscious human life (consciousness). The existence of the cosmos and its fine-tuning, the existence of life and information, and the existence of human consciousness are among the many natural indicators of God's eternal power and divine nature.

Three Types of Naturalism

Anti-religious Evolutionists: These naturalists affirm that nature only appears designed, but that no actual design exists in the physical and biological realms. Their development is wholly attributed to natural processes.⁸ Proponents seek to show that even religious phenomena have naturalistic explanations. Examples of such proponents are Richard Dawkins, William Dennett, and Steven Weinberg.

Non-religious Evolutionists: These naturalists affirm that nature only appears designed, but that no actual design exists in the physical and biological realms. Their developments

are wholly attributed to natural processes. Proponents allow that religious beliefs may be compatible with belief in naturalistic explanations of origins. Examples of such proponents are Stephen Jay Gould, Michael Shermer, and Michael Ruse.

“Weak” Theistic Evolutionists: These naturalists recognize design, but do not believe it can be empirically detectable. They accept that a Theistic Being has causally acted both during and after the initial formation of creation and who designed biological complexity via universal common ancestry during the past 4.5 billion years. Examples of proponents are Francis Collins and *The BioLogos Foundation*.

Three Types of Intelligent Design

All three of these types affirm the recognition and detectability of real design in the physical and biological realms by a transcendent Theistic Being who has causally acted both during and after its initial formation. They differ in the age of the earth (old versus young) and the continuity or discontinuity of biological complexity.

“Strong” Theistic Evolutionists: They say that God designed biological complexity via universal common ancestry during the past 4.5 billion years. An example of a proponent is Michael Behe.

Old Earth Creationists: They affirm that God designed discontinuous biological complexity during the past 4.5 billion years. Examples of proponents are Hugh Ross and *Reasons to Believe*, and perhaps William Dembski.

Young Earth Creationists: They believe that God designed discontinuous biological complexity 6,000 to 10,000 years ago. Examples of proponents are *The Institute for Creation Research* and *Answers in Genesis*.

Conclusion

Romans 1:18-32 supports the expectation that the unbelieving world will suppress the evidence of design in creation and adopt naturalism. Intelligent design proponents should not be surprised at either the hard antagonism of anti-religious evolutionists or the more respectful rejection of non-religious evolutionists.


Recently Bill Nye the Science Guy debated Ken Ham of *Answers in Genesis*. The debate showed that there is widespread interest in the matter of origins. Over three million people watched the live debate on streaming video with millions more watching the recorded debate over the following days. For a time, the event was the number 1 trending topic on Facebook and Twitter. The topic for the debate was “Is creation a viable model of origins in today’s modern scientific era?”

Nye presented the argument against creation, basing many of his assertions on an advanced age of the Earth.

Ham argued that there is a difference between observational and historical science: “There is a distinct difference in what you observe and what has taken place. Creationists and evolutionists disagree on how to interpret data regarding the origins of our universe, and we can’t prove either way observationally, because all we’ve got is the present. When it comes down to it, this is a battle over philosophical worldviews.”

To give another example, the current *Cosmos* television series suppresses the truth of natural revelation, and shows antagonism towards it. The first episode began with the late Carl Sagan’s words from the original series: “The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be.” This is not a scientific observation

but instead a philosophical assertion of naturalism.

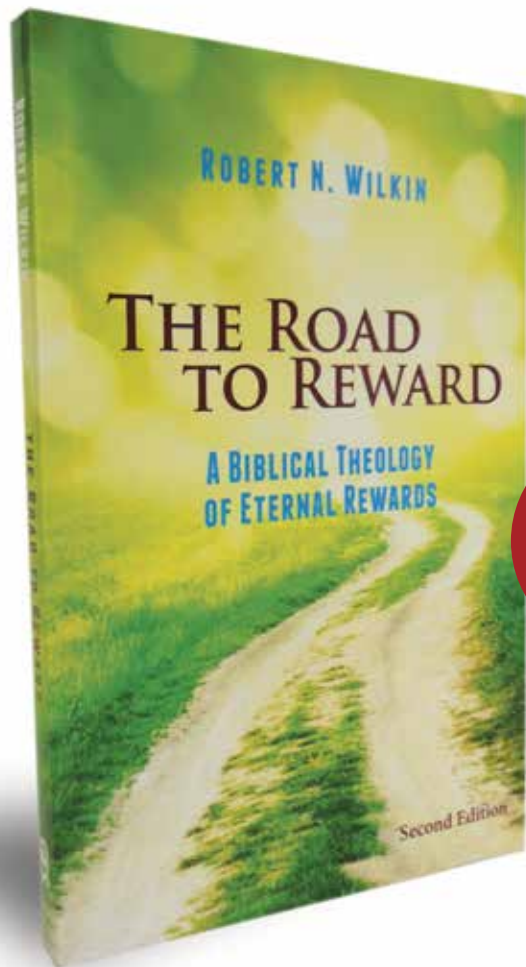
Human beings suppress the truth of God’s natural revelation. Thus discussion of the topic of creation’s witness to a Creator may lead to an opportunity to present the message of everlasting life. It is the Holy Spirit working with the proclamation of the life message that can overcome the suppression of the truth and bring people to the point where they might believe the promise of Christ for eternal life. 

