

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2016

ASSURANCE BY WORKS: MY ROAD TO RUIN

BY PAUL CARPENTER

PLUS Universalism: Will God Save Everyone? / Don't Base Your Assurance on Feelings /
The Building Block of Knowledge / A Man Approved by God / Q&A **AND MORE**

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2016

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GRACE IN FOCUS

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FROM THE EDITOR

When I was young it took a very long time to move from one year to the next.

As I'm now in my seventh decade the years go by a lot faster.

Sharon just bought her first pair of boots. These are fancy looking things made of some exotic leather. Knee high too. She claims she got them for under \$150 on some super sale. But the funny thing is that when she brought them home and tried them on for me she noticed that the zippers have writing on them: "2 Cor 5:7."

"Wow. I bought boots from a Christian company," Sharon said. "What does 2 Cor 5:7 say?"

Since I regularly preach on that passage, I remembered. That is where Paul says, "We walk by faith, not by sight." Great verse.

As believers in Jesus Christ we walk by faith in the fact that we have glorified bodies awaiting us, bodies free of pain and suffering (2 Cor 5:1-8). We walk by faith in the coming righteous kingdom of Jesus (2 Cor 4:18). We do not walk expecting heaven on earth out of our current governments.

In the last year a number of our dear friends and loved ones have gone to be with the Lord. They have not ceased to exist. They have simply "departed" for the presence of the Lord.

As Moses wrote in his only Psalm: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps 90:12). Let's make the most of the days and years that God gives us until we die or go up in the Rapture. Like the saints before us, we long



Walking by Faith

Bob Wilkin, **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

to be caught up and to meet the Lord in the air. But whether we come from here, or whether we are part of the dead in Christ who rise first and come from there, all Christians will meet the Lord in the clouds.

Welcome to the year of our Lord 2016. It is a great time to be a Christian and to serve the King of kings and Lord of lords.


Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Wilkin". The script is fluid and cursive.



UNIVERSALISM

Will God Save **Everyone?**



“Those who teach universalism suggest that God simply overlooks the fact that most people do not believe in Jesus for everlasting life. He grants everyone everlasting life. Thus there is no condition for salvation.”

By Bob Wilkin

What Is Universalism?

Universalism is the belief that every person who has ever lived or who will ever live will spend eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ in His kingdom. In this view the lake of fire will have only fallen angels and demons as its residents. No humans will live there. That, of course, means that not a single human will experience eternal torment.

What Is the Appeal of Universalism?

Hopefully none of us wants any humans to miss the kingdom of God. Of course, God Himself does not want that either. That is why He sent His Son to die on the cross and make everyone savable. God wants all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4).

So it certainly would be great if everyone came to faith in the Lord Jesus and was born again. Then everyone would spend eternity with the Lord.

But the Bible is clear that the way is narrow that leads to life and few find it (Matt 7:13-14). Even in His own ministry the Lord Jesus found that most of those to whom He preached rejected Him and His promise of everlasting life (John 1:11-13).

Those who teach universalism suggest that God simply overlooks the fact that most people do not

believe in Jesus for everlasting life. He grants it to everyone. Thus there is no condition for salvation.

The appeal is easy to see. An eternity with all humans experiencing unending joy seems much better than one in which many, if not most, humans are experiencing unending torment.

Biblical Evidence in Favor of Universalism

Most people who argue for universalism argue on the basis of logic and philosophy, not Scripture. They reason like this:

- Major Premise: Everything God does is good.
- Minor Premise: Condemning people to eternal torment is bad.
- Conclusion: God does not condemn any people to eternal torment.

Some verses of Scripture are cited to support their position. Most of these revolve around unlimited atonement. For example:

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:19).

He died for all (2 Cor 5:15).

God...is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe (1 Tim 4:10).



LIGHTSTOCK

He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 John 2:2).

The Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world (1 John 4:14).

“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Biblical Evidence Against Universalism

The problem with trying to use Unlimited Atonement to teach universalism is that the removal of sin as a barrier between us and God does not mean that all have or will have everlasting life. It simply means that our sins no longer keep us from having everlasting life. But as the Lord Jesus Himself said repeatedly, it is only those who believe in Him who have everlasting life. He also indicated the opposite, that those who do not believe in Him don't have everlasting life:

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who

does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

“If one is able to reject all the clear passages that indicate those who do not believe in Christ will be eternally condemned, then anything in the Bible can be rationalized away.”

“You are not willing to come to Me [= believe in Me] that you may have life” (John 5:40).

“If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

John the Baptist also said the unbelievers will be eternally

condemned: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him” (John 3:36).

The Apostle John said, “And the smoke of their [unbelievers from the Tribulation] torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Rev 14:11). He also said, “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and false prophet [two humans] are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev 20:10).

In the famous Great White Throne Judgment passage John tells us that all unbelievers of all time will be judged by Christ after the Millennium. He says that the Book of Life was opened, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15).

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord alluded to the Great White Throne Judgment. He said,

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven [cf. John 6:28-29, 40]. Many will say to me in that day [the Great White Throne Judgment], ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’ (Matt 7:21-23).

What Difference Does It Make?

Evangelism becomes unnecessary if everyone will spend eternity with the Lord.


The message preached by universalists who evangelize is radically different. Rather than saying that Jesus’ death on the cross means that all are savable so that all who simply believe in Him have everlasting life, they say that Jesus’ death on the cross means that everyone is saved, whether they ever believe in Jesus or not. They can gladly tell atheists and agnostics and Muslims and Hindus and people of every belief that they will spend eternity with the Lord no matter what they believe or do not believe. Of course, since that is a false message, that sort of evangelism is worse than no evangelism at all.

Another sad result of people teaching universalism is that they win

converts. People who once believed in justification by faith alone can, and sometimes are, led to believe in universalism. Then they in turn influence others, for they find this doctrine very important and liberating. So instead of keeping it to themselves, they seek to proselytize others. To the degree they have

success, they cause others to suffer shipwreck regarding the faith.

A final tragic impact of universalism is that the literal meaning of the Bible is abandoned. If one is able to reject all the clear passages cited above that indicate that those who do not believe in Christ will be eternally con-

demned, then anything in the Bible can be rationalized away. We can simply reject whatever does not seem right to us. And we likely will do that too. Once someone adopts an unbiblical position like universalism, then the Bible loses much of its power to shape and direct our lives. 



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. His most recent book is, *A Gospel of Doubt* (2015).

“Once someone adopts an unbiblical position like universalism, then the Bible loses much of its power to shape and direct our lives.”

HOW SHALL THEY BELIEVE?

WORLD POPULATION:

7,289,392,000¹

#OF PEOPLE WHO ARE UNREACHED OR ONLY NOMINALLY EXPOSED TO THE GOSPEL:

3,861,530,000²

#OF UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS:

9347

1. <http://www.census.gov/popclock/>

2. joshuaproject.net

A Man Approved by God

(ACTS 2:22-26)



LIGHTSTOCK

“Even a Christian life that has God’s approval and that has evidenced the working of His power, may still be visited by tragedy as a part of God’s eternal plan and for our eternal good.”

By Zane C. Hodges

In considering Peter’s message to his audience, one can find not only an explanation of the career of Christ—this is its basic thrust—but one can also find the underlying principles of that career which can be applied to Christian experience.

From the Bad Part of Town

2:22. Jesus of Nazareth. This is the first recorded public mention of His name since His ascension, yet He is mentioned by a designation (**of Nazareth**) which reminded men of His humble, and even despised, earthly connections (John 1:46; John 7:52). This is how the Spirit sees fit to introduce Him to this crowd, and Christians have ever gloried in the fact that He was “despised and rejected of men.” The glories of an ascended Savior spring directly from His humiliation (Philippians 2). Later, Christians were privileged to share the onus of Nazareth with their Lord (Acts 24:5; cf. Heb 13:13).

In contrast to men’s thoughts of Him were God’s own thoughts. He is “**a Man attested by God.**” The verb for *attested*, *apodeiknumi*, is found frequently in papyri to indicate proclaiming of an appointment to public office. Man’s view of us matters little; it is God’s view that counts. It is wonderful to have God’s public approval. This approval was shown in Christ by the working of His power, “**by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst.**” Likewise, in the believer His approval should be indicated by the working of His power because God has given us a spirit of power (2 Tim 1:7; cf. also John 14:12-14; John 7:38).

2:23. A life publicly approved by God ends in deepest tragedy at the hands of sinners. Yet it was part of

God’s determinate “**purpose and foreknowledge.**” Even a Christian life that has God’s approval and that has evidenced the working of His power, may still be visited by tragedy as a part of God’s eternal plan and for our eternal good.

The tragedy of the cross is now seen by Peter in its true light—not, as it had seemed at the time, an unspeakable calamity—but part of God’s counsel, inscrutable at the time to them, yet unutterably wise. That is how the misfortunes of the obedient disciple of this Master should be viewed.

2:24. Whom men despised, God approved. Whom men slew, God raised. The cross was but the precursor of Christ’s greatest triumph—His resurrection. So the Christian’s tragedy is but an anteroom to triumph (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:28, 37).

“**It was not possible that He should be held by it.**” He is the true God; the grave could not hold Him. He is Everlasting Life; death could not keep Him. Sin’s wages had been paid on the cross; there was nothing more to be exacted. Anything but resurrection was an impossibility. So defeat for the obedient Christian is utterly impossible (Rom 8:38-39) whatever tragedy occurs.

“**The pains of death**” (*tas ōdinas*) is an expression used for the pains of childbirth. Our Lord’s death was not mere death, but was fruitful, productive, and life-giving death (cf. John 12:24). Through His birth pains we have been born anew and so ultimately will all creation (cf. Matt 19:28).



“The God who is before
our face to lead us in
the right path, is at
our right hand to be
our Companion and
Sustainer in that path.”

123RF

What David Saw of Christ's Inner Life

2:25. Perhaps the Psalm quoted here was part of our Lord's exposition the evening of His resurrection (cf. Luke 24:44-45). If not, it must surely have come up during the 40 days post-resurrection period. No doubt Peter's explanation that it could not refer to David (vv 29-31) traces to Christ's own exposition.

“I foresaw” (cf. Ps 16:8, “I have set”). To see the Lord **“before my face”** is to set his attention on Him. As a man, Jesus never lost sight of God in all He did and said. To foresee someone before one's face always requires going where that person goes (i.e., it implies following). We are called to a life of keeping our Lord ever before us and following wherever He leads. Too often other things—sin, happiness, home, business—are ever before us. We must not put God to one side, ignore or forget Him, but foresee Him always before our face. The proper place for Satan is behind our back

(i.e., ignored; cf. Matt 16:23; Mark 8:33; Luke 4:8), but the proper place for God is before our face.

“For He is at my right hand.” Only God can be in two places at once—before our face and at our side. As the Perfect Man, Jesus was conscious of God's sustaining help at His right hand. As He goes to the cross He keeps God ever before His face (“thy will be done”) and we admire His calm courage through it. He was not moved, for God was beside Him. The God who is before our face to lead us in the right path, is at our right hand to be our Companion and Sustainer in that path (cf. Heb 13:5-6).

Note the word *for* in **“For He is at my right hand.”** Man can only assuredly keep God before him on the basis of the fact that God is beside him to sustain him in the path God is leading him. Thus Christ was bold in setting God before His face for He knew God was at His right hand. If God is not before our face, and other things are, it may be necessary that we be moved. It is only as God is set before our face that we

may be assured that He who is beside us will not suffer us to be moved.

