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POSTMODERN DOUBTS

And Theological Education (Part 1)

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The Warning Passages in Hebrews (Part 3) / Was the Gospel Lost until the Reformation? /
Prologue of Acts (Acts 1:1-14) / God's Faithfulness to His Promises (Hosea 2:14-23) / **AND MORE**

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This is the first 48-page issue of our magazine. Thank you for your encouragement, gifts, and prayers. We appreciate you and hope you find the new larger magazine even more helpful.

Postmodernity is the in thing in Christian education today. It is thought to be the mark of humility that Christians affirm that they are sure of nothing, not even the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead or the existence of God. We have convictions, but not certainty. There's an article by me on "Post-modern Doubts and Theological Education (Part 1)." This is a subject every believer should understand. It is important that we know what is going on in Christian higher education.

We are all works in progress. Joe Lombardi discusses how all believers are building lives that have eternal significance. How we live now matters. "The one thing I want to hear more than anything else is: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant' (Matt 25:21)."

What does it mean to suffer and to go forth for His name's sake? Bill Fiess discusses the eleven uses of the expression for His name's sake and shows that our service is decidedly centered on the Second Member of the Trinity. His name is wonderful and His name is worth our all.

There is a brief review of our recent annual conference with pictures.

Zane Hodges taught the Book of Acts many times. In this issue he gives us great insights into the opening verses, Acts 1:1-14.

John Niemelä shows that the gospel was not lost between the time of the Apostles and the Reformers. The message of life has always been proclaimed and there have been born-again people in every generation.

Ken Yates shows from Hosea 2:14-23 that God is faithful to His promises.




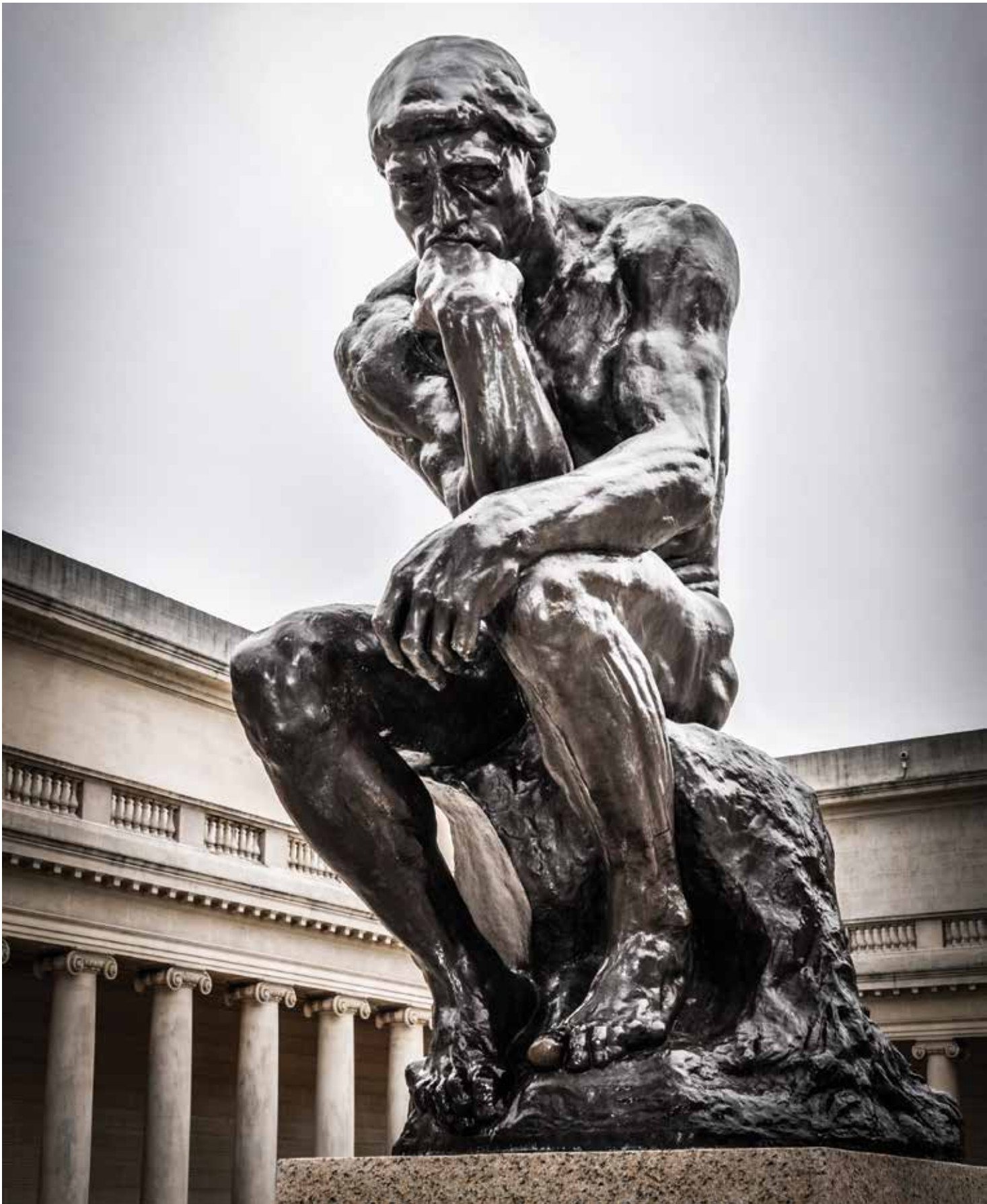
Large and In His Charge

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

Shawn Lazar continues his series on the warning passages in Hebrews, discussing Heb 10:26-31, another very crucial and much misunderstood passage.

Finally, you will find letters to the editor, questions and answers, and an article remembering beloved Free Grace Pastor and patriarch, Reagan Benedict.

Enjoy. 



Postmodern Doubts

AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION (PART 1)

BY BOB WILKIN

Postmodern Agnosticism Rules at Most Conservative Theological Institutions

Most Evangelicals have no idea what is being taught in Christian colleges and seminaries in America today. They assume that those training for the ministry are being taught the Bible, sound doctrine, and how to teach and preach.