Philippe R. Sterling is Pastor of Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship in Lewisville, TX.

1. See <http://www.npr.org/2013/05/28/184827647/stephen-king-on-growing-up-believing-in-god-and-getting-scared> (accessed 3/10/2014).
2. Stephen C. Meyer presents a good summary of the controversy in the paper “A Scientific History – and Philosophical Defense – of the Theory of Intelligent Design” which can be found at <http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/filesDB-download.php?command=download&id=3241> (accessed 3/10/2014).
3. The text of Romans 1:18-32 is from the ESV.
4. Natural revelation is the revelation of God through creation. Passages like Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:18-20 express the fact that creation declares and shows God’s power and divine nature.
5. Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 41.
6. *Ibid.*, 42.
7. *Ibid.*, 45.
8. The descriptions of the various views are adapted from Marcus R. Ross, “Who Believes What? Clearing Up Confusion over Intelligent Design and Young-Earth Creationism,” *Journal of Geoscience Education*, 53 (3), May, 2005, 319-323. A PDF file is available at http://serc.carleton.edu/files/nagt/jge/abstracts/Ross_v53n3p319.pdf (accessed 3/10/2014).

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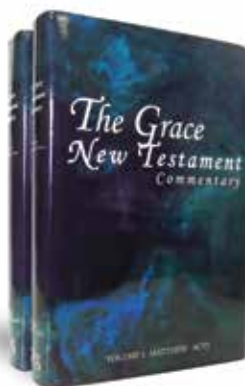
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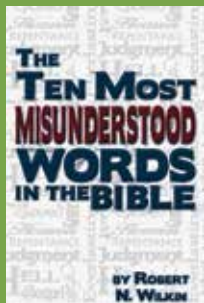
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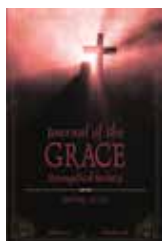
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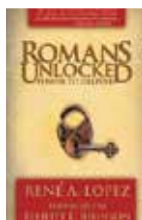
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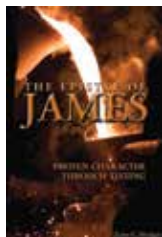


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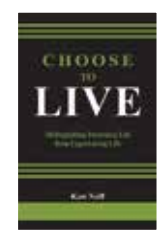


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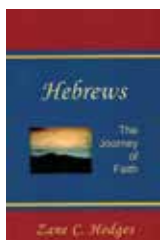


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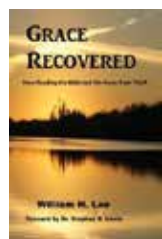


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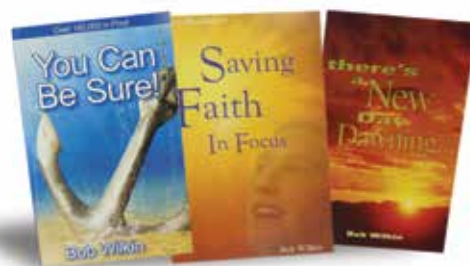


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Blameless & Above Reproach

by Bill Fiess

There are only seven uses of the Greek word *anenklētos* (blameless, above reproach, irreproachable) in the New Testament.

Three of these uses refer to one of the requirements of an elder (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) or a deacon (1 Tim 3:10). Those are fairly well known. The other four are not so well known.

One refers to widows:

Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. *And these things command, that they may be blameless.* But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:3-8, emphasis added).

So not only should elders and deacons in the local church be blameless/above reproach, but so should widows. In light of this surely all in the local church should be blameless. The elders and deacons are to be examples of what the whole flock should be like.

The final three uses of *anenklētos* show that the aim of every believer is to be found blameless at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

First, Paul prayed for the believers in Corinth “that [they] may be *blameless* in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:8). The expression *the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ



“Honor widows who are really widows.”

(the Bema) in the Corinthian letters (compare 1 Cor 3:13; 4:3; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14) and in several of Paul’s other letters as well (compare Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; 2 Tim 1:12; 4:8).

Second, Col 1:22 is often cited as teaching the Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. Yet it actually teaches the doctrine of eternal rewards for believers who persevere and hence will be found blameless at the Bema:


And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless [*amōmos*], and

above reproach [*anenklētos*] in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard... (Col 1:21-23, emphasis added).

If we simply look at the other six uses of *anenklētos* in the NT, it is clear what Paul means here. He is not warning believers that if they fail to persevere they will prove they were false professors and will end up in the lake of fire. He is encouraging believers to persevere so that they may be presented by Christ at the Bema as having been holy, blameless, and above reproach in this life.

Third, in 1 Tim 6:13-14 Paul urges Timothy, obviously a born-again and eternally-secure man, to persevere so that he might be highly rewarded at the Bema:

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep *this* commandment without spot, *blameless* [*anenklētos*] *until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing...* (emphasis added).

Blamelessness in the NT is not sinlessness. It means to be one who is an exemplary Christian, one who will be approved by Christ and praised by Him at the Bema (cf. Luke 19:17). Not all believers are blameless all the time. But we can and should be. That is our calling. We should long to be found blameless by Him. A simple word study plainly reveals this, even to a math professor. 

Bill Fiess is a mathematics professor.

This year's conference was unique in several ways.