2:26-31. The result of having the eyes on God and a sense of His sustaining presence is joy of heart and praise of lips. These words of joy were spoken by Christ as He was conscious of His approaching death (v 27) and reveal the triumph of faith's joy over even the darkest of circumstances. As for the Master, so it should and can be for the disciple (cf. John 16:33; Rom 5:3-5; 1 Thess 1:6).

But Christian experience as set forth in verses 25-26a (for the Christian life is nothing more nor less than the life of Christ) is crowned by hope: **"moreover my flesh also will rest in hope."** The reference is to the time when His body will be laid in the tomb—the most hopeless moment in the world's eyes—yet at such a moment there is hope. For His soul there was hope—**"You wilt not leave my soul in Hades"**; for His body there was hope—**"Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."** Again, for the body—**"You have made known to me the ways of life"**; and for the soul—**"You will make me full of joy in Your presence."** Christianity gives hope in the hopeless moments of life.

Note that our Lord's hope reached beyond the grave to resurrection life and the presence of His Father (v 28). So true Christian hope centers upon life beyond death and upon that time when we will be made full of joy with our Savior's countenance. Our Lord could not center His hope in this world, for He came to die. The shadow of the cross was ever across His path. "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). So true Christian experience may mean (should mean) a termination of fixing our hopes in this life and learning to place them, as did our Lord, in the life to come.

The Power of Peter's Sermon

If results are any indication (2:41), the greatest sermon of the Church Age may have been the first. What are the secrets of its power?

1. The fullness of the Spirit (2:4)
2. Content full of the Word. About 21 of 51 lines are direct quotations of Scripture (in the Majority Text). No doubt, Peter quotes from memory, a testimony to his knowledge of the Word.

It is not education or oratorical powers, but these two things that have always made a great sermon.

The first sermon of the Christian era presents three facts which are more crucial in history than any events that have transpired since then. It is appropriate that this first message should strike an age-long keynote. The facts and supporting Scriptures are:

1. The Spirit Has Come (vv 14-21; cf. Joel 2:28-32).
2. Christ Has Risen (vv 22-32; cf. Ps 16:8-11).
3. Christ Is Exalted (vv 33-36; cf. Ps 110:1).

2:32. Though he could have spoken much of those experiences (especially the 40 days and the ascension, Acts 1:3, 9) which qualified him as a witness, his personal testimony is held to a bare minimum (cf. v 32 almost alone), while the Scriptures are appealed to as the authoritative basis for what is said. No religious fact can become an object of faith, however well attested, apart from the witness of the Word of God.

The importance of these three facts cannot be overstated:

1. The Spirit's presence alone accounts for the existence of the Church and the maintenance of light in a world otherwise utterly dark and corrupting.
2. The resurrection of Christ is alone the sure basis of true hope for every individual soul (1 Cor 15:17).
3. The exaltation of Christ is a sure sign of the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose and the ultimate subjection of every enemy (cf. vv 34-35 and 1 Cor 15:25-28).

A more magnificent array of facts could hardly be dealt with. This is truly an unequalled commencement for Christian preaching.

Moreover, the three facts are inter-related. Peter is seeking to explain to the multitude the significance of that day's events. Basically it is (1) the Spirit's coming, but this cannot be understood apart from (2) the resurrection of Christ. But even the resurrection of Christ by itself does not fully explain the Spirit's presence, which can only be really appreciated by knowing that (3) Christ has been exalted. (Thus v 33 links back to vv 14-16.) Only a glorified Christ could have provided the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; 16:7). Only One in the position of honor at God's right hand could have made so great a request (note v 33). Thus

how awesome is the gift of the Spirit, the possession of every child of God if only secured through One so exalted!

The Spirit Points to Christ

2:33-35. The Spirit Who speaks through Peter loves to disappear behind the Person of Christ (cf. John 16:13-15). Here in the Spirit's first public witness after His advent, He disappears from view starting at verse 22, and thereafter mentions Himself but once (v 33). Likewise, the human witness should seek to hide behind the Person of the Lord Jesus (cf. John the Baptist, John 1). Wherever the Holy Spirit is made more of than a Risen and Glorified Christ, this is a mark that the Spirit is not working as He would like to. Notice the wide range of the Spirit's testimony to the Lord Jesus:

- His life (v 22)
- His death (v 23)
- His place in God's eternal counsels (v 23)
- His resurrection (v 24)
- His single-heartedness for God (v 25)
- His inner joy (v 26)
- His hope in God (vv 26-28)
- His place in prophecy (v 30-31)
- His exaltation (v 33)
- His provision for His own (v 33)
- His coming triumph over enemies (vv 34-35)
- His divine titles (v 36)

It is as though, on the Holy Spirit's first opportunity to speak of Jesus, He cannot wait to tell about all these things, but quickly ranges over those areas which subsequently He will delight to unfold in full.

Human witnesses need the eagerness and readiness of the Spirit so they pour forth their thoughts of Him (Ps 45:1ff). Believers should overflow with Christ.

Verse 33 reaches a climax in the Spirit's presentation of Christ. The **"therefore"** reaches back to all the preceding truths. Because of His approved life (v 22), His death within the counsels of God (v 23), His resurrection (v 24), His consecration (v 25), His hope in God (vv 26-28), and His prophesied possession of the Davidic throne (v 30), God has exalted Him. Such a One must be exalted. He must reign till all His enemies are under His feet (1 Cor 15:25).

Note in v 33 that Christ's exaltation is ascribed to *God*¹ and the promise of the Spirit is from the Father. The Spirit is pre-eminently sent from the *Father* (cf. John 14:16; John 14:26; John 15:26; Acts 1:4). The


Spirit testifies concerning the Son, making Him real to us, and leading us through Him to an enjoyment of the Father.

2:36. Jesus is presented as **"both Lord and Christ"** (not Christ and Lord). The former title speaks of authority, the latter of Saviorhood (John 4:42). The effectiveness of His Saviorhood in this age is dependent upon His authority (Matt 28:18-20; cf. Mark 16:19-20).

We preach Him as Savior, trusting in the power of His exalted Lordship. His exaltation is both the proof that the titles are properly His, and the state by which both titles can be realized to the full.

Despite being Lord, He was crucified through weakness. But now His enemies can never more touch Him, except to become the footstool for His feet.

When Christ was on earth, His Saviorhood was known only within the limited sphere of Israel. But now it is known and received worldwide (Isa 49:6-9).

Jesus is both Lord and Christ. The two titles are clearly distinct. Saving faith is directed not at His Lordship, but at His Christship (cf. 1 John 5:1; John 20:31). 



Zane Hodges taught NT Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary. His book, Acts of the Risen Christ is forthcoming.

1. Editor's note: God (*Theos*) most likely refers to the Father in Acts 2:33 since it is part of the phrase, "the right hand of God," which is only used of the Father in its only three other uses in Luke-Acts (Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55-56). Clearly the Father is in view in the use of this expression as well in Mark 16:19; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; The point Hodges appears to be making is that Luke is not merely varying his terminology from *God* to the *Father* for stylistic reasons. Hodges takes the shift as indicating that Luke is emphasizing that the Father sends the Spirit.

The Building Block of Knowledge

By Joe Lombardi

When *Newsweek* magazine published an article several years ago lamenting the lack of knowledge among the youth of the United States, there were 1,274 two-year colleges in the United States that collectively enrolled nearly five million students.

Dr. James M. O'Neill taught English composition at four of those colleges in two different states. During his fifteen-year career he became increasingly concerned about the lack of knowledge among so many of his college-age students.

That was when he decided to present his pupils at the South Puget Sound Community College in Olympia, WA, with an 86-question "general knowledge" test on the first day of class one year.

The questions that O'Neill devised were not trivial, nor were they technical. They were based on simple facts pertaining primarily to history and geography— basic information about world-renowned



people and well-known places that any high school graduate should know.

The exam was given to twenty-six students ranging in age from eighteen to fifty-four. All of them had completed at least one semester of college-level work.

Here is just a sampling of what O'Neill learned concerning how much (or little) his students really knew.

With respect to famous people, his students said that: Charles Darwin invented gravity; Sid Caesar was an early Roman emperor; Mark Twain invented the cotton gin; Heinrich Himmler invented the Heimlich maneuver; Jefferson Davis was the guitar player for the rock band Jefferson Airplane; Socrates was an American Indian chieftain; and Jesus Christ was born in the 16th century.

Professor O'Neill went on to say that "most students answered incorrectly" and that some of them "meticulously wrote 'I don't know' as many as eighty-six times." (Remember, there were only eighty-six questions on the test).

No wonder why many people conclude that what we have witnessed during the past several decades is the "dumbing down of America." In the words from the title of a Jim Carrey comedy, as a nation we seem to be growing increasingly "Dumb and Dumber."

Illiteracy in the Pew

In my opinion, the only thing more pathetic than this pitiful lack of knowledge among so many youth today, is an ever-increasing Biblical illiteracy in the pew.

According to the Princeton Religious Research Center, over half

of all Americans cannot name the four Gospels. More than one third do not know the number of Jesus' disciples. And, in spite of many very familiar Christmas carols, one third do not even know the name of the town where Jesus was born.

A recent Gallup Poll found that less than four out of every ten Protestants know that it was Jesus who said, "Ye must be born again."

And another national periodical published an article titled "The Startling Belief of Our Future Ministers." It included the results of a survey taken by the ministerial students at several major denominational schools. To be sure, not all of them were Evangelical—but, remember, these were still men and women preparing for full-time ministry.

When asked the following questions,

Do you believe in a physical (bodily) resurrection?

54% said "no."

Do you believe in the virgin birth of Christ?

56% said "no."

Do you believe in a literal heaven and hell?

71% said "no."

Do you believe in the deity of Jesus Christ?

89% said "no."

Do you believe that man was born in sin, and separated from God?

98% said that "they were not concerned."

Do you believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ?

99% said "no."

God's People Need Knowledge

As I have reflected on these tragic facts and disturbing trends, I could not help but think of the Word of the Lord, spoken through His prophet, Hosea, "My people are destroyed for *lack of knowledge*" (Hos 4:6, emphasis added).

Ignorance is *not* bliss! God places no premium on ignorance. In fact, in what our Lord Jesus regarded as the supreme command, we are told to love the Lord our God with *all our mind*, as well as with all our heart and soul and strength (Mark 12:30).