The truth is hard to believe.

The norm in most American theological institutions, among both the faculty and the students, is the idea that we are certain of either very little, or of nothing at all. Many professors, students, and graduates are certain that they can't be certain of anything!

Not only are theological students and faculty not certain of their eternal destiny, they aren't even sure that God exists! And they say so in class.

Students no longer primarily study the Bible. They primarily study what scholars say about the Bible.

Sound doctrine is no longer a given among Christian students. Many diverging views are tolerated among the students *and faculty*, even views that radically disagree with the school's doctrinal statement.

According to most Evangelical educators today, we cannot be sure of even foundational Christian truths. For example, many seminary and Bible college professors specifically say we cannot be sure that Jesus rose from the dead! Consider the following evidence.

Postmodernity Is the Next Reformation

Carl Raschke is the author of *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

He has a Ph.D. from Harvard in the Philosophy of Religion and is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Denver.

Raschke says that postmodern faith is existential, not rational. Faith is "a total surrender of one's heart" (pp. 168, 210). "A rational 'faith' is not really faith at all. Faith does not require any kind of unimpeachable demonstration. It is a passion for God amid the contingencies of experience and the messiness of life in general" (p. 168).

"The Bible is not a system of arguable and debatable propositions. A genuine systematic theology forged from the Bible is impossible" (p. 210).

The Bible has errors in it, yet it is authoritative (pp. 120, 134, 143). "The 'infallible' authority of Scripture, therefore, is not founded on the fact that it contains no 'errors'" (p. 134). "The authority of the Bible does not rest on whether it is logically and seamlessly consistent and free of 'errors'" (p. 143).

Certitude is the enemy of faith (pp. 82, 150, 168, 174). Without certitude to stand on, postmodernity takes its stand on *intuition!* "*The real is relational and the relational is real.* On this intuition the postmodern Christians take their stand" (p. 158, italics his).

"Postmodernity is all our doubts supersized" (p. 174).

Raschke admits, “At first glance the prospect appears both repugnant and frightening.” It must take a lot of glances to remove those fears. The more I look at evangelical postmodernity, the greater my fear and repugnancy grows.

We Believe in God Despite No Evidence

According to Wheaton Professor of Philosophy W. Jay Wood, “modest foundationalists make no claims about the invincible certainty of one’s basic beliefs” (*Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*, p. 98). The reason is because we cannot be sure of anything based on evidence.

Wood rejects the suggestion by W. K. Clifford that “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” (p. 107). *For Wood anything we “believe” is believed in spite of the fact that there is insufficient evidence.* Clifford’s credo runs headlong against Wood’s postmodern “truths.”

Wood speaks of “the inescapable ambiguity of ‘sufficiency of evidence’” (p. 112). No matter how much evidence one has for something, it cannot prove that it is certainly true. He gives as an example the belief that God exists. Even this basic belief is not something of which a postmodern can be certain (pp. 112-13).

It is hard to believe that we have faculty at leading Bible Colleges, Christian Colleges, and Seminaries who are not even certain of the fact that God exists.

Wood gives many examples of situations in which a person’s eyewitness testimony is reasonably doubted by others (see, for example, his example of jurors

with different beliefs about a defendant’s guilt, p. 11; the illustration of a young boy accusing another of stealing one of his baseball cards, yet with the group doubting the charge, p. 114; and the claim of a bird watcher to have seen a very rare bird, with the group doubting the claim, pp. 167-68). Wood in part wishes the reader to see eyewitness testimony may not be true. Of course, no one has ever doubted this. However, he also seems to want the reader to jump to the unreasonable conclusion that one can never be sure of the eyewitness testimony of any witness or group of witnesses. Interestingly, in each of the examples he gives to show that an eyewitness claim may not be true, he shows the reader problems with the claim *by appealing to evidence*.

Postmoderns seem to want it both ways. On the one hand, Wood presents lots of evidence in an attempt to prove his claim that no amount of evidence could ever be sufficient to prove anything is certainly true. On the other hand, they want to say that all evidence is suspect and no matter how much there is, we are faced with “inescapable ambiguity.” It would seem that they are in a hopeless impasse.

However, for postmoderns, this is the beauty of beliefs that are not bound by proofs. Wood, by his own admission, was a new convert who when he went to college was “not at all sure that my newfound faith was intellectually defensible” (p. 11). He learned as he continued in philosophy studies that when people expressed skepticism about his religious beliefs he might avoid giving evidence entirely! “What if instead of answering the religious skeptic’s demand for more

evidence, I were to argue that one may be perfectly rational believing in God in the absence of evidence?” (p. 13).

We Can’t Know Anything, Except We Know We Can’t Know

James K. A. Smith is the head of the department of Philosophy at Calvin College.

Smith has written a book endorsing postmodernism: *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?* Smith notes, “The postmodern theologian says, ‘We can’t know that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The best we can do is believe’” (p. 119).

Smith continues, “Why? Because to know would mean being certain. We know that such certainty is an impossible dream...”

Did you notice that Smith contradicts himself? “To know would mean being certain,” Smith says. And we can’t be certain. But then he turns right around and says he does indeed know something. He says, “we know that such certainty is an impossible dream.”

Smith continues, “therefore, we actually lack knowledge. We don’t know; we can only believe, and such faith will always be mysterious and ambiguous. But this isn’t a bad thing; quite to the contrary, it is liberating and just” (p. 119).

He doesn’t even seem aware that in back to back sentences he totally contradicts himself.

As with many Evangelical postmoderns, Smith describes himself as a charismatic. On an NPR radio interview cited at his personal website, Smith said he likes to describe himself as a “Reformed Catholic Charismatic.” In the same interview he stressed the importance

of experience in the Christian life (3:05ff.). He spoke of the importance of *mystery* and of *charismatic worship* (ca. 4:30).

Evangelicals Agree There Are No Absolutes

The following are short transcripts from two of Dr. John Franke's presentations at the 2005 Annual ETS meetings in Valley Forge, PA.

One of his messages was on "Postfoundationalism and Postcolonialism."

Everybody [at ETS] agrees that classical foundationalism is not a helpful project...