First, we reduced the number of messages slightly, from 12 plenary to 9 plenary and from 32 workshops to 24 workshops. This proved a big hit. It allowed us to have longer sessions and longer break times for fellowship. In addition since there were fewer messages we were able to pick the best of the best.

Second, this was our first conference on Paul's letter to the Romans. It proved a very profitable study.

Third, Dr. Allen, head of preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, spoke at our conference for the first time and did an outstanding job. He was rated the best speaker at this year's conference.

Fourth, we had our first video ministry update. Reagan Benedict has Parkinson's and was not able to attend, but he was able to send a very moving video message on assurance that was very well received. We've decided that all future ministry updates will be done on video because the medium is very powerful and it is the best way to pack a lot about one's ministry in just 5 to 7 minutes.

Finally, Don Reiher was able to complete the audio and video of this year's conference in record time. Many thanks to Don and his son Nathan for all the work they did at the conference and afterwards.



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Letter to the Romans





Model of the Ancient Temple in Jerusalem

Why It Matters That Hebrews Was Written to Believers

By David Janssen

Because the epistle to the Hebrews is a challenging book to understand, many believers today don't take the time and effort to mine its rich truths. One reason it has become difficult to understand is the debate concerning whom Hebrews was written to.¹ Many view Hebrews as a message that was written to a combination of "true" believers and "professing" believers, i.e., unbelievers. With the mixed-audience view, the five warning passages (Heb 2:1-4; 3:1-4:16; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29) are typically regarded as being addressed to "professing" believers (= unbelievers), with the rest of the book addressing "true" believers. However, if the entire book of Hebrews was in fact written to "true" believers, then all of it becomes beneficial to believers today. In this way a believer today doesn't have to dismiss parts of Hebrews because those parts were not written to him.

Why We Know Hebrews Was Written to Believers

There are eight reasons to believe the entire book of Hebrews was written to believers (i.e., to those who have eternal life):

First, the writer calls the audience "holy brethren" (Heb 3:1).

Second, the writer describes himself and his readers ("we") as ones who "have faith" (Heb 10:39). This would be true only of believers.

Third, readers are referred to as "sons" who have a relationship with God the Father (Heb 12:5, 7, 8).

Unbelievers, professing to believe or otherwise, do not have a "son" relationship with God the Father until they are adopted and have eternal life (Gal 4:5).

Fourth, the author did not exhort readers to "believe in Jesus for eternal life" anywhere in Hebrews. The starting point for unbelievers is to place their faith in Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life (John 3:16; Rom 6:23).

Fifth, the author did exhort (Heb 13:22) readers to "press on to maturity" (Heb 6:1) in the faith they already possessed (Heb 6:4-5). To exhort unbelievers to "press on to maturity" makes no sense. Without faith in Christ there is no life to be matured!

Sixth, the readers went through sufferings, reproaches, and tribulations for their faith (Heb 10:32-33). They even "accepted joyfully the seizure of [their] property" (10:34 NASB). It seems unlikely that unbelievers would be willing to go through these things for a nonexistent faith.

Seventh, in each of the five warning passages, the writer uses first person plural pronouns (us or we); he includes himself with the readers. Because the author was a believer in Jesus Christ, this is noteworthy. He views the warnings as applicable to both himself, as a believer, and to his readers, also believers. Had the warnings been for "professing" believers/unbelievers, he would not have included himself. For example, Heb 10:26 says, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." The writer sees "sinning willfully"—a return to animal sacrifices as a means for atonement, Heb 10:29— as something which he, as a believer, could commit, as could the believers he is writing to. After the

five warning passages below are the verses containing “us” and/or “we” demonstrating the author included himself in the warning.

First warning (Heb 2:1-4): 2:1, 3

Second warning (Heb 3:1-4:16):
3:6, 14; 4:14

Third warning (Heb 5:11-6:12): 6:1

Fourth warning (Heb 10:19-39):
10:19-24, 26

Fifth warning (Heb 12:14-29):
12:25

Because the warning passages in Hebrews include the author, it does not stand to reason that these sections are addressed to unbelievers.

Eighth, there are no clear signs *in the text* to indicate switching of the audience between “true” believers and “professing” believers. The burden of proof for a spiritually-mixed readership rests on those who propose this view. This is not simply an argument from silence.

It is logical to assume that the writer is addressing one consistent group of Jewish believers unless a change is clearly indicated by the text. The idea that the readership switches back and forth between believers and unbelievers seems to be governed by its proponents’ need to support their theological position rather than by evidence from the text.

Why It Matters

Hebrews is a “word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22) written to Jewish believers who were experiencing persecution and considering returning to the external practices of Judaism, including animal sacrifices for sins. The writer encourages these believers to persevere in their faith, even in a hostile world. This encouragement includes five warnings about

the consequences of not holding fast to their faith.