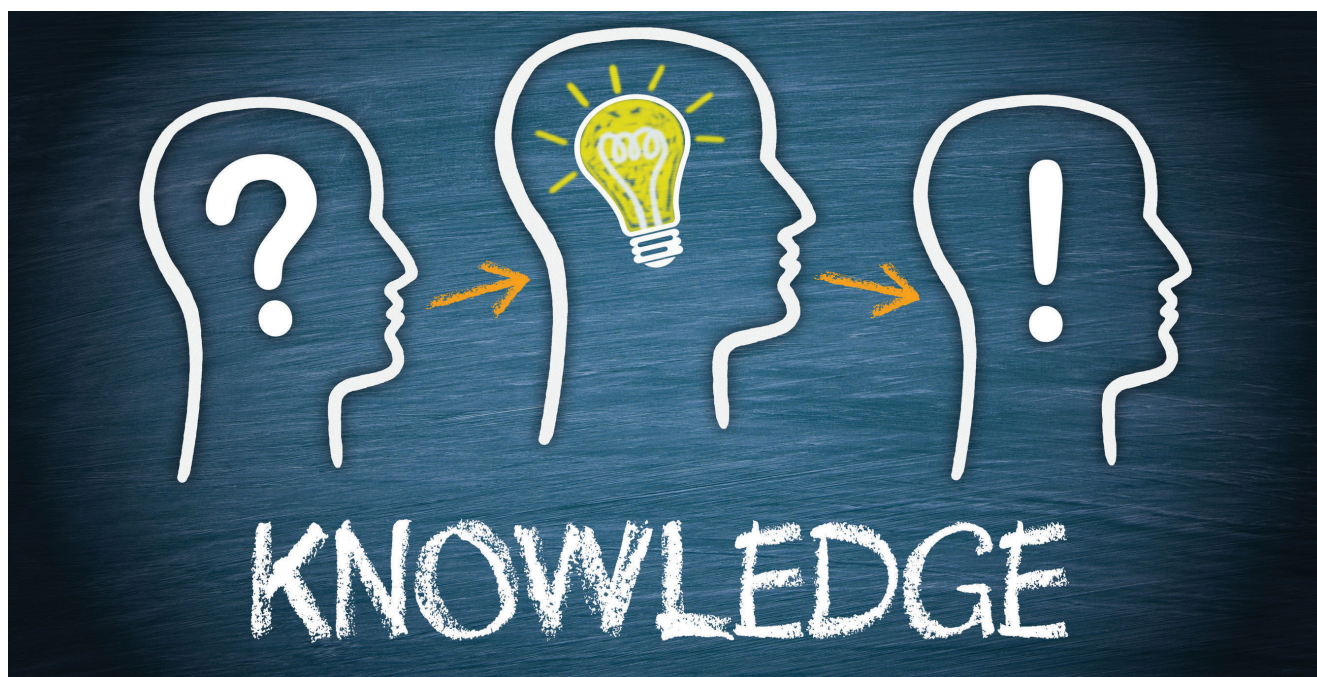
I believe that to love Him with all our mind demands (among other things) we must grow in our knowledge of the Bible.

In previous articles, I have noted that Peter presents us with a Divine "blue print" that specifies seven building blocks that are to be used in the framing and fashioning of Christians in and under construction. In the remainder of this article I want to examine the second building block of knowledge.

Principles for the Attainment of Knowledge

The Greek word translated "knowledge" is *gnosis*. The transliterated Greek root *gno* appears in our English word, "agnostic," which means "unknown," and in our English word "ignoramus," which literally means "one who is not knowing."

Gnosis is found in its various forms over two hundred times in the New Testament alone. In the context of 2 Peter 1 it refers essentially to the knowledge of God—of coming to know *who* He is,



primarily through *what* He says—that is, through His special revelation of Himself. Thus, the *source* of this knowledge is God Himself, concerning whom Paul exclaimed in this beautiful burst of praise, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge [*gnosis*] of God” (Rom 11:33).

And so we read, for example, in Prov 2:6, “For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge [*gnosis*, LXX] and understanding.” He Himself is indeed the very source of this knowledge to which Peter refers.

I like the nuance of the paraphrase of this term in the Living Bible, “His every word is a *treasure of knowledge*” (Prov 2:6, emphasis added). I especially like what John says concerning His Word: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed a *treasure of knowledge*.

Seven hundred years before Christ’s birth the prophet Isaiah wrote concerning Him,

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of *knowledge* and of the fear of the Lord (Isa 11:1-2, emphasis added).

Concerning Jesus Christ Paul wrote, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and *knowledge*” (Col 2:3, emphasis added). Similarly, he wrote to the believers in Corinth, “that you were enriched in everything by Him [Jesus Christ] in all utterance and all *knowledge*” (1 Cor 1:5, emphasis added). Once an individual believes in Jesus for everlasting life, they soon discover there is so much more to learn *of* Him and *from* Him. Indeed, Peter adds in the text that serves as the basis for this series of articles, “For if these things are yours and abound, *you*

will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the *knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:8, emphasis added).

The truth is that once we begin to learn more *about* Him, we soon discover that there is still so much more to learn *of* Him and *from* Him.

I believed in Jesus nearly sixty years go. Six decades later, the one thing I am quite sure of is that I still don’t have Him all “figured out!” But, then again, the Psalmist explains, “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; *his understanding is beyond measure*” (Ps 147:5, emphasis added, ESV). There is so much more to learn. But don’t be discouraged. Jesus invites His followers to “come to me” and “learn from me” (Matt 11:28-29).

Therefore, if you wish to be effective and productive for the Lord, then, according to Peter, you need the building block of the *knowledge* of God. This building block is so important to Peter that he begins this letter by referring

to it in 2 Pet 1:5-6, and mentions it once again in his final conclusion in 2 Pet 3:18, “But grow in the grace and *knowledge* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (emphasis added).

Before I explain two Biblical prerequisites for the attainment of this knowledge, I need to issue a parenthetical warning about some dangers of which you need to be aware.

Knowing Evil

First of all, when Peter speaks of this building block of knowledge, he is referring to the knowledge of God and *from* God. He is speaking, essentially, of the knowledge of *good*. For there is a type of “knowledge” of which you and I should remain ignorant. I am referring to the “knowledge of *evil*.” For example, Paul wrote,

For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is *good*, and *simple* [that is, innocent, unadulterated, pure] *concerning evil* (Rom 16:19, emphasis added).

The fact is that there are some things you and I just don’t need to know. Listen to the voice of God speaking through the prophet Jeremiah: “For My people are fools; they do not know Me. They are foolish children, without understanding. They are skilled in doing what is evil, but *they do not know* how to do *what is good*” (Jer 4:22, HCSB, emphasis added). The devotional writer, Oswald Chambers, said, “There are some things a man is a criminal for knowing. The knowledge of evil, instead of instigating to action, paralyzes.” Three

thousand years before Chambers’ time, one of the wisest men who ever lived wrote that the pursuit of the knowledge of evil is “to know madness and folly” and is a “grasping for the wind” (Eccl 1:17).

Knowledge Puffs Up

Secondly, there is also the danger of making the attainment of knowledge an end in itself. It is knowledge just for the sake of knowledge.

That can be a very heady thing.

The great country preacher Vance Havner once warned, “Head knowledge is useful, but unless it is

“When a person does what is right (virtue) with all that he knows (knowledge), that is called ‘wisdom.’”

sanctified by the Holy Spirit, it can be the most dangerous thing in the world.”

It can certainly lead to pride.

There is an old proverb which says that “knowledge humbleth the great man, astonishes the common man, and puffeth up the little man.” Likewise, Paul wrote, “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Cor 8:1). A few chapters later he adds, “And though I... understand all mysteries and *all knowledge*... but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2, emphasis added).

The English author, pastor and professor, J. I. Packer, also warned believers,

...If we pursue theological

knowledge for its own sake, it is bound to go bad on us. It will make us proud and conceited. The very greatness of the subject matter will intoxicate us, and we shall come to think of ourselves as a cut above other Christians because of our interest in and grasp of it... To be preoccupied with getting theological knowledge as an end in itself... is the direct route to a state of self-satisfied, self-deception (Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 22).

Do you know anyone like the person Packer describes?

Some of them are people who may have grown in knowledge, but have failed to grow in grace. You see, the more knowledge you have, the more grace you need.

By the way, as we continue our study in 2 Peter 1, I want you to note that Christlike character is not only constructed with knowledge, but it is also framed with the building blocks of brotherly kindness and Christian love. Together, they bring “balance” to this project.

Indeed, in order for knowledge to be useful, it must be balanced not only by the last building block of love, but also by the first building block of virtue, which is, essentially, the commitment to do what is right with what we know.

When a person does what is right (virtue) with all that he knows (knowledge), that is called “wisdom.” But one can be knowledgeable without being wise when one makes the attainment of knowledge an end in itself. However, one cannot be wise without being knowledgeable. From Prov 13:16 we learn that “Every prudent man acts with knowledge.” So, clearly, the more knowledgeable you are, the wiser you may be, if

you do what is right (prudent) with what you know.

Don't Be a Know-It-All

Here is one more final word of warning: Beware of the danger that once you come to know a little, you begin to think you actually know a lot!

I know believers who have come so far, and then, suddenly, they think they don't need to learn anymore. That is why Peter said in 2 Peter 1:8 (NIV) that if you want to be effective and productive for the Lord, then you must "possess these qualities in *increasing measure*" (emphasis added).

I like the way Paul expressed this truth in Phil 3:8-10:

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for *the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which *is through faith in Christ*, the righteousness which is from God by faith; *that I may know Him...* (emphasis added).

The passion, purpose and pursuit of Paul's life was to know Christ! From him we also understand that as long as we are living we need to keep on learning.

Prerequisites for the Attainment of Knowledge

Here are two Biblical prerequisites for the attainment of this kind of knowledge. The first one is determination. Paul said that he wanted to know Christ more than anything else. That passion of his life became the foundation

of his purpose in life which, in turn, became the direction for the pursuit of his life. The Living Bible paraphrase of Prov 4:12 reads, "Determination to be wise is the first step toward becoming wise."

One of the two Biblical passages that God used in what I determined to be my call to full-time pastoral ministry is Ezra 7:10 (NASB): "For Ezra had set his heart (i.e., he determined) to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it (i.e., not just knowledge for the sake of knowledge), and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." Once again, the first prerequisite for the attainment of knowledge is a determination of the will.

The second prerequisite is a discipline of the mind. Paul said in the first half of Phil 3:8, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Paul was disciplined enough to do whatever it would take to know Christ.


I fear that there are not too many believers today who are willing to pay the price of determination and discipline. Why not? Perhaps one reason is that in the western world we have become so affluent that we have also become, as a result, indifferent, complacent, and even content about being so spiritually ignorant!

Conclusion

Fellow believers, it is our Father God who said, "My people are destroyed for lack of *knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6, emphasis added). That is why Hosea makes this impassioned plea two chapters later, "Let us *know*, let us pursue the *knowledge of the Lord*" (Hosea 6:3, emphasis added).

In the *Newsweek* article I quoted at the beginning of this article, Dr. O'Neill concluded, "As a teacher I find myself in the ignorance and hope business. Each year hopeful faces confront me, trying to conceal their ignorance. Their hopes ride on the dispelling of that ignorance. All our hopes do."

I think that is also true with respect to our knowledge of the Lord. Most assuredly, according to 2 Pet 1:2-11, our hope as believers of a "rich welcome" into His kingdom is based on – among other things – whether or not we have made every effort to add to our faith not only goodness, but also knowledge.

With that in mind, my prayer for those who read this article is, in the words of the Apostle Paul, "...that you may know him better" (Eph 1:17, NIV). 



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**“Are You a
Christian?”**

Voice from the Past

By J. Wilbur Chapman

I was studying for the ministry, and I heard that D. L. Moody was to preach in Chicago. I went down to hear him. Finally I got into his after-meeting. I shall never forget the thrill that went through me when he came and sat down beside me as an inquirer. He asked me if I was a Christian. I said, "Mr. Moody, I am not sure whether I am a Christian or not."

He very kindly took his Bible and opened it at the fifth chapter of John, and the twenty-fourth verse, which reads as follows: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from death unto life."

Suppose you had read that for the first time, wouldn't you think it was wonderful? I read it through, and he said, "Do you believe it?"

I said, "Yes."

"Do you accept it?"

I said, "Yes."

"Well, are you a Christian?"

"Mr. Moody, I sometimes think I am, and sometimes I am afraid I am not."

He very kindly said, "Read it again."

So I read it again: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

Then he said, "Do you believe it?"

I said, "Yes."


"Do you receive Him?"

I said, "Yes."

"Well," he said, "are you a Christian?"

I just started to say over again that sometimes I was afraid I was not, when the only time in all the years I knew him and loved him, he was sharp with me. He turned on me with his eyes flashing and said, "See here, whom are you doubting?"