I'm glad the theory has been rejected. I think it needs to be. So I think it sounds like we can stop debating that. We agree. That's what I'm hearing at ETS. (Disk 4, 9:45-10:45, emphasis added).

Moments later Franke expanded a bit on his point:

Postmodern theory raises two basic questions about this agenda and its tendencies. Whether such an approach to knowledge as described by foundationalism in its classical form and its tendencies 1) is possible and 2) whether it is desirable.

It's not possible. Human beings are finite.

Further, it's not desirable. Human beings are fallen and if some would say even if it were possible, it wouldn't be desirable because it's a scary thing when people, human beings who are corrupt, feel they have that kind of confidence about absolute, certain, objective truth.

As one friend of mine put it, "You don't have to listen to most of the defenders of absolute truth very long before you realize they not only believe

in the idea, they think they have it. And they are prepared to use it—sometimes on you, if you don't agree with them." [Laughter in background.] That's important, friends. It's funny and I think we can laugh, but that's what happens. (10:55-11:47, emphasis added).

During another ETS Parallel Session in which Franke and J.P. Moreland² discussed these issues, Franke made this fascinating comment:

The word to me that haunts this discussion...is *certainty*. So in J.P.'s response...he says that ...we need to move forward without caricaturing the position of [modest] foundationalism as having anything to do with the quest for certainty, control, human autonomy, or such. I agree with that...(Disk 4, Tract 29, Time: 29:30-30:00, emphasis added).

Franke's choice of the word *haunt* is quite telling. *Haunting* suggests that which is fearful, dreaded, and sinister. For Franke, certainty is like a ghost that haunts and thereby terrifies people.³

We Aren't Even Sure That Jesus Rose from the Dead

A message given at the 2005 ETS Annual Meeting in Valley Forge, PA, by Dr. Stewart Kelly,⁴ entitled, "Miracle, Method, and Metaphysics: Philosophy and the Quest for the Historical Jesus" shows that the *probability*, rather than *certainty*, of Jesus' resurrection being true is precisely what many if not most Christian historians, theologians, and exegetes say today. Note this comment by Kelly about Troeltsch's *probability principle*:

The probability principle claims

that "in the realm of history, there are only judgments of probability, varying from the highest to the lowest degree, and that consequently an estimate must be made of the degree of probability attaching to any tradition." Given that faith requires at the least a certain degree of trust, *the inherent non-certainty of the historical method* might be seen as an enemy of faith. But as Alvin Platinga points out, Troeltsch's first principle is not a prescriptive claim, about how all historians and theologians should practice their craft, but rather a descriptive one about the historical enterprise in general. *Well, any historian, Christian or otherwise, can readily agree with Troeltsch in this matter, for absolute certainty of the sort that Descartes and others prize will be limited to innocuous claims such as Caesar crossed the Rubicon or else he didn't.*

Now from *the fact that historical claims are probabilistic*, it hardly follows that particular Christian claims, for example, Jesus rose bodily from the dead, are at risk here. *Few Christian apologists claim apodictic [incontrovertible, demonstrably true] certainty for such a claim [the resurrection of Jesus!], but merely that it is the best and most plausible explanation given the historical data with which we are dealing* (Time marker: 16:22 to 17:44, emphasis added).

Our Beliefs Never Correspond to Reality

Also in Valley Forge at ETS, Dr. Merold Westphal, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University in New York City, said, "I appreciated, Bill, these charitable attempts to make me into a critical realist...But, he was

just dead wrong about me. He was hoping desperately that my view is that our beliefs do not necessarily correspond to reality and not that, therefore, *our beliefs never correspond to reality. And, it is the latter which is my view, and this is why I am anti-realist*" (Disk 4, Message 47; around the 4:30 mark, emphasis added).

Our beliefs never correspond to reality?

If Westphal is right, every human being should be in a mental institution since we are all out of touch with reality.

Westphal went on to say, "*nothing we ever say about God strictly speaking is true.*"

Then why would any honorable person who believed that make his living by being a pastor, by teaching in a seminary or Bible college, by being a missionary, by working in a parachurch organization, or by doing anything Christian? Would he not feel guilty if he knew that nothing he says about God is true, and yet that is what he is being paid to do? Wouldn't it be hypocrisy to take a paycheck for promoting lies? Wouldn't anyone in the ministry be a shyster?⁵

The Role of the Teacher Is Not to Impart Information

James P. Danaher is the head of the Department of Philosophy at Nyack College, a CMA school. In 2006 a faculty interview of him was posted at the Nyack website.

Under the heading, "My conversion to a life in Christ," Danaher says:

I had an experience with the Lord when I was eighteen, but it was an experience and not a conversion into a radically

new and different life. Twelve years later, I had another God experience but again without the kind of surrender that marks the beginning of a transformed life. God was faithful still and, two years later, with a third experience, there was a surrender and the beginning of a transformation that has continued for the past twenty-five years.

As a committed Evangelical postmodern, it is not surprising that Danaher emphasizes *experience* in telling of his conversion. He tells of three difference *experiences with the Lord*. Evidently Danaher hadn't surrendered sufficiently the first two times for transformation to begin.

It is telling that we read nothing about faith in this testimony. Nor is anything said about Jesus Christ in this testimony. And nothing is said about everlasting life, justification, or the kingdom of God. As with many postmoderns, Danaher sees surrender to God as a condition of temporal transformation, which is a common understanding of *salvation* among Evangelical postmoderns.

That Nyack College, a Christian school, posted such a testimony on their website reveals the degree to which postmodernity is at home there.

In the same faculty interview, note what Danaher says "the role of a teacher" is:

The role of a teacher is not to impart information but to stimulate imagination and create interest. Intelligence is largely a matter of interest. We are all geniuses with regard to those things toward which we have a deep interest. The job of the teacher is to instill such an interest in the student. To

do so, two things are essential. You have to love your subject matter and you have to love your students. Everything else in regard to teaching is superficial.

While there is certainly some truth in what Danaher is saying, there's also some error.

Surely the role of teacher includes at least *some* impartation of information.

We are *not* all geniuses, even in regard to things to which we have a deep interest.