Rosemarie Matlak’s summary relates the overall message of Hebrews to believers today:

As modern day Christians, we are also beguiled and pressured to distance ourselves from Christ through false teachers, worldly philosophies, discouraging circumstances, social pressure, and even persecution. As believers we all experience times of spiritual defeat...in our walk with God. It can be tempting to return to our old way of life where we felt

“When a believer in Jesus Christ returns to a religious system or perspective that denies the sufficient work of Christ on the cross, they are making the mistake the book of Hebrews warns against.”

accepted and admired...and to the pursuit of wealth and comfort rewarded us with immediate gratification.”²²

Many of today’s believers are not Jewish and none of us live in the First Century, but we all still face similar challenges. Over the past twenty years many born-again people have left Bible-teaching churches for the liturgical practices of Catholicism or Orthodoxy. Many believers have departed from the teachings of God’s Word to practice counterfeit means to spiritual maturity like transcendental meditation, centering prayer, *lectio divina*, and prayer labyrinths. Sadly many believers have been duped into ceasing to believe that everlasting life is everlasting and thus they have begun trying to give and work so as to retain that life.

Legalism both for justification and sanctification is quite alluring today. When a believer in Jesus Christ returns to a religious system or perspective that denies the sufficient work of Christ on the cross, they are making the mistake the book of Hebrews warns against.

Here in Utah when an active Mormon comes to faith in Christ apart from their works he is contradicting the teachings of the church of his family and friends. The result is that he will face very real pressure to stop saying he knows he has ever-

lasting life simply by faith alone in Christ alone. If this new believer continues to confess his belief in justification by faith alone, the result is often complete rejection by all his friends and family. New believers from a Mormon background face a very real temptation to return to Mormonism at least in some external way to restore

relationships with their relatives in particular.

Of course, leaving a Bible-teaching church and returning to the works-based system of Mormonism will prevent the new believer from going on to spiritual maturity and puts him in danger of being disciplined by the Lord.

Even someone who has no religious background may be tempted and/or pressured to return to their previous lifestyle without God instead of following Jesus more closely and continuing on to spiritual maturity. Old friends may hound the believer to come back and party like the old days. These “friends” and their lifestyle may hamper the believer from growing spiritually. But Hebrews is warning against more than just returning to a sinful




Detail from William Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat*

lifestyle. The warning is against denying the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ in their life. This might take the form of verbally rejecting or denying critical truths about Jesus including his death, resurrection, or ability to forgive our sins. Such a change in beliefs is what Hebrews warns against.

The writer of Hebrews was deeply concerned because he knew that the believer who departs from the faith reaps fiery judgment in this life (Heb 6:7-8; 10:27-31). Worse, the believer who apostatizes will not be one of those chosen to be Christ's partners (*metochoi*), His co-rulers, in the life to come (Heb 1:9; 3:14). Instead of hearing the Lord's "Well done, good servant" at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Luke 19:17), he will experience rebuke and shame before His Lord and Savior (Luke 19:20-26; 1 John 2:28). That's why this matters. Departure from the faith is a terrible thing.

Conclusion

Knowing that the entire book of Hebrews was written to believers in Jesus Christ is vital to understanding God's message in Hebrews. Because it was written to believers, the entire book is relevant for today's Christians. The message is not that "professing" believers must prove their faith by commitment and perseverance, but rather that "true" believers

are to move on to spiritual maturity despite difficulties. The dangers are clearly described in the five warning passages in Hebrews: negligence, unbelief, immaturity, willful sinning, and unresponsiveness.³ A believer today who "neglects" their spiritual life, remains "immature" and "unresponsive" to the Lord Jesus is not at a spiritually neutral place. These warnings remind us that not going on to maturity has negative consequences, and we must guard against these dangers if we are to press on to maturity. 

David Janssen is Equipping Pastor at Grace Community Bible Church in Sandy, UT.

1. Another reason Hebrews can be difficult to understand is the overall Jewish orientation of the book. The writer expects the readers to have a detailed understanding of the Jewish priesthood, tabernacle, and sacrificial system. Modern Gentiles, like myself, do not have any first-hand experience with the Jewish sacrificial system, which makes Hebrews more difficult to understand.

2. Rosemarie Matlak, *Hebrews Study Guide* (2010), p. 6.

3. Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, *The New Testament Explorer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999), pp. 506-507.

Bob Wilkin
PhD (Dallas Seminary)

Lt. Col. Ken Yates
PhD (Dallas Seminary),
DMin (Erskine)

Shawn Lazar
MA (Free University)

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Invite a Speaker!

A photograph of three people sitting at a table, smiling and looking towards the right. The person in the center is a woman with long blonde hair wearing a red shirt. To her left is a woman with dark hair wearing a light blue shirt. To her right is a man with dark hair wearing a blue shirt. They appear to be in a casual setting, possibly a cafe or a meeting. The text is overlaid on the image.

CLARITY IN EVANGELISM FOR **BAPTISTS**

by Shawn Lazar

“Just because someone believes the facts about Jesus’ life doesn’t mean they know or believe Jesus’ promise.”



Baptists need to do some soul-searching about our search for souls. We (I am a Baptist myself) love talking about Jesus. We emphasize evangelism. But we aren’t always clear when we present the gospel. We all know that some ways are clearer than others, but how do we tell the difference?

How to Present the Gospel Clearly

Let’s start with a clear gospel presentation.

First, if someone doesn’t already know the facts about Jesus’ life, tell ‘em. Explain to them that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Tell them He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross as a sacrifice for all our sins, rose again from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and is coming back to establish His kingdom. Those are the basics. It also helps to share some of the miracles that Jesus did, the parables He told, and the commandments He gave. There is tremendous power in Jesus’ words and life. He’s like a bright light in a sea of darkness. Even non-Christians admire Jesus. So don’t be afraid to tell them about Him.