Then I saw it for the first time, that when I was afraid I was not a Christian I was doubting God's Word. I read it again with my eyes overflowing with tears.

Since that day I have had many sorrows and many joys, but never have I doubted for a moment that I was a Christian, because God said it. 



J. Wilbur Chapman (1859–1918) was a Presbyterian evangelist.

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DON'T BASE YOUR ASSURANCE ON FEELINGS

By Shawn C. Lazar



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I was recently teaching a class on Genesis 1 when I read this question in the leader's guide: "Ask: How does knowing that God created everything *make you feel?*"

I remember when teachers used to ask, "What do you *think* about that?" Or "what do you *believe* about that?" Now it's all about feelings.

You'd think teaching had been replaced by group therapy.

Somewhere along the line feelings have come to predominate over facts. That has been disastrous for assurance, robbing people of the certainty they will spend eternity with God.

Many people doubt their salvation because they don't want to *believe* they're saved; they want to *feel* they're saved. But that's a problem. Maybe that's your problem. Are you looking to your feelings for assurance?

If so, we have a saying in Texas—if you don't like the weather, just wait five minutes.

Feelings are like that.

They're different for everyone. Some people are more emotional than others. And some people tend towards a different range of emotions than others, whether that be joy or sorrow.

You can't predict your feelings or depend on them. Sometimes feelings are as pleasant as a picnic and other times they come flooding over the levees.

Just like the weather, emotions have their seasons and their cycles and the only constant thing about them is that they're constantly changing.

Just as you can never be certain that tomorrow will be a sunny day, if you base your assurance on feelings, you'll never be certain of your salvation.

“Let’s not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it.”
~Vincent Van Gogh

Do you think God would want your assurance to be based on something as unstable and unpredictable as your emotions?

The fact is, God wants your assurance to be based on faith, not feelings. He doesn’t want you to depend on your subjective emotions, but on His objective promises.

Martha Mourning Lazarus

For example, take Martha. Remember when her brother Lazarus was deathly ill?

She and her sister Mary sent for Jesus, urging Him to come before their brother died. But the Lord didn’t come. At least, not right away. He delayed for two days and then headed for Bethany. By the time Jesus finally arrived in town, Lazarus had been dead for four days. It looked like Jesus was too late. Lazarus was long gone.

Or was he?

Martha thought there was still hope. When she saw Jesus she ran up to Him and said,

“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You” (John 11:21-22).

Such faith! Such confidence! Even though she knew her brother was dead, Martha believed Jesus had the authority to bring Lazarus back to life. She knew He was far more than just a man. But how much did she really understand? Did she really know who Jesus was and what He could do?

Jesus looked Martha in the eyes and asked her the most critical question of her life,

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. *Do you believe this?*” (John 11:25-26, emphasis added).

Jesus didn’t ask how Martha *felt* about what He said. Her brother had just died after a serious illness and she’d been mourning for days. *Of course, she felt terrible.*

That wasn’t Jesus’ question. His question was: did she *believe* what He said about Himself?

Did she believe in bodily resurrection?

Did she believe that Jesus was the one who did the raising?

Did she believe that Jesus had power over life and death?

Did she believe that whoever has faith in Jesus will never die?

In sum, did she believe Jesus gives us everlasting life?

Martha’s Answer

She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (John 11:27).

Martha said yes! She believed Jesus was “the Christ.” Her answer was very significant.

Many people mistakenly think “Christ” was Jesus’ last name. (I used to think that as a baby Christian.)

Or they might have some vague notion that being the “Christ” means Jesus was God’s anointed King of Israel.

That’s not the key truth that Jesus and the Gospel of John are trying to get us, the readers, to understand and believe about Jesus. The “Christ” is shorthand for something.

Imagine if Barack Obama came to you and asked, “Do you believe that I am commander-in-chief of the armed forces, have the right to grant reprieves, have the right to pardon convicts, and have the duty to appoint supreme court judges and other government officers?”

You could say, “Yes, I believe you can do x, y, and z” and repeat all the powers he mentioned. Or you

could simply say, “Yes, I believe you’re the President” because the title “President” summarizes Obama’s powers.

That’s how Martha was using the title “Christ.” It was shorthand to sum up the powers that Jesus just claimed for Himself.

Martha knew the “Christ” is the One Who resurrects the dead and gives everlasting life to those who believe in Him. And she believed Jesus was the “Christ.”

Hence, whatever she felt in that moment, Martha believed that Jesus would raise her up on that Last Day and give her everlasting life.

That was her rock of certainty in a sea of grief.

One Foundation

How about you? What do you believe about Jesus? Do you have faith, not in God in general, but in Jesus’ specific promise of resurrection and everlasting life?

Do you believe that Jesus is the “Christ”?

Do you believe you will never die because you have faith in Him?

Do you know Jesus’ promise is true *for you*?

That’s what assurance is, isn’t it? Assurance is believing that Jesus’ promise is true *for you*.

If you believe that, you have saving faith. But if you don’t believe that—if you think that salvation is for others but aren’t sure if it’s for you—then you don’t have saving faith.

At least, you don’t have it *right now*.

Maybe you had saving faith in the past. Maybe you believed when you were a little kid at summer camp, but later backslid and lost your faith. Maybe you had assurance years ago only to hear something in church that confused you about the nature of faith, and you later lost it.

It happens.

But so long as you ever believed the promise, you were born again in that moment. And the moment you were born again, you were secure forever, no matter what you believe now.

But let’s say that, right now, you don’t have assurance. What do you do? Where should you turn for help?

God only offers you one answer: turn to His Word. Turn away from introspecting your mixed emotions and turn to Jesus and His promises. Your feelings are subjective. His promises are objective. If you privilege your perspiration over His inspiration, I guarantee

you’ll be anxious instead of assured. So don’t believe your feelings over believing the Bible.

So your challenge. Instead of doubting Jesus’ promise, doubt your feelings.

If Jesus said it, don’t let your feelings unsettle it.

Believe His promise is meant *for you* and true *for you*.

And if you struggle to believe those promises for yourself, keep on reading them and even speaking them out loud until they sink in.


After all, faith doesn’t come in a vacuum or pop into existence out of nowhere.

Faith needs an object: let that object be Jesus’ promises, not your feelings. As Paul said, faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17).

It doesn’t matter where you hear the Word. You don’t need to wait for Sunday morning. You don’t need to wait to talk to your pastor or to a missionary. You can hear God’s Word from your own lips as you read the Bible, say, the Gospel of John, and speak Jesus’ promises out loud.

It might take a day, a week, or year before the Word penetrates through the darkness of your doubting heart. You might have to read Jesus’ promises a thousand times before you believe them.

But it will happen. Faith will come. God created your mind to believe the truth, and He is the Truth with a capital “T.” Jesus speaks with authority (Matt 7:29). No matter what you may feel about it, hear Him, listen to Him, and believe Him.

Emotions have their proper place and time. As the Bible says, there is “a time to weep and a time to laugh” (Eccl 3:4). But there’s never a time to base your assurance on your feelings. 



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications at Grace Evangelical Society.

The Power of Christ's Obedience (Hebrews 10:5-7; Psalm 40)

By Ken Yates

When I study the New Testament, I like to see how it deals with Old Testament quotes. It is always interesting to go back and study the original context. For example, take Heb 10:5-7:

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:
“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
You had no pleasure.
Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.’”

Christ's Death, Not Animal Sacrifices, Was Needed to Take Away Sins

In this passage, the author of Hebrews tells us that the Old Testament sacrificial system could never take away the sins of God's people. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to do that (Heb 10:4).

Then, the author tells us that Christ took on a human body in order to make that sacrifice (Heb 10:5-7). What the blood of animals could never do, the blood of the eternal Son of God could. His death paid for the sins of His people forever. Because Christ made this sacrifice, believers have been made holy forever (Heb 10:10, 14).

When the author refers to Jesus taking on a human body, he quotes from Ps 40:6-8. This Psalm is traditionally ascribed to David.

But what was David talking about when he wrote these words nearly ten centuries before the time of Christ?

David Remembers His Own Divine Deliverance

In the first part of the Psalm we see that David is referring to something that happened to him in the past. God had delivered him from some kind of



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problem. Perhaps it was a serious illness or from some kind of enemy. David describes it as a “horrible pit” in which his feet were sunk in miry clay (Ps 40:2). When David was confronted with the problem, he trusted in the Lord to deliver him. He cried out to God, Who heard and delivered him (Ps 40:1).

David responds to God's deliverance by singing a new song (40:3). One is reminded of the song of deliverance the children of Israel sang when God delivered them from Egypt and through the Red Sea, while at the same time destroying their enemies who pursued them (Exodus 15).

David tells everyone about his deliverance and about God's faithfulness, power, and lovingkindness (Ps 40:9-10).

When David tells others of these things, he also tells them they can trust in God too. In times of trouble it is easy to trust in our own power or in the power of others. But David wants us to trust in God. David waited on Him. He cried out to Him. And it was God who delivered him (Ps 40:4).

It was only natural that David should trust in God. He knew from experience that the Lord was trustworthy. God had demonstrated His power and ability to deliver many times in the past (Ps 40:5). God delivered the Jewish people. He also delivered David as a young shepherd from the mouths of lions and bears, as well as from Goliath, King Saul, and other enemies.

David Points to Christ

After declaring how God had delivered him, David writes the verses quoted in Hebrews. Even though they point to Christ, they are also directly relevant to David.

As a result of what God had done for him, David is compelled to obey God. God has opened his ears so that he wants to obey (40:6). It is his delight to do what God requires of him. The law of God is within David's heart (40:8). This does not mean that David is enjoying the benefits of the New Covenant (where God's Law is written on the heart of the child of God—Jer 31:33). It means God has captured David's affections. He does not want to simply obey God through rituals like sacrifices and meal offerings (40:6). It is no longer a matter of simply going through the religious motions for him. David actually wants to obey God.

Christ's Obedience Was Perfect

Of course, all of this also points to Christ and His obedience. We all know how He took on a body in order to pay the penalty for our sins. But from the context of Psalm 40, there is more.

Christ was the perfect example of David's desire to be completely dedicated and obedient to God. This is shown through the sacrifice He willingly made for the sins of mankind.

Christ, like David, trusted in God to save Him. Like David, He cried out to His Father to deliver Him from death (Heb 5:7). After demonstrating this trust, Jesus, like David, became one who proclaimed to others that such trust was warranted (Heb 2:12-13).

Trust and Obey

We learn many things from Psalm 40 and its use in Hebrews 10.

First, Christ took on a body and died on Calvary to pay for all of our sins once for all. When a person believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life they receive that gift and are made holy forever. They cannot lose it.


Second, all of this was the result of the obedience of Christ to the Father. Christ's obedience is a model for us.

Third, Christ has shown that we can trust in God when we need deliverance. God has delivered every

“Christ has shown that we can trust in God when we need deliverance. God has delivered every believer from the greatest enemies of all—sin and death.”

believer from the greatest enemies of all—sin and death. The believer can now call upon God to save (i.e., deliver) him in every circumstance, and from whatever issue, he needs deliverance.