While loving your subject and your students is certainly important in teaching, it is going too far to say that "everything else in regard to teaching is superficial." Communication skills, knowledge of your subject, preparation for each class session, and attention to detail are also vitally important.

The Bible Is Insufficient for Sanctification

At the 2006 ETS annual conference in Washington, D.C., John Coe, Professor of Philosophy and Spiritual Theology and Director of the Institute for Spiritual Formation at Talbot School of Theology, presented a provocative paper entitled, "Spiritual Theology: A Methodology for Bridging the Sanctification Gap." He said, "Though the Scriptures are a central and defining datum, a Bible-alone approach is inadequate and truncated in understanding the doctrine of sanctification and the process of transformation" (p. 2). He continued, "*If we are going to understand all we can about the work of the Spirit in the soul, we are going to have to study and understand that work in real life as*



well as the Biblical text” (p. 3, italics his).

In the Q & A time I asked him if we can learn from unregenerate people like Catholics, Buddhists, and Hindus, how to do spiritual formation. He answered that while the unregenerate often have a “truncated view” of spiritual formation (note the quote above using the same expression regarding Bible-only folks!), yes, we can learn from the unregenerate how to do spiritual formation as long as we filter out the mistakes they make.

The room this took place in seated around 75 people. Every seat was taken and there were another 20 or so seated in the back and in the aisles. This was a very popular session. As far as I could tell from the questions and from the faces of the people in the audience, people were very favorable toward this presentation.


Conclusion

It is time that believers wake up about what is being taught in our theological schools. It is not only liberal schools which are out of step with the Bible and with its fundamental truths. Even historically conservative schools for the most part teach the postmodern

principle that we cannot be sure of much, if anything.

I have a friend with two children under age 3. He does not plan to send them to public schools, which he calls *atheist schools*. Maybe he is a bit too harsh. However, it isn’t just public K-12 schools that are a problem. Christian colleges and seminaries often do not promote the values that parents want their children to maintain.

It is time for Christian parents to spend as much if not more time deciding on a college or seminary for their children as they did deciding on whether to homeschool or send them to a Christian middle school and high school.

Sadly, the more impressive the academic credentials of the faculty at a school, the more likely the school promotes postmodernity and uncertainty. Degrees from prestigious schools like Harvard, Yale, Duke, Oxford, Cambridge, and Aberdeen should be red flags. Watch out. Liberal theology flows from liberal schools. 

Bob Wilkin is Editor-in-Chief of Grace in Focus Magazine and Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

1. This message was originally given in 2006 at the Pre-Trib Study Group Annual Conference in Dallas. It has been slightly edited (including being cut into two parts).

All of the people mentioned in this article continue to teach at the schools indicated.

2. Moreland is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology in La Mirada, CA.

3. Today Franke is Executive Director and Professor of Missional Theology at Yellowstone Theological Institute in Bozeman, MT.

4. Kelly is Professor of Philosophy at Minot State University in Minot, ND.

5. In an article entitled, “Blind Spots: Christianity and Postmodern Philosophy” (www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_12_120/ai_1039...) Westphal compares atheistic postmodernist and Christian postmodernists such as himself. “Atheistic postmodernism says that we are not God because there is no God. Christian [postmodern] thought says we are not God because only God is God. In spite of the deep disagreement about God, there is a deep agreement between Christians [i.e., postmodern Christians] and postmodern thinkers [i.e., atheistic postmodern thinkers] that we are not God and should not claim divine status for our knowledge.”



This Is the House That I Built

By Joe Lombardi

It is a cute little Cape Cod with clapboard siding and two eye dormers in the front. It was constructed back in 1950, when that particular style was very popular in this country—at least, it was popular on the east coast. Several years later a detached, two-car garage was added. The house is situated on a small lot at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac in a bedroom community of some 6,000 residents. The address is 96 Valpeck Avenue, Raritan, New Jersey. If I may slightly alter the first line of a children’s nursery rhyme: “This is the house that *Pat* built.” Even though it is some sixty-five years old, it would still make a great “starter” home for any young couple looking to buy for the very first time.

In fact, it was Pat and Lydia’s first home. And who are they? Why, they are my parents: Pat and Lydia Lombardi. And yes, it is true: the very first home that they ever owned was built by my dad with his very own hands. In fact, he did most of the work all by himself. You see, this is the house that Pat built.

I have never built anything like that. Actually, I have really never built anything—except for one project I tried to make in junior high wood shop. It was supposed to be a spice rack. But, somehow, “This is the spice rack that Joe built” does not sound all that impressive. Indeed, it really was not that impressive—in spite of the fact that I worked on it for nearly one whole semester.

All Believers Are Builders

I will admit that when it comes to building, I know virtually nothing. Having said that, the truth is I am

in the process of building a place. In fact, in one sense, it is the place in which I now reside. But please do not misunderstand. I am not talking about the remodeling of a *parsonage*. No, I am talking about the remaking of a *personage*. I am talking about...*me*. You see, I am talking about the Biblical footing, the spiritual flooring, and the moral framing of my life. I am talking about the structure—in fact, the super-structure—of my Christian character. And I believe that is what the Apostle Peter was talking about in 2 Peter:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:2-11).



LIGHTSTOCK

Both the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul (in 1 Cor 3:9-15) state very clearly that all believers are also builders.¹ So, we are not only *under* construction, but there is a sense in which we are also *in* construction. We are all involved in the business of building.

Quality Inspection

Both apostles also agree that we will all give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ for the quality of our work. Paul warns about the possibility of loss: “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15). John also issues a similar warning, “Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward” (2 John 8). On the other hand, Peter speaks of the possibility of an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:11). In fact, Peter tells us how we can actually *add* to what we will receive at the Bema. He expounds on that truth in 2 Pet 1:2-11.

In this passage Peter makes it very clear that every Christian is a builder. And, while Paul *warns* “let each one take heed how he builds” because “the fire will test the *quality* of each man’s work” (1 Cor 3:10, 13, emphasis added), Peter explains how to build a life of quality that will make a difference for all eternity. In other words, this is how you need to live here and now, so that you will not *lose* what you have, but may also *add* to what you will receive then and there, on that day when you stand at last before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Building a Rich Entrance with Divine Resources

In fact, notice how the section ends in 2 Pet 1:11, “For so

an entrance will be supplied to you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The expression *plousiōs epichorēgēthesetai humin hē eisodos* (“an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly,” NKJV) is also rendered in other translations as “a richly provided entrance” (ESV), “a grand entrance” (NLT), and “a rich welcome” (NIV).