Second, we need to make clear what Jesus gives and what we must do to get it. This is key. Lots of people know the facts of Jesus’ life, but they believe in Him *for all the wrong things*. They believe in Him for health, or for a promotion, or for a husband. Worst of all, some people believe in Jesus for the right reason—to save them from eternal condemnation—but they misunderstand what is required. They think He will save them *if their works are good enough*.

We need to recognize that just because someone believes the facts about Jesus’ life doesn’t mean they know or believe Jesus’ promise. So we need to make two things clear: 1) that the sole condition is believing in Jesus, and 2) what they need to believe in Jesus *for*. We need to make clear that Jesus promises to give *everlasting life* to all who simply believe in Him for that (John

3:16, 36; 5:24). That’s the core issue. That’s the free gift He wants to give people. Lots of people believe some correct facts about Jesus, but don’t know about the gift, and hence they do not believe in Him *for everlasting life*. So make clear what He offers up front.

Most people in Christendom think that we are saved by works. They know all there is to know about Jesus, and they still think they get into eternity by being good. But Paul emphasized the only condition more than anyone: *it is by faith apart from works* (Rom 3:28; Eph 2:8-9). That message is extremely difficult for most people to understand. It goes against the grain. There’s no such thing as a free lunch! Everyone thinks they need to be good to be saved. But Jesus said, “whoever *believes* in Me” not “whoever *behaves* in me” has everlasting life (John 3:16). Behavior is not the condition for receiving eternal life. That means that going to church, giving to the poor, or trying to be a good person—all good things—are not required for eternal life. The only condition for having everlasting life is faith in Jesus. No works are required. If that isn’t made plain, we haven’t presented the gospel clearly.

Third, in order to present the gospel clearly we need to tell someone that Jesus guarantees that believers are *eternally secure* (they shall never perish). “Once saved always saved” is the gospel promise to the believer, not something extra added to it. And it’s easy to see why. After all, how do people think they can lose everlasting life? Most people do. They always point to a list of works that must be done to keep everlasting life. They’ll say you can lose your salvation by not getting baptized, by not taking the sacraments, by committing a major sin or by persisting in minor ones, or by losing one’s faith. In other words, people think they can lose everlasting life because they think they need to keep it by doing good works and avoiding bad works. It is no accident that most denominations that reject eternal security teach salvation by works. The two go hand in hand. Which is why when presenting the gospel, we need to explain that Jesus promised that believers will never perish (John 3:16).

So there we have it. Tell someone about Jesus. Tell them that He promises eternal life. Tell them the only condition to have the gift of eternal life is faith in Jesus, and that once we believe we have everlasting life. We don't need to be professional evangelists to explain that. It's simple enough for anyone to do it. It's a clear message. Even a child can understand it, believe it, and be eternally saved. Now that we know how to present the gospel clearly, let's think about how we might present it *unclearly*? Here are some popular evangelistic techniques that Free Grace Baptists think do more harm than good.

Ask Jesus into Your Heart

I can't tell you how many times I've told people to ask Jesus into their hearts to be saved. I meant well. But it's also one of the most confusing ways to present the gospel to someone. Why?

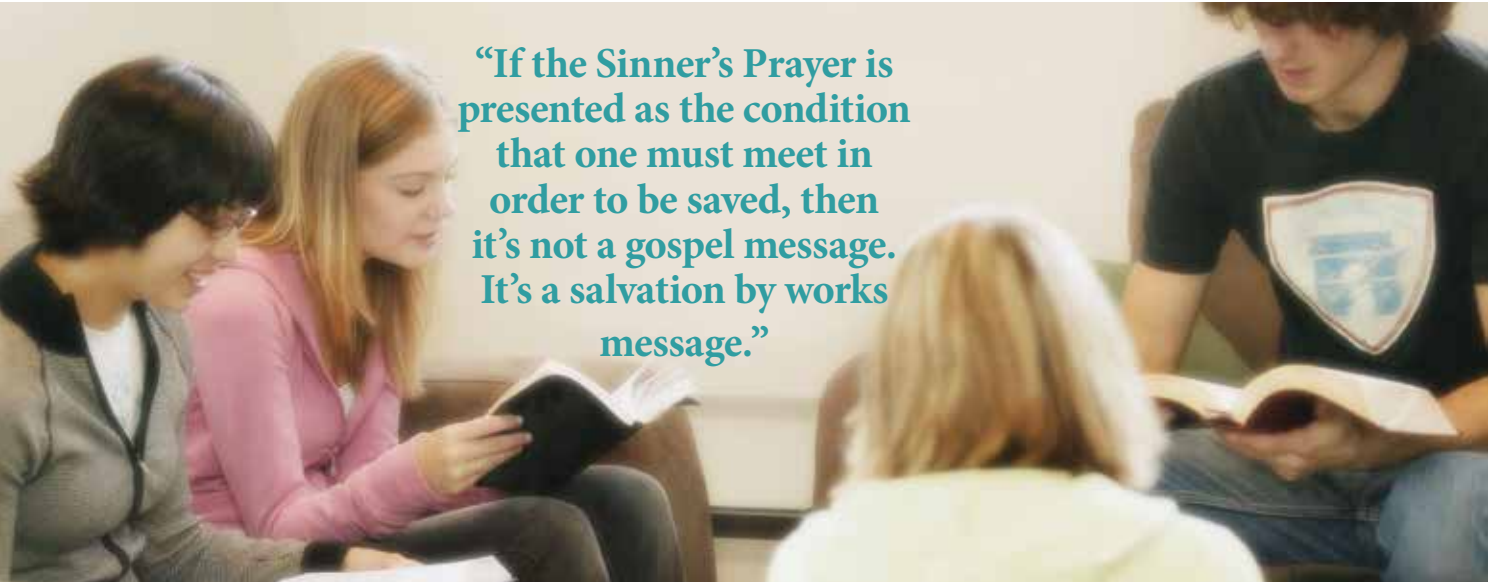
like to have Jesus in their hearts. On good days, they'll think Jesus is there. On bad days, they'll wonder where He's gone. Some people will never be sure that He ever came into their hearts at all. All will lack Biblical assurance.