Fourth, because God has done that for us, we should also follow Christ's, and to a lesser degree David's, example. We, out of grateful hearts, should desire to obey God. We should desire to

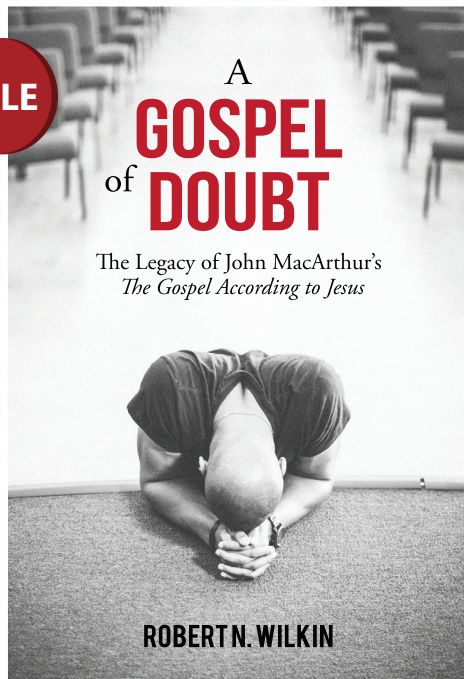
serve Him not out of some kind of legalistic or ritualistic requirement. The believer has the Law of God written on his heart. God has given us the ability to obey Him through His Spirit. After all He has done for us in Christ, like our Savior, He should have our total affection. 



Ken Yates is Editor of the Journal for the Grace Evangelical Society and GES's East Coast speaker. He lives in Columbia, SC.

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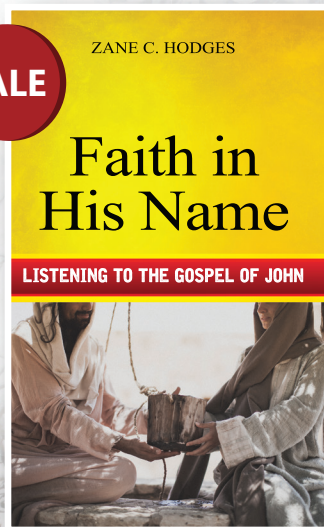
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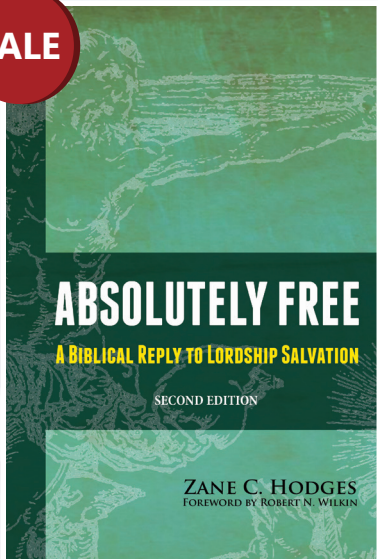
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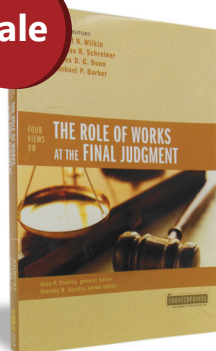
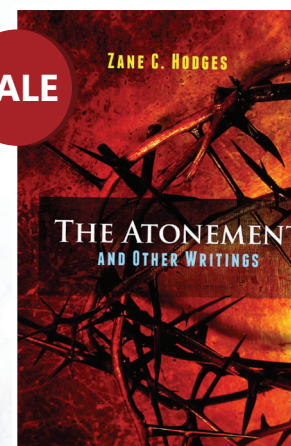
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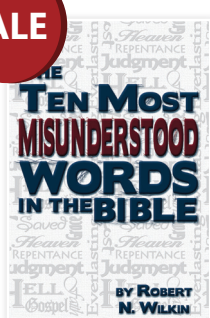


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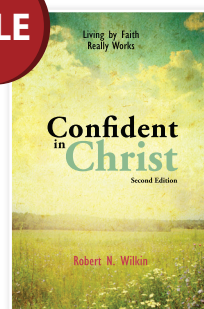


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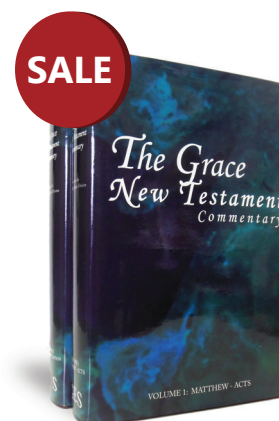
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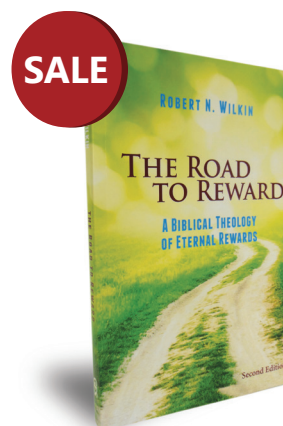
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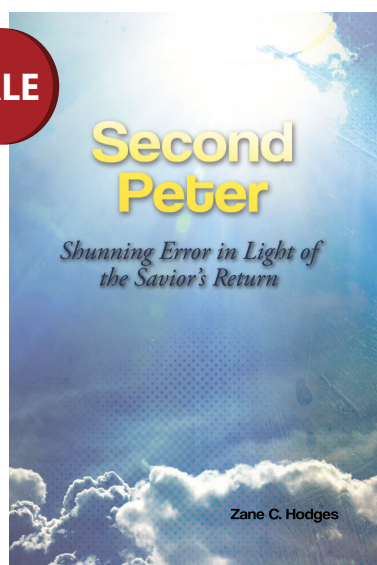
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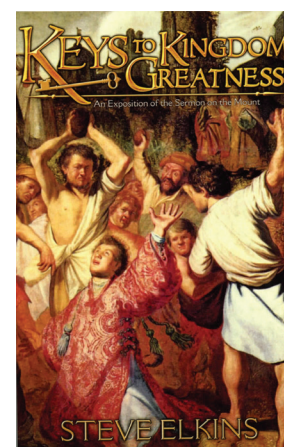
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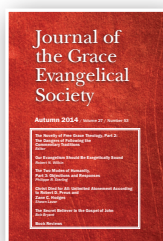
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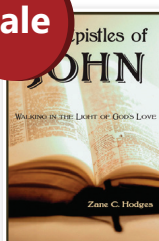




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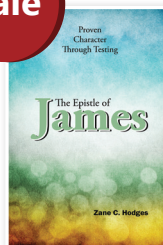


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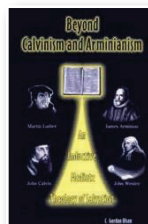


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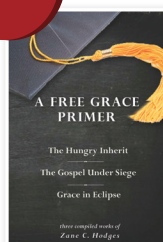
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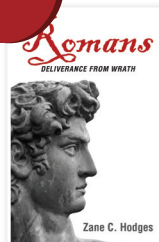
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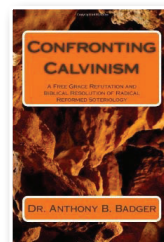


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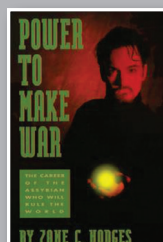


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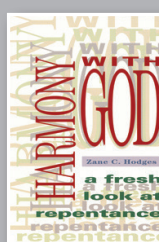


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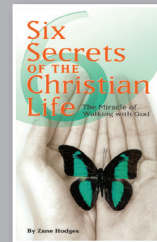


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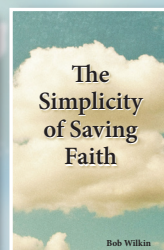
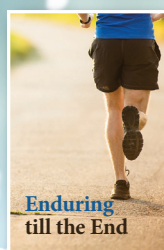
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Confession in the New Testament

By Bill Fiess

The word *homologeō*, often translated *confess*, is found quite regularly (23 times in the Majority Text) in the New Testament, but it may be surprising in what sense it is used most often.

We are accustomed to thinking of confession in relation to confessing sins. But surprisingly confession of sins is mentioned only three times in the New Testament (Matt 3:6; Mark 1:5; 1 John 1:9).

In fact, the Greek word *homologeō*, which is usually translated *confess*, is occasionally translated *give thanks* (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21; Heb 13:15). And a few times it has the sense of *promise* (Matt 14:7; Luke 22:6). But most of the time it is rendered by the simple word *confess* or *confession* (about 75% of the time).¹

In addition to the verb *homologeō*, there is also the related verb *exomologeō*, (11 uses) and the noun *homologia* (6 uses). Though it is very imposing to contemplate, I personally will give a *confession* of my life before Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12). And even more astonishing is the fact that Jesus Himself promises *that He will confess* (or acknowledge) some believers before God the Father and His angels. For example,

“Therefore *whoever confesses Me before men*, him I will also *confess before My Father* who is in heaven. But *whoever denies Me before men*, him I will also *deny before My Father* who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32–33, emphasis added).

Similarly in Rev 3:5 the Lord Jesus promises, “I will confess his name [i.e., the name of him who overcomes] before My Father and before His angels.”

In both contexts it is very clear that Jesus is speaking to and about believers. So the setting in which Jesus will confess some believers can only be the Judgment Seat of Christ (Luke 19:15-26; Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:9-10).

Also, it is clear that not all believers will be confessed (openly acknowledged and praised) by Jesus, for He also says “*whoever denies Me before men*, him I will also *deny before My Father* who is in heaven” (Matt 10:33; 2 Tim 2:12b). In fact, the context in




Matthew and also Revelation strongly suggests that those whom Jesus denies at the Bema will not be eligible to rule with Him.

In fact, in his own commentary on Matt 10:32-33 Paul said both “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” and “If we deny Him, He will also deny us” (2 Tim 2:12). Endurance in confession of Christ results in reigning with Christ. Failure to endure in confession will result in a denial of the privilege of reigning with Christ.

Sadly confessing Christ is exactly what many believers in Jesus’ day were unwilling to do:

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees *they did not confess Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue (John 12:42, emphasis added).²

For me, I have decided that I want to be a *confessing* believer that I might be confessed at the Bema. 



Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia and can't believe he gets paid to have so much fun.

1. Whether it should be translated that way so often is open to question. Possibly translations like *acknowledge*, *profess*, *praise*, or *declare* might better convey the sense in some contexts.

2. See also John 9:22.

Pursuing Grace

By Phil Congdon

I grew up in a “black-and-white” world, where “right” and “wrong” was ingrained in me by parents, church, and culture.

It’s not a bad thing, generally speaking. The moral vacuum that people grow up with today is far worse, resulting in many destroyed lives.

But thinking you have right and wrong all figured out is dangerous too because it can engender pride, arrogance, and a kind of self-righteousness based on moral superiority.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen’s Mr. Darcy describes his upbringing with these words:

“As a child I was taught what was right... I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit... my parents... allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing; to care for none beyond my own family circle; to think meanly of all the rest of the world; to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own.”

While my experience was different, the tendency to view ‘my way’ of living the Christian life as being ‘the only right way’ can lead to a deep-seated pride which tends to look down on others who don’t share my views. This pride can reveal itself in belittling people who have a different theology, who engage in activities I don’t approve of, or who are more conservative (or more liberal) than I am.

In his book *The Grace Awakening*, Chuck Swindoll says there are two strong tendencies that nullify grace: the tendency to compare and the tendency to control. Both of those tendencies are embodied in the word *Pharisee*.

The Modern Pharisee

The dictionary defines a “Pharisee” as 1) a member of an ancient Jewish religious group who followed the Oral Law in addition to the Torah and attempted to live in a constant state of purity (we all know those guys); and 2) a self-righteous, hypocritical, or sanctimonious person (Ouch). The first describes *who* they were, and the second describes *how* they acted.

This tendency to compare myself with others and treat them as spiritual inferiors is alive and well today.