But how can we have “a rich welcome”? Well, Peter said, in verse 10, it is those who believe who “do *these things*.” What things? Well, in verses 5-9 we learn about the human process of building the super-structure of Christian character into our own lives. And in the preceding verses 2-4, we learn about the divine resources available for building this super-structure of Christian character into our lives.

And so, in this passage, Peter is essentially telling us that by

our dependence on His divine resources (verses 3-4), and by our diligence in the human process (verses 5-9), we can build a spiritual house—a life of Christian character—that will be effective and productive for God, and which will result in His bestowing and our receiving an abundant and extravagant eternal reward (verses 10-11).

So, how do we do it? Lord willing, in the next article we will consider the divine resources that are available to us in this process: His divine power and His precious promises.

Well Done


Not long before we moved from New Jersey to the Coachella Valley of California in 1992, I took a ride out to Raritan. Although I had not been there in years, it still was not too difficult for me to find 96 Valpeck Avenue. I stopped for a few moments in front of the little yellow Cape Cod house at the end of that quiet cul-de-sac. And I said to myself, “So, this is the house that Pat built!” I could not help but think at that moment that I was still amazed and very proud of what my dad did. Why, I suspect that even Bob Vila would say it was very good.

And I also could not help but think that one day, some day, I am going to stand before my Lord and hear Him say, “So, this is the house that Joe built.” For, you see, every believer is a builder. Each one of

us is building a place. Some of us are using, as it were, nothing more than wood, hay and straw. Others are building with gold, silver and costly stones. I just hope that what I have to present for Him to inspect, will be a super-structure

“We are not only *under construction*, but there is a sense in which we are also *in construction*. We are all involved in the business of building.”

of Christ-like character, built by me in dependence upon His divine resources, and with diligence in the human process, that will have enabled me to be effective and productive for Him. Because, you see, I do not want to lose my

prize. And the one thing I want to hear more than anything else is. “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...Enter, thou, into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt 25:21). 

Joe Lombardi is a pastor without charge in Lincoln, NE.

1. Editor's note: Technically 1 Cor 3:10-15 is about how we who preach and teach in the church are building *the local church*, not our own lives. Whereas 2 Pet 1:5-11 concerns building our own lives. However, Joe's point is well taken. Whether we are building our own lives, or helping building Christ's Church, we as believers are all builders.

CAN YOUR CHURCH HOST A REGIONAL GRACE CONFERENCE?

IN A CULTURE dominated by the message of salvation by works, people are hungry for God's Free Grace. They want to learn about the promise of eternal life and eternal rewards.

Other Free Grace believers feel burned out. Many people don't have a grace church near them. They need the encouragement of meeting like-minded believers.

Many people find encouragement by attending GES's national conference. But not everyone can afford to go. What can be done?

Please consider hosting a weekend regional conference in your local church. A GES speaker could fly in, and in cooperation with church leaders, teach a Saturday to Sunday seminar on grace-related topics. It would not only build up your local body, but draw in believers from around your region.

For more information please email bethany@faithalone.org

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For the Sake of His Name

By Bill Fiess

The expression “for My [or His] name’s sake” occurs eleven times in the New Testament, in all four Gospels (seven times), Acts (once), John’s first and third epistles (once each), and Revelation (once).¹ It is not found at all in the epistles of Paul, Peter, James, Jude, or the book of Hebrews.

I was interested to see that 100% of these refer to the Lord Jesus and none to God the Father. This makes sense, of course, since Jesus is our Savior and Mediator and the One whom we serve.

Here are all of the uses:

Matthew 10:22 (see also Mark 13:13 & Luke 21:17). [Jesus said,] “And you will be hated by all *for My name’s sake*. But he who endures to the end will be saved.” Note: compare Matt 24:13 and Matt 24:22. The salvation here is salvation from physical death during the Tribulation, not salvation from eternal condemnation.

Matthew 19:29. [Jesus said,] “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, *for My name’s sake*, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.” Note: the Lord is speaking here of inheriting an abundant experience of everlasting life, not of simply getting into the kingdom.

Matthew 24:9. [Jesus said,] “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations *for My name’s sake*.”

Luke 21:12. [Jesus said,] “But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers *for My name’s sake*.”

John 15:21. [Jesus said,] “But all these things [hating and persecuting the disciples] they will



do to you *for My name’s sake*, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

Acts 9:16. [Jesus said,] “For I will show him how many things he [Saul of Tarsus] must suffer *for My name’s sake*.”

1 John 2:12. “I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you *for His name’s sake*.”

3 John 6-7. “If you send them [traveling Christian teachers] forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth *for His name’s sake*, taking nothing from the Gentiles.”

Revelation 2:2-3. [Jesus speaking,] “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored *for My name’s sake* and have not become weary.”

My conclusion from this study is that we are called to serve and to suffer for the sake of the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. While we certainly pray to the Father and are empowered by the Holy Spirit, our ministry is specifically directed toward the Lord Jesus. His name is indeed wonderful. ■

Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia.

1. The Greek is not identical, however. Three different prepositions are used to convey the sense of “for.” They include *dia* (seven times), *huper* (twice), and *heneken* (twice).

GES NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2015



We had a good conference highlighted by a number of outstanding plenary messages and workshops and lots of super fellowship.

Bob Bryant's plenary message on the difference between assurance and eternal security was outstanding. He showed that there are four types of people: assured but not secure, not assured and not secure, assured and secure, and not assured, but secure. Since assurance can be lost, a person might be eternally secure who today does not know where he will go if he dies. It was a challenge to the listeners to share the promise of everlasting life with everyone.