Pray the Sinner's Prayer

The Sinner's Prayer is a very popular evangelistic tool. It can be useful. It can also be dangerous.

I heard the story of a missionary who was talking to his cab driver about Jesus. He led the cab driver to pray a prayer to be saved. The cab driver wanted to tell his family members how they could be saved too; but he had a problem. He had forgotten the words of the Sinner's Prayer! He thought he needed that prayer so that his family could be saved too.

I hope you see the problem.

A photograph showing a group of people, including two women and a man, sitting on the floor and reading books. The scene appears to be a Bible study or a church service. Overlaid on the image is a quote in teal text.

“If the Sinner’s Prayer is presented as the condition that one must meet in order to be saved, then it’s not a gospel message. It’s a salvation by works message.”

Think of what you *aren't* telling someone when you tell them to ask Jesus into their hearts. You aren't making clear what Jesus promised to give us (eternal life). You aren't making clear that the only condition for receiving eternal life is faith, not works. And you aren't making clear that believers are eternally secure.

Telling someone they have to ask Jesus into their hearts to be saved is confusing for all those reasons. But here's another.

If you tell people that their salvation depends upon accepting Jesus into their hearts, their whole focus will be skewed. Instead of putting their faith in *Jesus' promise*, they'll put their faith in a *subjective experience*. Instead of basing their assurance on *God's Word*, they'll base it on *their own emotions*. They'll begin to wonder what it feels

Somehow, when the cab driver was first evangelized, he got the impression that the Sinner's Prayer was a magic formula that needed to be repeated in order to be saved.

Is that what you want people to think?

If the Sinner's Prayer is presented as the condition that one must meet in order to be saved, then it's not a gospel message. It's a salvation by works message.

I have seen and heard many Sinner's Prayers. Very few of them made the gospel promise clear. Few spoke about eternal life, about faith apart from works, or about eternal security.

If you have already presented someone with a clear gospel message, and they believed it, then a Sinner's Prayer can be a useful tool in directing the new believer's

gratitude and praise to God for the free gift of everlasting life. But saying such a prayer is not a condition for having eternal life, and shouldn't be presented as such. At best it's very confusing. At worst, it leads someone to put their trust in something other than the gospel promise.

Walk the Aisle

Publicly confessing Christ is important. One way to do that is to walk to the front of the church during an altar call. It's a way of telling people that you're willing to identify with Christ. Publicly confessing Him is something that will be rewarded (Matt 10:32). It also encourages the congregation, and may even serve as a witness to unbelievers about the power of Jesus' promise.

However, public confession is not a condition to receive everlasting life.


Sometimes preachers will say, "If you want to be saved, you need to make a decision for Jesus right now, and come up to the front, otherwise you may not go to heaven."

That's a problem. Jesus never said that walking an aisle was the condition for everlasting life. And making salvation depend upon walking an aisle leaves out the gospel promise. It doesn't make clear that Jesus wants to give us eternal life. It doesn't make clear that we are saved by faith in Him apart from works. And it does not tell the person that once we are saved we are always saved. Instead, it makes it seem like you need to do a work (i.e., come up front) in order to be saved.

If the invitation to walk the aisle isn't preceded by a clear presentation of the message of everlasting life, people might think that walking to the altar is what they must do in order to be saved. That leaves people confused.

Conclusion

The key to winning souls is getting the soul-winning message right. Instead of using non-Biblical terminology and extra-Biblical techniques, Baptists should just stick to preaching the simple message of Scripture, such as is found in John 3:16. We should tell people that by simply believing in Jesus for everlasting life we have that life and are secure forever. That's the core message in evangelism. We shouldn't forget it. And we definitely shouldn't leave it out when presenting the gospel.

If we want to win souls, then stick to the message Jesus Himself used. If we preach an unclear message, we'll reap confusion. If we present a clear gospel, we'll reap the harvest. 

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications at Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Denton, TX with his wife Abby, daughter Daphne, and newborn son Zane Isaac.

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AFFLICTION

BY KEN YATES

The world is full of trouble. It comes to everyone. But in the book of Romans, Paul tells us that there is an important difference in how affliction operates in the life of a believer and how it operates in the life of an unbeliever. Someone who believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life can see afflictions in a completely different way.

Mankind and the Wrath of God

In Rom 1:18, Paul says that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against the sinful attitudes and actions of mankind. The reason why is because man has rejected the truth that God has revealed about Himself in creation. Since man has rejected the light of God's revelation, He gives them over to the darkness they have chosen (Rom 1:24, 26, 28). God allows them to be controlled by their depraved minds and the consequences are tragic.