An article I recently read suggested the kind of thing modern Pharisees might say: “You can’t be a Christian if you are/aren’t a [blank]; if you believe/don’t believe [blank] (not referring to believing in Jesus, but to other issues); or if you do/don’t do [blank].”

Some areas are rife with this judgmentalism: “You’re a terrible Christian parent because your children [blank].” Or perhaps, “You’re not a good Christian because you support [blank].” The blanks are filled in



with the opposite belief of the “modern Pharisee”—perhaps supported by a proof-text or two, but entirely devoid of grace.

The Antidote of Grace

I have felt the sting of judgmentalism in my life, and I didn't like it. You have too.

Spiritual “bullying” in the church causes broken relationships, splits, and loss of joy. Sadly, Satan's most effective way of weakening the Body of Christ is spreading such attitudes by reflex—someone treats us crassly, so we respond in kind, putting them down or whispering unpleasant tidbits about them to others. And the “Pharisee disease” spreads.

The only antidote for this infection is grace.

Grace is a gift which gives God space to work in others' lives, without me gerrymandering the situation so it works out my way.

Grace recognizes that I am a work in progress, and that if not for God's mercy, I wouldn't be here today.

Grace keeps me from jumping down someone's throat when they get their theology wrong, or struggle with besetting sin, or stumble in their Christian walk.

Grace does not compromise the truth; it just spreads it with love, gentleness, and understanding.

Folks today are facing *real* issues in life, and they don't need our supercilious piety in the heat of their battle. They need grace!

The enemy of souls is doing all he can to beat them up; let's do all we can to heal!

Sin is leaving gnarly wounds in the lives of people—both saved and unsaved. It will continue to affect all our lives as long as we live. My battles will be different


from those of others; and how God works in their life will not always be how He works in mine. But as we discuss sin, we can do it with grace.

Knowing Our Hearts

Like many Christians (most?), the better I know my heart, the more I see an old tendency to be a Pharisee. But then I remember those who have wounded me, and realize how I can wound others...and I pursue grace.

How thankful I am that God did not take one look at me and say “Unsavable!” What amazing grace it was that sent His Son to this earth, that led Jesus to the cross to save a wretch like me!

And how incredible that though I may struggle or stumble in my Christian life, His grace never fails. God is not a Pharisee!

And He doesn't want us to be Pharisees either. Join me in pursuing grace. 



Phil Congdon is Senior Pastor at New Braunfels Bible Church.



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Our Citizenship Is in Heaven

(Philippians 3:17-21)

By Bob Wilkin

THINKSTOCK

What do you think about politics in the United States today? Are you encouraged by the work of the Supreme Court, the House, the Senate, and the President? Do you find that our leaders are doing a good job of promoting godliness in our country?

What about the politics in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East? Do you find righteousness being exalted by the world's political rulers?

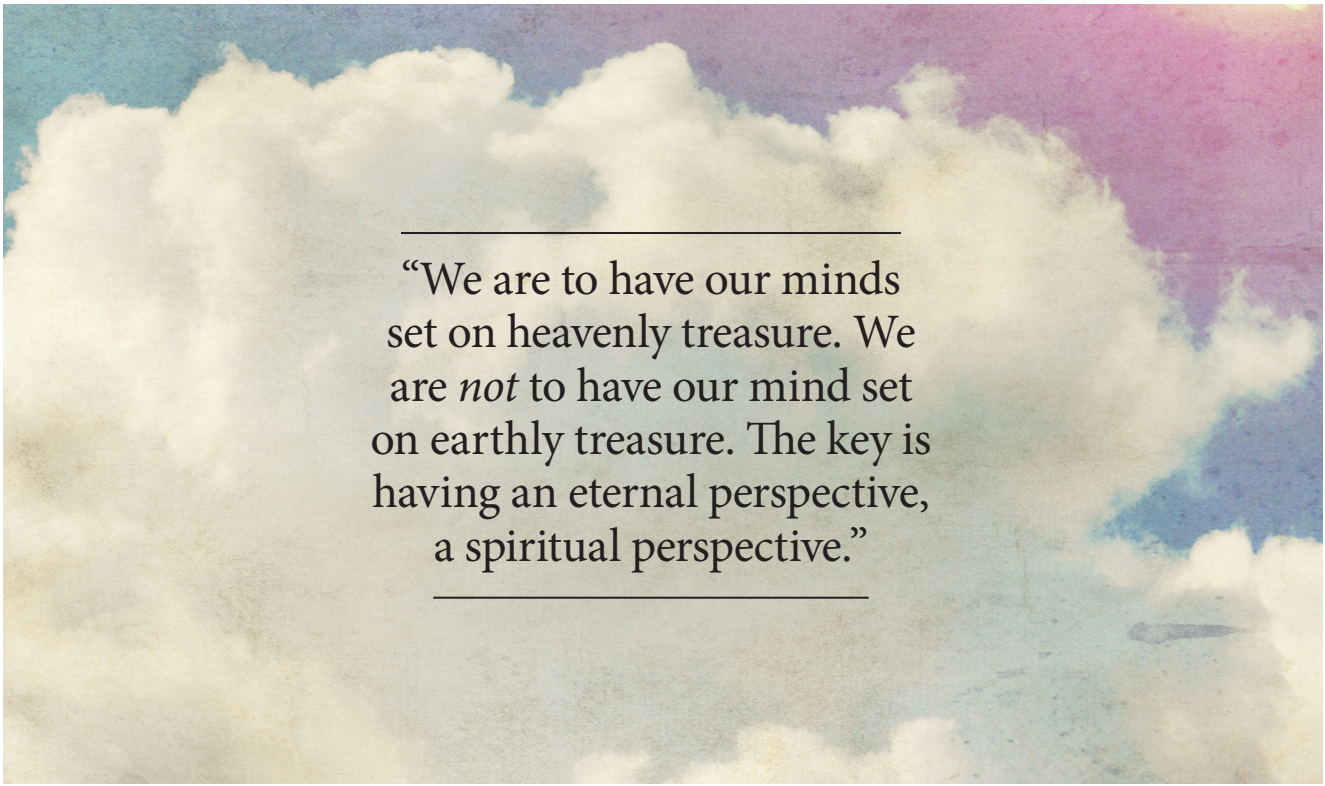
Being a citizen of the United States used to be a very exalted thing. Today citizenship in the U.S. doesn't mean as much as it once did. Some Americans have actually renounced their citizenship and become

citizens of Switzerland, England, France, New Zealand, Australia, Belize, and so on.

Many in politics are seeking to bring about heaven on earth. Sadly many in churches today are trying to bring about heaven on earth too. Yet the Scriptures are clear that heaven won't come to earth until our Savior returns. When He returns, then He will set up His righteous kingdom.

Christians should recognize that our most important citizenship is not our citizenship *today*. Our most important citizenship is the one that we have *positionally* now and the one we will have in our experience *soon* when our Lord and Savior returns.

Let's look at Phil 3:17-21.



“We are to have our minds set on heavenly treasure. We are *not* to have our mind set on earthly treasure. The key is having an eternal perspective, a spiritual perspective.”

THINKSTOCK

Imitate Christ

Brethren, be fellow imitators [of Christ] with me and look out for those who are so walking, as you have us for a pattern (Phil 3:17).

The Church was less than forty years old when Paul wrote this. However, the age of the Apostles was already close to ending. Most of the Apostles would be dead within ten years of the writing of the letter.

Paul is concerned that the believers in Philippi have good examples to follow. Ultimately, of course, they were to imitate Christ, as Paul himself did (see 1 Cor 11:1, “Imitate me as I also imitate Christ,” using the same verb, but without the “with” prefix, i.e., *mimetai*).

Ralph Martin makes this excellent statement about Phil 3:17:

For Christianity the pattern of ethical teaching is embodied not in a written code of precepts and maxims covering every possible contingency of life, but in a life—preeminently the life of the Lord Jesus, and secondarily in the lives of his earliest and closest followers (Martin, *Philippians*, p. 159).

This drives the reader back into the preceding context, where Paul laid out his own mindset. He renounced works salvation, self-righteousness, and

he forgot the past and pressed on for the prize of ruling with Christ. He lives in light of Christ’s cross (Phil 2:5-11).

Anyone else who is living a Christ-like life is a good example for believers. Of course, that starts with the elders in the local church.

Do Not Imitate Enemies of the Cross

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now I am telling you weeping, as enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who think on earthly matters (Phil 3:18-19).

As is often the case in Scripture, the authors tell us both what behavior to imitate and what not to imitate (cf. 2 John 5-8, imitate Gaius, and 2 John 9-11, do not imitate Diotrephes, who loves to have preeminence among them).

The language here is vague. It might refer to unbelievers or to believers.

One option is that Paul is thinking here of Judaizers (see Phil 3:2). These would be legalists.

The opposite option is that Paul is thinking here of libertines, people who think that they can live in sin and still not incur God's judgment.

There is no reason to see Paul's language here as being restricted to believers or unbelievers or Judaizers or libertines. He is referring to anyone who is living as an enemy of the cross of Christ.

If someone is not imitating Christ, then he may well be an "enemy of the cross." Those who are enemies of the cross and thus of Christ will be destroyed ("whose end is destruction"). This would certainly be true of legalists. But it would also be true of libertines.

In the Philippian church this probably related to traveling teachers, not to people who were in their church. Today this would likely refer to visiting speakers or to new people at our church.

Paul says that their "god is their belly" (v 19). They live to feed their bellies. Compare Rom 16:17-18, "Note those who cause divisions and offenses... those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly..."

Probably the reference to having their belly as their god means that they are slaves to their bodily desires. Thus this might refer to people enslaved to alcohol, drugs, sex outside of marriage, etc.

The glory they seek is also their shame.

The last part is key. They have an earthly mindset ("who set their mind on earthly things"). Paul's mindset is on the coming kingdom and the soon return of Christ. His is not an earthly mindset. His is spiritual. Remember 2 Cor 5:7, where Paul said, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." There too Paul was speaking of the coming kingdom: "The things which are seen

are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal"(2 Cor 4:18).

This is similar to the Lord's words in Matt 6:19-21. We are to have our minds set on heavenly treasure. We are *not* to have our mind set on earthly treasure. The key is having an eternal perspective, a spiritual perspective.

Our Citizenship and Our Lord Is Currently in Heaven

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly await the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humiliation that it might become similar in form to His glorious[glorified] body, according to the working of His ability to subject all things to Himself (Phil 2:20-21).

The believers in Philippi were not merely citizens of the city of Philippi and of the Roman Empire. Those are external matters that are temporary in nature. The eternal citizenship of believers is "citizenship in

"The eternal citizenship of believers is 'citizenship in heaven.' This does not mean that the kingdom will take place in heaven. It means that our King is in heaven and He will come to us from there."

heaven." This does not mean that the kingdom will take place in heaven. It means that our King is in heaven and He will come to us from there. But the kingdom which will come from heaven will take place on earth during the Millennium (Revelation 20), and on the New Earth in the eternal state (Revelation 21-22).

Martin makes another excellent point:

The apostle here indicates the double allegiance of the Philippian Christians. As Roman subjects they were citizens of the far distant, capital city of Rome, where the emperor has his residence. As servants of 'another king, one called Jesus' (Acts 17:7), they are citizens of that capital city [New



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Jerusalem], where the King of kings has his domicile, and whose advent to establish his reign on this earth and to rescue his people (1 Thess 1:10) is awaited. Here on earth, meanwhile, they are resident aliens who dwell temporarily in a foreign country, but have citizenship elsewhere (Martin, *Philippians*, p. 163).