Ken Yates had a surprising plenary. He spoke on the need to have lowered expectations. When most talk about evangelism they like to share stories where 10% or more of the audience came to faith in Christ. I've heard stories where over 90% of the audience reported coming to faith in Christ. Ken showed from Acts 16 that Paul's experience in Philippi was not a big numerical success. He said that we should not expect to have huge churches and huge success in evangelism. Instead, we should be happy for whatever ministry God gives us. It was a word we all needed to hear.

David Janssen presented an excellent plenary session on the importance of accurately applying the Bible and not simply turning it into a magic book where the words can mean one thing to you and something else to your brother and something else to your uncle and so on. The Bible means what God originally intended it to mean, not what we want it to mean. He gave a number of excellent examples of how people misapply verses and do not even consider the meaning to the original recipients.

The message on Rom 12:1-2 by Tony Evans was excellent. He showed how transformation comes from the Word of God impacting our minds and changing our thinking. Many people indicated that they were very moved by his stirring message.

Shawn Lazar's message was on the assurance preaching of famed British preacher and author D. Martin Lloyd-Jones. He showed that Lloyd-Jones actually moved people away from certainty of their eternal destiny when he led them to search their feelings and experiences for evidences that they were regenerate. Shawn's was a very practical and powerful message.

The banquet on Tuesday night provided plenty of time for excellent fellowship. The sharing time at the end was excellent as many at the banquet shared about what the Lord has been doing in their lives.

Sharon Wilkin, Bob's wife, was her normal bubbly self. She made everyone feel welcome. Quite a few people mentioned Sharon (sometimes with one or more exclamation points) as one of their three favorite things about the conference.

The conference was live-streamed by Don Reiher and online viewers were submitting questions which the speakers would answer. It was a nice use of technology to allow people who were unable to travel to the conference to watch and even participate.

We considered two possible themes for the 2016 conference: inerrancy or the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John was selected by the majority of conferees.

As you know, John's Gospel is a unique book of the Bible. It is the one and only evangelistic book in the Bible. It will make a great conference theme.

The next conference will be held on April 25-28, 2016 at the Riley Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX.

We are considering doing the workshops a bit differently next year. In the past we just had four messages per hour and we tried to have most of the messages be on the conference theme. Next year we plan to have four different types of messages each session: one on the conference theme (John), one on Calvinism (the theme of the July 19-24, 2015 Dubois, WY conference), one outstanding repeat message from previous conferences, and one message on any topic the speaker is working on. In this way we will expand the variety of our workshops (and make it possible for someone who missed a great message from a previous year to catch it this year).





Opening of Acts

(ACTS 1:1-14)



By Zane C. Hodges

Prologue (1:1-3)

1:1. Theophilus (v 1) is unknown to us except from Luke's two prologues. From the Gospel of Luke we gather he was a believer in Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 1:4). His name is found in papyri sources as early as 3 BC indicating this was his pagan name given him by unsaved parents. The title "most excellent" (Luke 1:3) is dropped here in Acts. If Theophilus lost his position or office, maybe even due to his Christian faith, he would receive much comfort from a book such as Acts relating as it does the suffering of the early Church and its leaders. Paul, who figures so largely here, is to be shown how many things he must suffer for Christ's name (Acts 9:16) and the record of Acts contains much of this. Theophilus ("friend of God" or "God-beloved") was well named by his parents, for God was to call him to knowledge of the truth and then to honor him as the addressee of these two books.

Acts is the record of Christ's original company of "friends" who "go and bring forth fruit" that lasts (John 15:16). It is the record of their fruit-bearing and how the circle of divine friendship is enlarged by them—an enlarging which continues to this day. Every true Theophilus will benefit by this book, for it tells the way in which we may bring forth lasting fruit. Inattention to its principles leads to fruit that does not stand the test of time. The existence today of the Church founded in Acts is a testimony to the abiding fruit of that first circle of friends.

Note the phrase, **of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach**. Not to *teach* and to *do*, for in our Lord's

life thirty years of *doing* preceded about 3 ½ of *teaching*. The thirty years are crowned with the Father's approval (Matt 3:17). There is no place in God's service or in the ministry of the church for one who teaches God's Word without first doing it (cf. Jas 1:21-2:26; 3:1ff. See also Matt 5:19).

When Luke describes his Gospel as an account of all that *Jesus began...to do and to teach*, he implies that Acts is a record of all that Jesus *continued* to do and to teach. It may most appropriately be called "The Acts of the Risen Christ." Here are the things Christ does *in* His disciples, whereas Luke's Gospel records what He did while *with* them. The coming of the Spirit in Acts actually introduces the reality of the indwelling Christ (cf. John 14:17, 18 and 17:21-23). By the Spirit, Christ now lives in His body to continue to do and to teach (e.g., Eph 2:17). Thus, Acts, which comes to no definitive climax, initiates the continuing work of Christ, a work which goes on in the world today.

1:2. The **day in which He was taken up** is one of the most pivotal of human history. It is dispensationally significant. The Gospel of Luke goes up to that day and Acts proceeds from it. That day is the dividing point between these two "treatises" and the dividing point between two ages. Despite the transitional features of Acts, the Church Age looks back to this day. The Spirit whose baptism created the Church could only be given as a result of this day (John 7:39). The statements of Acts 1:2 which are made in connection with this day are basic to all which follows from it in the remainder of the book.

Our Lord **had given commands** to His disciples. These are specified particularly in verses 4 and 8. It was in the process of obeying these instructions that the Church came into being on the day of Pentecost. The Christian Church is not the product of human ingenuity or human planning or organization, but of obedience to divine commandment. The Church was not planned by the disciples as a “practical” post-ascension program, but it results from obedience to their Lord’s commands. An organism which has its birth through obedience to divine commandment can never be conceived of as capable of continuation through human plans and expedients.

The Lord gave commands **to the apostles**. The first reference to the disciples in Acts is not as *disciples* but as *apostles*. The word *apostle* (*apostolos*) occurs

in Zion (cf. 1 Pet 2:6; Isa 28:16). But the Holy Spirit enforced the commandment upon their hearts and thus secured their obedience. The work of the Church could not have begun—much less proceeded—apart from the inner conviction and compulsion of the Spirit in the hearts of those divinely commanded and commissioned by God.