Paul describes how, when left to their own devices, men and women can spiral down into all types of depravity, such as homosexuality and other forms of sexual immorality (Rom 1:26-27). That depravity can further extend to all areas of life. They can be malicious towards one another, hate one another, be full of envy, greed, and strife. They may not even display natural affections in their family relationships. All of these things lead to other bad consequences. Sexual immorality results in various diseases. It can lead to the break-up of homes and out-of-wedlock births.

It should be obvious to all that sin causes affliction. But what about the person who believes in Jesus Christ and then desires to live a life pleasing to God? How should that person view affliction in his life? According to Paul, everything has changed for the faithful believer.

The Believer and Peace with God

In Romans 3 and 4, Paul describes how the one who believes in Jesus Christ is justified or declared righteous by God. This results in a completely different relationship

with God. As Paul says in Rom 5:1, the believer is at peace with God, which is the exact opposite of being under His wrath.

In Romans 5-8, Paul describes how the justified believer can live by the power of the Holy Spirit and avoid the negative consequences of sin. The believer has access to God. He or she can, through prayer, ask God to transform their lives (Rom 5:2; 8:26). Their lives can result in God's approval, not His wrath (Rom 5:4). Living the kind of life that is approved by God means reigning with Christ in the world to come (Rom 8:17).

As Paul says, this life is one that has a hope of glory (Rom 5:4). The hope spoken of here is a sure thing. It is only hoped for because it lies in the future, with Christ's return. When Christ returns He will rule over all of creation and will share His glory with those who have been obedient to Him (Rom 8:18, 21). While all believers will live in the kingdom, those who have walked by the Spirit will receive a special share of His glory.

In chapters 5 and 8, Paul also discusses what role affliction has in such a life. The believer who walks

by the Spirit can expect to experience affliction, but not as a manifestation of God's wrath. Instead, Paul says the believer should *boast* in his or her affliction (Rom 5:3). When the disobedient suffer, they are reaping the consequences of their own sins. But when the obedient believer suffers, he or she is walking in the footsteps of Christ. They are suffering with Him (Rom 8:17).

That is the key.

The believer who walks by the power of the Spirit is in the process of becoming more like Christ and God uses afflictions to accomplish that goal.

How do afflictions help?

They teach the obedient believer to endure the things we encounter in the process of becoming more like Christ (Rom 5:3-4; 8:25). They also cause us to take our eyes off of this present world and look for the world to come. When things are going well for us, it is easy to forget that we live in a fallen world. Afflictions remind us that all is not well. The world is under bondage to sin,

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death, and decay. In chapter eight, Paul says that creation is longing for release from these things (Rom 8:22). When we suffer afflictions as obedient believers, we join with creation in this desire. Put simply, afflictions cause us to look for the world to come and for the Lord’s soon return.

In these chapters, Paul says that afflictions are used by God in the life of the believer to make him or her more like Christ. This only makes sense when one looks at the afflictions that our Lord went through. If we desire to be like Him, we can expect to encounter difficulties.

If this is the case, then afflictions are an expression of God’s love towards the obedient believer. This is what Paul says. The process of spiritual growth that faithful believers go through, which often includes afflictions, means that God’s love has been poured out in our hearts (Rom 5:5). Such things do not separate us from the love of God. Whatever we go through, nothing can do that (Rom 8:35, 39).

Conclusion

In Romans, Paul discusses the troubles that people encounter. The world we live in is full of such trouble. It is impossible to avoid difficulties. But the meaning of such afflictions differs depending upon who experiences them.


And what a difference!

For the unbelieving world, many afflictions are the self-inflicted result of sin. Their lives follow the course of their depraved minds, and the consequences of their choices reveal the wrath of God.

For the believer walking by the Spirit, however, that is not the case. Already at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, God uses afflictions to transform believers into the image of Christ. As believers, we know that there are things the Lord

wants to change about us. There are things we need to learn and experience to make us love Christ’s return and the world to come more deeply. God often uses afflictions to bring this about.

Our greatest desires as believers should be to be more like Christ. We should desire to not only live with Him in His kingdom, but to reign with Him there. If afflictions help bring this about we should indeed “boast” in them. We should thank God for them because it shows that He loves us and answers our prayers when we go to Him in prayer asking Him that we would become more like Christ.

How great a Savior we have! Not only did His death make possible our justification and peace with God, He also loves us and wants us to become more like Him and to reign with Him. As we go to Him we know that He is in the process of using all things in our lives, including afflictions, to bring this about. 

Ken Yates is Editor of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society and the GES East Coast Regional Speaker.

Q&A

by Bob Wilkin

Q Paul so often talked about the freeness of salvation. He wanted us to know that if works of any kind are added to belief then that is not salvation. Paul went to great effort to show the clear contrast between works and grace. But I do not see Jesus doing that very much. Sure one might point to Matt 7:21-23, but where else? Why didn't Jesus say more about the freeness of salvation?