Are we *eagerly waiting* for the Savior to return? Do we *eagerly wait* for the transformation of our bodies? Compare 2 Cor 5:2, 4. See also 1 Cor 15:1, "We will all be changed," and 1 Thess 4:16-17, "The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air."

This transformation will not only be physical. Yes, we will no longer have any pain or suffering. Yes, we will have perfect bodies. But we will also be changed morally, inwardly, spiritually. As the Apostle John says, "when He is revealed, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Spiritually-minded believers realize that our ultimate citizenship is in Jesus' kingdom and we long for Jesus to return, to give us glorified bodies, and to establish His righteous kingdom.

As a friend of mine, Dan Mosher, likes to say when we sing the song *Coming Again*: "May be morning, may be noon, may be evening, and *shall* be soon."

If we eagerly await His return, it has a positive impact on our giving, our role as a spouse, as a parent, as a child, as a brother or sister, as an aunt or uncle, as a person who works for a living, as a neighbor, as a driver, etc. All of our life is transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 3:18).

Applications

Imitate Christ. WWJD should not just be a slogan. It is a way of life.

Imitate the example of Godly believers in your church.

Do not follow the example of those, believers or unbelievers, who are not imitating Christ.

Realize that your most important citizenship is not U.S. citizenship. It is being a citizen of the coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

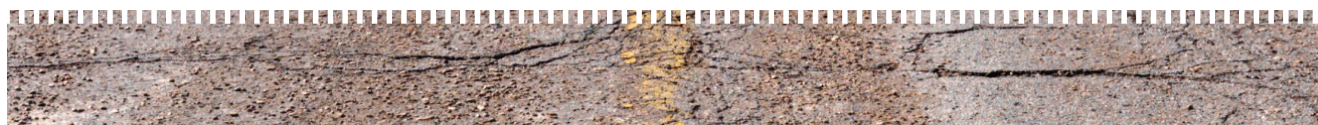
Eagerly wait for the soon return of Christ. 



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. His latest book is, A Gospel of Doubt.



Assurance by Works: My Road to Ruin



BY PAUL CARPENTER

On a late winter night in the spring semester of my senior year in 1975 at Miami Christian College, in Miami, Florida, my world came crashing down around me. I had been postponing a dreaded assignment: write a major paper on the meaning of Heb 6:4-6. The text reads,

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame” (NASB).

A cursory reading suggested to me that for some people there was no hope for eternal life, precisely

because they had had some kind of ineffective, superficial spiritual experience.

But assignments have to be completed, so at long last, I sat down with trepidation to do my work.

No Comfort in the Commentaries

I opened the commentaries to get to work. There was no comfort in any of them. They seemed to confirm my fears.

The worst was William R. Newell’s, *Hebrews Verse by Verse*. As I understood him at the time, the passage pointed to someone who came close to getting saved, and then fell away. Now he could not get saved. It was not so much that he was rejecting God, but that God was rejecting *him*. So, though this person most earnestly wanted to get saved now, God refused to save

him because he had crucified “to [himself] the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6b KJV).

Looking for a Changed Life

I was raised in a Christian home in central Missouri. My father was a Southern Baptist Pastor, having been saved through reading a Gideon Serviceman’s New Testament in the Navy in the last half of the 1940’s. Eventually, he felt “called to preach” after his five years of duty were complete. He was called back for the Korean conflict, thus the five years were not served in succession. So it was in the late 1950’s that he took his first pastorate without the benefit of formal Bible school training or seminary.

Dad was an avowed Dispensationalist, but his favorite theologians on the subject of salvation were Reformed and Puritan. They had a heavy emphasis on the sovereignty of God, divine election, and predestination.

According to their view a saved life was *necessarily* a changed life, and the Holy Spirit will *inevitably* produce sanctification in the believer. Failure in the Christian life was inconceivable in light of “sovereign grace.” Therefore one ought easily to be able to look at his life subsequent to salvation and ascertain from the good works or fruit springing forth that he really is a Christian. Contrarily, the absence of such evidence would supply potential proof that one was not a Christian.

I assumed that was true. So did our church. And we also assumed that assurance was to be derived from one’s good works, or one’s changed life generally. Those were also the assumptions of the evangelists who preached in our church. If you were doing anything on their particular list of sins you were clearly not a Christian, or at least there was a good possibility that you were not. Doubt was introduced on the basis of failed conduct.

Did all this mean that we did not believe in eternal security?

Not at all!

In fact, the content of the gospel, as I remember it, was relatively clear, though admittedly there was confusion introduced in requiring the walking of an aisle, confessing of sins, and asking Jesus to come in to one’s heart, etc. We believed in salvation by faith and the eternal security of the believer.

The problem arose in knowing whether or not such marvelous truths *had been applied to oneself*.

If one could ever determine whether they had been applied, then at long last, one could have peace of mind. I never found that peace except for a few days after I had walked the aisle for salvation in my youth. Thereafter I was regularly plagued with doubts, particularly under certain kinds of preaching wherein I was confronted with various standards of righteous living which were considered to be required of true or genuine believers. Yet, I always tried to rise higher in my Christian life so that at long last, I could produce the necessary evidence that would suffice to quiet my own troubled conscience.

Off to Bible College

So off to Calvary Bible College in Kansas City, MO, I went at age seventeen to prepare for whatever life of service God had for me. Instead of the sought-after assurance of heart, I found plenty to fear in my classes.

Again and again, I heard that if there was insufficient holy living, it was time to call into question one’s salvation.

I cannot begin to tell you how many chapel speakers, for example, regularly urged the students to reexamine their initial salvation experience to test its validity. How would you ever be able to tell for sure? What kind of an experience would suffice? How could there be objective proof? Not finding the answer, my doubts grew deeper.

The ramifications were far reaching.

For example, if a person was not certain of his salvation, then of course he could not know whether he had the Holy Spirit and was free from sin. He was very likely the slave of sin, and really did not have the power to say “no” to temptation.

I began to be assailed by temptations to commit the most abominable acts, and felt like the only power that I had to resist them was my own strength. This was frightening! Oh, how I cried out to God! But I could not seem to reach Him.

Same Song, Different Dance

Just before my senior year, I transferred to Miami Christian College in Miami, FL.

Things did *not* improve.

I cannot begin to tell you how many times in that first semester I cringed all over again at the possibility that I might not really be a Christian.



The teaching that a saved life is *necessarily* a changed life, and if there is not sufficient change, then there has been no salvation, was even more prevalent.

We heard that we were *saved by faith alone*, but a *faith that saves is never alone*.

We heard speakers rail against the abominable notion of “easy believism.” Florida Bible College, just up the road in the next county, was regularly bashed for espousing this evil notion of “easy-believism.”

I distinctly remember hearing one of my professors say, “Many Christians think they got saved when they ‘believed’ the gospel, but when they get to heaven they will discover that they were saved the moment they began to live for Christ.”

That did not give me any comfort at all, even though I was in Bible College preparing for “ministry.”

One of the reasons for this was that I had heard of more than one man who had been in ministry for many years who suddenly got saved, and then confessed publicly that up until that moment he had never

really been a Christian. So what good was Bible College for offering proof?

In addition to all this, I heard reiterated the notion that bare intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel did not constitute saving faith. I was told such faith was dead faith. A dead faith will not yield justification before God, for one can believe all the right things, but if this faith is not acted upon via obedience in the form of good works, then such a person is not a true believer. *The only way that a person can tell the difference is by his behavior.*

Only Close to Being Saved?

Then came that paper on Heb 6:4-6. I remember reading somewhere in one of the commentaries that night, “If you are not sure of your salvation, do not read any further!” But I had a paper to write! So I blundered onward.

In reading Newell, I concluded that what he described there must be what had happened to me. The night I walked the aisle I had merely *come close*

to being saved. I had sort of gone along with the Holy Spirit and had merely “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” but then I had “fallen away” (cf. Heb 6:4-6a). In falling away, I had committed what amounted to an unpardonable sin and I could *never* be renewed “again to repentance” because I had crucified to myself “the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6).

I was doomed to eternity in the lake of fire!

Fear unlike anything I had ever known struck my heart at that moment. I was physically affected. I felt paralyzed, veritably frozen with fear. I had no defense whatever against the fiery missiles of the evil one. I was at his mercy, but he had none.

Walking Dead

My life went to pieces. I walked around the campus like a zombie. Tears were a way of life.

Eventually, I was kicked off the gospel team because of bad grades, something with which I had never had trouble before. I had no capacity for study. I tried, but I *could not* study. I withdrew *failing* from all my courses. What was the use? I was going to hell anyway. Or was I?

Was there a possibility that I had erred somewhere in my understanding? Had that old serpent had a great victory via deception? I wondered, but I could see no way out.

However, I began to ask a few people about my situation anyway. I would ask certain chapel speakers what they thought about my case. They tried to be encouraging, but I got the impression that they *held it possible* that my fears were based in reality, so they refrained from giving me any false hope. In so doing, they gave me *no* hope. During this whole experience I relentlessly cried out to God, just in case He might hear me.

On one occasion, I imagined that God had heard me, and had saved me. But the reality of Hebrews 6 and those awful commentaries wiped that out shortly, and my life was made worse for the experience.

Finally, I could conceal what was happening in my life from my family no longer. I called home after weeks of incomparable torture and anguish of soul, now a complete academic failure as well. My worst

fear was that my own father might say, “Yes, I think you have hopelessly fallen away and there is no hope for you.”

However, just the sound of my breaking voice on the phone caused him to leap into action.

He announced with remarkable authority that this was simply a last-ditch, all out effort by the Adversary to prevent me from going into the Lord’s work.

He told me several things, not the least of which was that Jesus says, “the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37b).

Jesus did *not* say, “the one who comes to Me (and

has not committed the unpardonable sin or crucified Christ afresh or any other added condition) I will certainly not cast out.”

I thought, now isn’t that simple?

Dad added that the next day I should go to a local Christian bookstore and purchase a copy of John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*.

I did. I sat in the parking lot and read the entire book. It is John Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography in plain English. It was not so much that the book contained the answers, so much as it contained the struggle. I was

astonished and encouraged to learn that somebody else had gone down such a similar path. I am not sure to this day that Mr. Bunyan ever really found peace in this regard, *Pilgrim’s Progress* notwithstanding, but I admit that the book helped me greatly.

I returned to Missouri and remained there for the rest of the year, not returning to school until the spring of 1976.

By the way, I still vividly remember the empty feeling of sitting at graduation and watching my own class graduate in the spring of 1975. When I returned to school, I cannot deny that just being there aroused old fears. For as a matter of fact, I still believed in works for assurance. Thus far, I had merely found a way to circumvent the problem by refusing to look *solely* at my works as a ground for assurance. I would look to my life, but when the doubts arose as they *always* did, I would simply quote John 6:37 or 1 John 5:1 and I would feel better quickly. I suspect that this is a regular practice for those who believe in works for assurance.

“In reading Newell, I concluded that what he described there must be what had happened to me. The night I walked the aisle I had merely *come close to being saved.*”

Rumours of Grace

After I graduated and got married in 1977, having worked for a few years in a secular position, I thought the time had come to “go for broke” and get into full-time ministry. How I longed to be able to erase lingering doubts about my eternal destiny. I am sorry to say I went into ministry for the most part for that reason. So my wife Carol and I, along with our daughter Erin, moved to northwest Missouri where I began my “ministry” at Antioch Christian Church. It was an interesting place, because these people understood even less about the Bible than I did. God blessed His word in spite of my limited understanding of the basics. People were saved too, something for which I will be eternally grateful.