The phrase *through the Holy Spirit* might be construed with **whom He had chosen** (*hous exelexato*), but this seems much less natural. Kirsopp Lake suggests that the tense of “[He commanded them] not to depart” in 1:4 implies the apostles intended to leave Jerusalem, but the Lord told them to give up that intention at that time.

The divine choice (*whom He had chosen*) displays the divine wisdom. Though we might have imagined

“It is not our qualifications for the work of God which matter, but whether or not He has chosen us to do it.”

only *six* times in Luke, but *thirty* times in Acts. The eleven are viewed here in that capacity which becomes prominent in Acts, as ones who are sent by their Lord (cf. John 17:18). As the Christian Church is based upon divine commandment, so it is also upon divine commission. The program of the Church has ever been carried on by those sent of God, divinely raised up and commissioned by Him. In its fullest sense John 17:18 refers to all believers and we are apostles in this sense (though not in the technical sense). We are sent into the world, and this fact results in the growth of the Christian Church.

He commands **through the Holy Spirit**. We may surely conclude that every utterance of the Lord was through the Holy Spirit. The fact that our attention is especially called to it here indicates its importance. The Spirit’s special influence is implied. What if the disciples had disobeyed our Lord’s initial instructions? They might have reasoned that Jerusalem was a dangerous place for them to be at this time (cf. John 20:19). With the story of the soldiers (Matt 28:13-15) making the rounds, they might have reason to fear the Roman power. Had they failed to obey the Lord now, as they had when He was arrested, the Church could not have begun, for its foundation was to be

that men of education, wealth, or influence would be needed for the worldwide mission of the Church, the divine choice centered upon eleven unlearned and little-esteemed Galilean fishermen. It is not our qualifications for the work of God which matter, but whether or not He has chosen us to do it. The worldwide spread and the centuries-long continuance of their work is the evidence of the divine choice (cf. John 15:16). Their fruit has remained because their mission originated with God. Whatever is of human origin withers (Isa 40:6-7; Acts 5:38-39), but that which is of God endures forever (Eccl 3:14).

The Lord **was taken up**. This phrase is climactically placed last in the sentence in Greek, for above all the Christian Church is inseparably linked with an ascended Christ. The divine approval of Him whom earth rejected is the key to the existence of the Church (cf. 1 Pet 2:6-8). The disciples witnessed the ascension that their confidence in His name might be increased (cf. John 14:12-13). We testify to God’s approval of Him—to His ascended glory—while He is absent. When He so comes in like manner the history of the Church on earth will be over.

1:3. The resurrection was strongly verified to the disciples, a fact which gave force to the kingdom



expectations which the Lord discussed with them. Ernest Haenchen, a radical liberal, affirms that the kingdom of God in Acts refers to “the kingdom of God which will begin with the Parousia,” and adds, “Since the kingdom of God is the state of perfection toward which Christians are advancing, Luke can describe it simply in 1:3, 19:8, 20:5 and 28:23 as the content of the Christian proclamation” (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 141 n. 2). This is probably essentially correct, though the kingdom does have a present aspect (cf. Col 1:13). Yet in this context the eschatological element is clearly in view (cf. v 6).

Compare **He presented Himself alive** (*parestēsen heauton*) with Rom 6:13: “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Jesus presented Himself that the disciples might present themselves alive to God.

Jesus Promises to Send the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8)

1:4. There are three possible renderings of the difficult *synalizomenos*. First, “eat (salt) with” (i.e., “to eat with”). Perhaps this option is as good as any, but why not the more usual *synesthio*? Second, *synalizein*, “to gather together,” (i.e., “being gathered together with [them]”). But the singular is awkward, as is also the present tense. Third, a variant spelling

of *synalizomenos*, “spend the night with” and then simply “to stay with.” (Lake states that *aylizō* is common as a military term = “to bivouac”). This meaning would be very suitable in context either as “to stay with,” referring to the forty days, or “to pass the night (in the open),” with reference to a night spent on Olivet prior to the ascension (cf. *aylizō* in Luke 21:37). A final decision is difficult.

1:5-6. The allusion to John recalls John’s prediction of the nearness of the kingdom (cf. Matt 3:2) and leads to the question of verse 6. If the baptism was near, was the kingdom also?

1:7-8. Jesus neither affirms nor denies that it is, hence the possibility remains open, for the kingdom is subsequently offered. They are not to know God’s program (v 7), but they are to know His power (v 8).

Only the apostles are martyrs in the technical sense of this term (v 8; cf. 1:22). In a secondary sense, of course, so are we, but in reference to the Christian martyria, the technical use is the only one found in Acts.

The *power* (*dynamis*) which the official witnesses are to receive apparently refers to the miraculous manifestations which in this book are mainly, though not exclusively, apostolic. Stephen, who also works miracles, is called a *martyros* at 22:20, but Philip is not. Stephen, of course, saw Christ in heaven (cf. 7:55). For the connection of *dynamis* with miracles, cf. 3:12

and 4:17, and note 4:33, which in context is formally parallel with 2:43.

Jesus Ascends to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11)

1:9. Our Lord deliberately ascends in full view of the apostles because the work He has just given them depends on His going to the Father (cf. John 14:1-2). A crucified and risen Christ is necessary to *salvation*; an ascended and glorified Christ is necessary to *service*. Our Lord's ministry was confined to Palestine. The disciples also ministered there (in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria) but they did more, for their witness was to the uttermost part of the earth. Thus the "greater works" of John 14:12 are not only so in terms of

the last earthly spot where His feet should stand. But there is also symbolic significance in this reference to Olivet and its distance from Jerusalem.

Olivet is located in reference to Jerusalem in terms of a Sabbath day's journey. Thus its very location is presented in terms reminding us of God's rest and the limitations on man's activity. Spiritually, by virtue of the Lord's ascension from it, Olivet becomes linked with divine rest, for in ascending to heaven and sitting at the right hand of God, the Lord Jesus signified the final completion of the sacrificial work of redemption. The Savior sits in a rest never permitted to the priests of the Old Testament because of the unfinished character of their work (cf. Heb 10:11, 12). As God looked out upon creation and found it good, so the divine

"The life of prayer—either individual or corporate—secures a spiritual elevation above the level of the world."

quality or quantity, but also in terms of geographical scope. Only an ascended Lord in heaven can direct this worldwide ministry, through His Spirit shed forth.