—BP, email


A The Lord did, of course, often teach on the freeness of everlasting life. He told the woman at the well that everlasting life is “the gift of God” (John 4:10; see also Rev 22:17). He told His legalistic listeners that the only work that God requires in order to have everlasting life is to believe in His Son whom He sent (John 6:28-29). He repeatedly rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for their legalistic thinking. He showed the rich young ruler that everlasting life cannot be had by law-keeping. As you point out, He said in Matt 7:21-23 that looking to our works will keep us from entering the kingdom.

It is true, of course, that the Gospels are a different type of literature than the epistles. The Gospels are holy biography. They do express theology, but they are not laid out like the epistles.

At the heart of your question is why God, knowing that there would be all this controversy over the promise of everlasting life, didn't give us detailed refutations of every ism there ever will be. He could have given us separate books on legalism, Calvinism, Arminianism, Mormonism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Lordship Salvationism, Darwinianism, and so on. He could have undercut every cult and every false teaching thoroughly.

I believe the reason why the Bible is relatively short is because God is a rewarder of those *who diligently seek Him* (Heb 11:6). He has made the truth clear. It is easy to see. But He has included difficult verses and He has made it so that false teachers can twist and pervert His Word. Those who are open will see the truth.



By the way, all of us who know the truth are being used by God to clear up this confusion for others. We are to point the way for them to the truth. Warren Wilke did that for me in September of 1972 and he led me out of the darkness of works salvation. Someone did that for you. And you and I are doing that for others. That most will not listen is sad. But the truth is there and clear for all to see and believe. 

—Bob Wilkin

Send your questions or comments to bethany@faithalone.org



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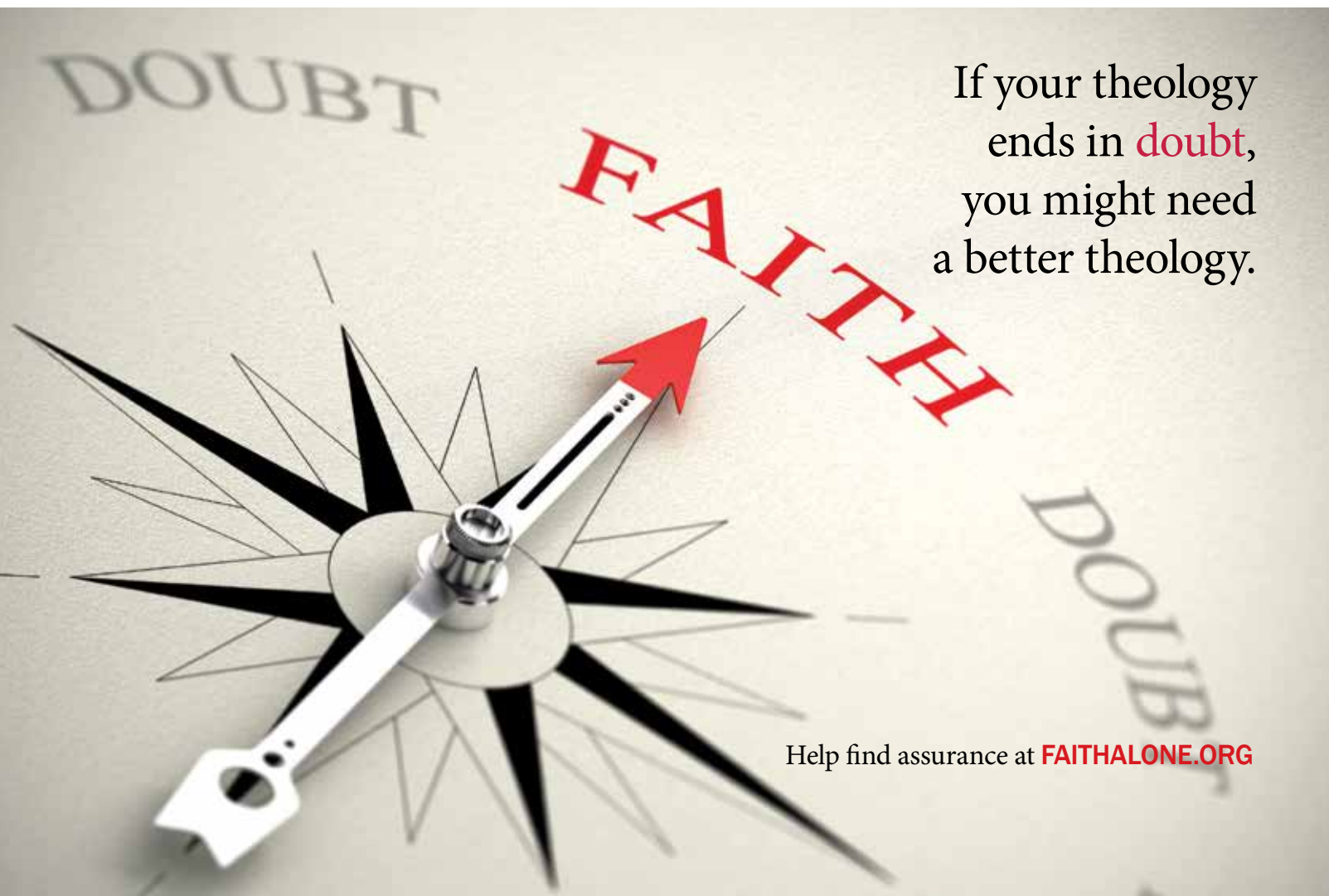
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