From 1983 to 1992 my dad and I traveled annually to the Moody Pastor’s Conference in Chicago, IL. It was there one day that I stood and bemoaned my plight to Kirk Muller who was at that time pastor of my father-in-law’s church. I rehashed off the top of my head what you have been reading here. I got to the point where I said something like, “Well, of course, we all know that a saved life is a changed life; if there’s no change, then there’s been no salvation.” He interrupted me to say, “Did you know that there is a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary who does not quite believe that is true?”

That was the first time I had ever heard of any such thing.

I said, “Who is that?”

He said, “Zane Hodges.”

The only thing I had ever heard about Hodges was from a pamphlet on the superiority of the Majority Text.

Nevertheless, I was intrigued.

I got Hodges’s books *Gospel Under Siege* and *Grace in Eclipse*. I thought, “If what he is saying is true, *I am a free man!*” But I was hesitant, because I knew of no others who were saying such things. The more I thought about it though, the more I became persuaded that he was right. Soon I became convinced that the

believer’s ground of assurance was to be found in the promise alone, just as Calvin had taught.

This was transformational for me.

What freedom and what joy was now my daily experience! Moreover, though I lost my original motive for being in ministry, I now had a great message to preach. Thank God!

After moving to Jansen Bible Church in Jansen, NE in 1988, I found myself studying 2 Pet 1:10-11 which reads,

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

I thought those verses sounded like works for

assurance. I exhausted all my resources and could find no help.

In desperation, I turned around and picked up a book off my shelf entitled, *Once Saved, Always Saved* by R. T. Kendall. I looked for Scripture references in the back, and there I found my verses. I hurried to look at what he had to say and found help. I later called him to discuss the issue on the phone.

He told me that Calvin said there are two interpretations of those verses. One is that you are to be diligent to prove to *your-*

self that you are saved, and the other is to be diligent to show *others* that you are saved. The Puritans went with the former, and Calvin the latter view.

The former arose from Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor at Geneva, who ultimately rejected Calvin’s view of assurance. Calvin had taught that assurance is of the essence of faith. From his perspective, it was impossible to separate assurance from faith.

Beza disagreed. When it came to assurance, he said, “We must begin at the sanctification which we feel in ourselves, for as much as our sanctification from whence proceedeth good works is a certain effect of the faith, or rather of Jesus Christ dwelling in us by faith.”

“Well, of course, we all know that a saved life is a changed life, if there’s no change, then there’s been no salvation.’ He interrupted me to say, ‘Did you know that there is a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary who does not quite believe that is true?’”

What was he saying?

He meant that if you want to know whether you are a Christian or not, check your life and look for the certain effects of faith.

It was this point of view that prevailed at the writing of the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1649, where Calvin's view of assurance was deliberately repudiated. And the dominant pastoral questions became, "How do I know that I am elect? And how many good works would suffice to assure?"


The answer is that no amount offered certainty to the doubter. It followed that, "There never, never, never, was a way by which one felt that he had sufficient sanctification, by which he could now say, 'I know for sure I am elect, and eternally and irrevocably saved'. It always eluded them" (Westminster Record, Winter 1988).

Calvin already had forecasted this outcome. Had they listened to him and not Beza, they could have saved themselves all this trouble.

Faith in the promise of eternal life is the only ground for assurance. If I had only known that!

Contending for Grace

After reading Kendall, I learned what had happened historically to assurance and it all made perfect sense. The Westminster Confession's view of assurance holds sway in our country. That is why we have such stiff opposition to the Free Grace movement. That's why so many people doubt their salvation, just as I used to do.

Nevertheless, we must contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints: faith alone, in Christ alone, for eternal life that can never be lost. I am committed to that. I trust that you are also. 



Paul Carpenter is Pastor of Jansen Bible Church in Jansen, NE.



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Q&A

By Staff

Can We Pray Directly to God?

Q I just had a conversation with a friend who made the statement that we could not speak (pray) directly to God, that it must go through an interpreter-intercessor in order for God to hear our heart. He seemed to base his belief on Rom 8:26-27:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Someone has told him that the Romans scripture proves that we cannot speak directly to God. I have always interpreted that text to mean that when we are so taken out by life that we either don't want to pray or that we don't know what to ask for, the Spirit will intercede on our behalf, asking God for what we need for the moment.

It would seem to me that in order to have a personal, intimate relationship with the Trinity, one would need to speak directly to them, otherwise the relationship would not be personal.

I would appreciate your thoughts about this issue and, if you have them available, scripture references which support one or the other position.

~MB, email

A Romans 8:26-27 doesn't quite teach what either your friend or you are saying. Paul is saying that when we pray to God the Father, then another member of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, is interceding for us. The result is that our prayers are improved because the Holy Spirit makes our prayers what they should be.

The Holy Spirit does this when we are praying, not when we are not praying. But our prayers are directly to God. We do have a personal relationship with the triune God. It is an intimate relationship if we pray



and share our hearts with Him. Of course, if we are in the spiritual far country, then our relationship with God ceases to be close, even though we remain eternally secure (Luke 15:11-32).

Here is what Zane Hodges wrote about Rom 8:26-27 in his commentary, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*:

Paul now very deftly transitions to the theme of how to bear up under suffering. The initial Greek words of v 26 are *hōsautōs de kai* (**But likewise also**). Although it is true that our sufferings cannot be compared with the coming glory (8:18), still we are weak and groan even in the midst of Christian victory (v 23). Thus we urgently need divine **help in our weaknesses**. And this is precisely what we receive through the indwelling Spirit, who *likewise also* (in addition to producing His first fruits within us [v 23]) gives us this help.

In fact, *our weaknesses* are manifest precisely in our times of prayer when, under the pressures of suffering, we try to make intelligent requests from God. But we have no real ability to assess any stressful situation we are in and to know precisely what is really necessary for us **to pray for** at such times. Into this gap, Paul assures us, comes the intercessory work of **the Spirit** who dwells within us.

Consequently, in the midst of our own **inarticulate groanings, the Spirit Himself makes intercession** for us. Although some commentators have thought that the *groanings* (*stenagmois*) referred to here are those of *the Spirit*, this seems

quite improbable.¹ The preceding context speaks clearly of our own groanings (*stenazomen*, v 23) and the reference is surely to that. When our own inability to know how to pray in the necessary way results in inarticulate (*alalētois*) expressions of anguish and concern, the Spirit intervenes. He prays the requests we ourselves do not know to pray.

Naturally, we do not know what the Spirit is praying for since, if we did, we ourselves could also pray for that. But, says Paul, we don't need to know, because God knows. **The One who** alone searches all human hearts, searches ours at such times and knows therefore what His Spirit within us desires (His aspiration). The Greek expression that is rendered here by **the aspiration of the Spirit** is *phronēma tou Pneumatos* and is not a new one. This is precisely the phrase that Paul also employs in 8:6 in the statement "but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace" (*to de phronēma tou Pneumatos zōē kai eirēnē*). The Greek noun *phronēma*, though translated differently in 8:6, nevertheless has much the same sense in that verse and here. The realization of the Spirit's "mind-set" is after all a realization of His aspiration for us. In Christian living (8:6) He desires us to experience "life and peace." There is no reason to doubt that the aims of His intercessory work for us are exactly those things. In fact, when suffering is borne "with endurance" (8:25), it enhances our experience of "life and peace."

Thus suffering is also a way in which "the one who is righteous by faith" can "live" (cf. 1:17) as a result of the Spirit's ministry within our hearts.

That the intercession of the Spirit is beyond question effective on our behalf is declared in the words **because He makes intercession on behalf of the saints in harmony with God**. This statement contains the first reference to believers as saints in Romans since 1:7. But it is most suitable here since both the presence of, and the intercession by, *the Spirit* within us clearly mark us out as those who have been set apart to God. God already knows the desires of *the Spirit* for us, Paul is saying, because those desires are basically His own as well (cf. Matt 6:8).

Thus the Spirit's prayers on our behalf are in complete conformity to what is pleasing to God. They are *in harmony with* God's mind for us. (Literally, they are *kata Theon*, "according to God.") Naturally this is what we would expect, assuming we have a clear theology of the Spirit, but Paul is a pastor at heart and any reassurance of this fact is always appropriate for suffering believers. In the

Holy Spirit we have the ideal Intercessor in time of testing precisely because He and **the One who searches the hearts** are united in their aspiration for the saints (*Romans*, pp. 233-34).

~Bob

Test the Spirits?

Q The Bible says we are to test the spirits for false prophets (1 John 4:1). So if someone believes a false gospel, even if they used to believe the true gospel, doesn't that show they were never saved in the first place?

~P.C., mail

A Thanks for your question. I see two problems with that idea.

First of all, 1 John 4:1-3 is not a test to determine if someone has ever been born again, but a test to determine the origin—whether divine or diabolical—of a spirit claiming to speak for God. And John gives us only one criteria (there are surely others) to make that determination, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God" (1 John 4:1-3).

It isn't clear what John means by *come in the flesh*. He might be referring to the incarnation, or to the work of Christ, or the identity of Jesus with the Christ (as opposed to thinking of them as two separate entities). It is crucial to believe that the Son of God became a real man, because if He was not, if He was some kind of immaterial spirit, then the atonement, resurrection, ascension, and future kingdom, are all illusory. John implies that a false spirit could never positively confess that Jesus came in the flesh. But that confession is not presented as a test to see if someone has ever been born again.

Second, if falling into error about the gospel proves someone was never born again, then no one could have assurance of salvation, because no one could be sure they will never fall into error about the gospel. Sure, you might believe the gospel now, but you can't know if you'll believe it next month, or next year, or twenty years from now. And if you can't be sure of that, then you can't have assurance. ■

~Shawn

Send questions to questions@faithalone.org

The Mailbag

By You

Send us your thoughts, reflections, questions, problems, praises, condemnations, insights, encouragements, or anything else you're thinking of. We love to hear from you!

"Thanks for your videos on YouTube. They have been a great blessing."

~J.O., Dallas, TX

"Keep on keeping on your great work for the Lord!" ~C.L., Snellville, GA

"Thank you for the GES commentary. Right now I am in John and so appreciate it!" ~S.K., Balch Springs, TX

"Greatly appreciate the personal integrity to admit and correct mistakes. It shows great spiritual maturity." ~T.B., letter

"I pray all is well for you all. We are thankful for you and the ministry that you all do." ~J.C., Tyler, TX

"God bless y'all. We need y'all. Keep on y'all. Stand firm y'all. And thank y'all. I mean all y'all." ~C.C., Dekalb, MS

"If it wasn't for your efforts to remain true to the message of life my family and I would not have come out of the false teaching of the word of faith perverted gospel." ~J.N., Aurora, MO

"Please keep up the good work in fighting for inerrancy and infallibility." ~J.E., Evansville, IN

"I just read the article, 'Have You Heard a Confusing Gospel?' in the Nov/Dec issue of *Grace in Focus*. I just



want to say, 'Amen, amen.' Thank you, you hit the nail on the head, keep up the good work." ~R.H., email

"Thank you for all you are doing for the Free Grace message! It is faith alone in Jesus Christ alone for eternal life! No strings attached either before or after." ~C.L., Indianapolis, IN

"Bob Wilkin, not unlike a careful physician, is the antidote to 'Mr. Mormon Light,' Dr. John MacArthur. If our appearances and 'good behavior' determine our destiny, pray tell, what is the difference between Protestants and Mormons?" ~S.K., Las Vegas, NV

"For the last year and a half I have been receiving *Grace in Focus* magazine. Thank you for your contribution to my understanding of Scripture." ~J.M., Denton, TX

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