1:10-11. The testimony of their eyes is confirmed by the testimony of heavenly witnesses (**two men stood by them**). Thus they are assured by word that their sight had not deceived them, making the ascension doubly sure to them.

The angelic witness also affirms the Second Advent. No time is specified for His return so that this hope might be a vital reality attended by expectancy. The angels do not exhort to fulfillment of our Lord's instructions, they simply announce the fact of His return. At a moment when the sense of separation and loss might have gripped them, this hope is introduced. Having seemingly lost Him through the cross only to have Him restored in resurrection, and after enjoying this reality for forty days, the ascension apart from such hope might have been saddening indeed.

Post-Ascension Prayer (Acts 1:12-14)

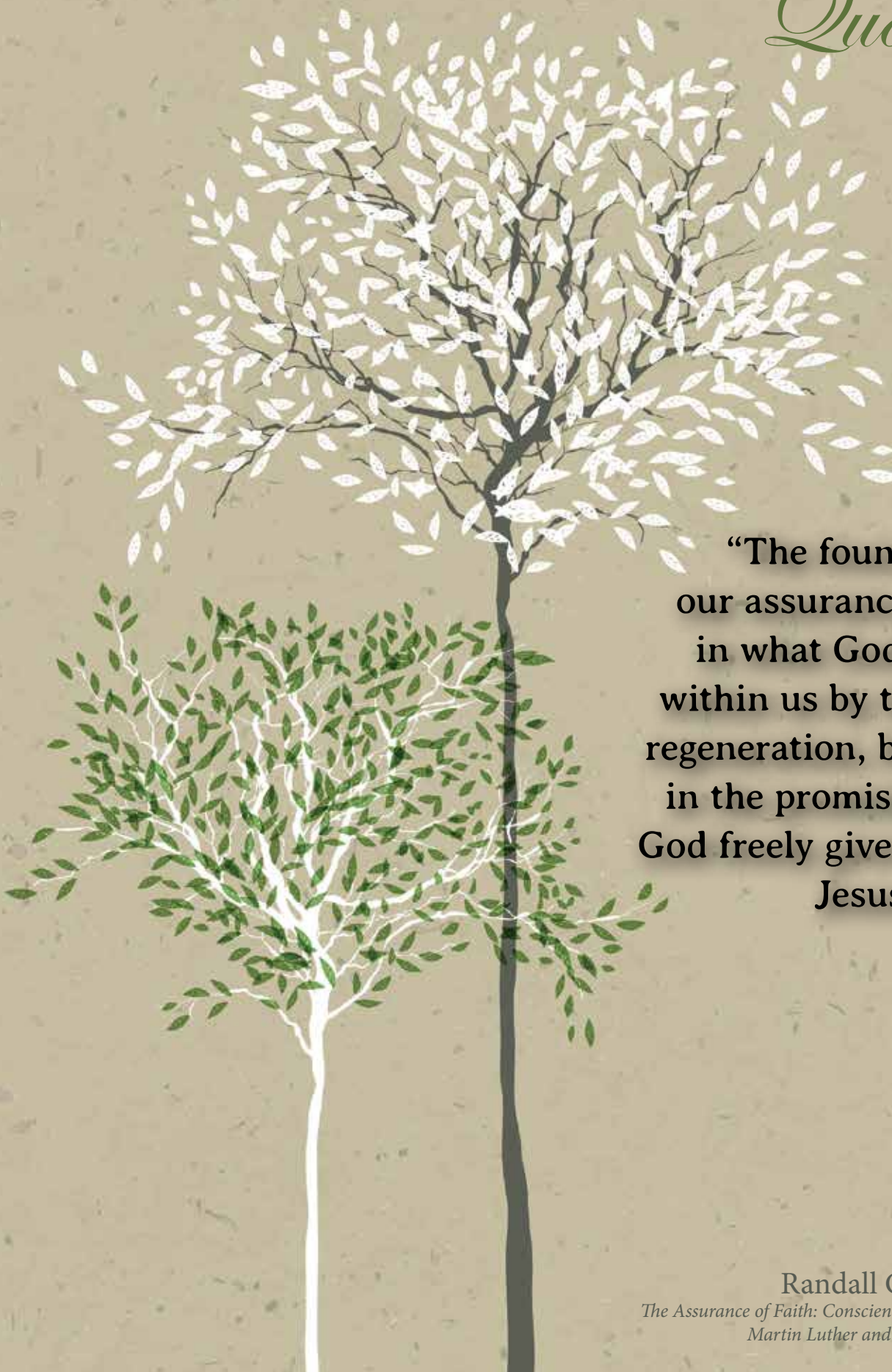
1:12. Olivet is a place evidently much loved by our Lord for He frequently resorted there. How natural and human that He should choose a favorite place as

eye rests upon Jesus, the true *hilasterion* (propitiation or mercy seat; cf. Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5) and finds perfect satisfaction. Divine righteousness finds its final vindicating token in the ascension, for the Sinner's Substitute is received up into the divine presence (cf. John 16:10 and Rom 3:25-26). Thus, the Father, too, rests in the completed work of the cross. And just as the original Sabbath became man's day of rest, so the divine rest signified by the ascension can be entered into by burdened, toiling sinners who come to the Savior in faith (cf. Matt 11:28).

In other words, Olivet and Jerusalem were separated by a distance which (by rabbinic interpretation) could be traversed by a man not working. Thus the mount of the ascension can symbolize a salvation available by faith apart from works and centered in a risen, ascended Savior. From this symbolic spot the apostles return to Jerusalem to make that salvation known.

1:13-14. The first post-ascension activity of the disciples is **prayer**. There is no previous record of the disciples actually praying (they fail to pray in Luke 22:40-46), though no doubt they did, and the first mention thereof is reserved till here. From henceforth prayer becomes a prominent feature of their lives. Closely linked with the ascension are new privileges *in prayer* (cf. John 14:12-14), privileges unknown to them

Quotable



“The foundation of our assurance lies not in what God is doing within us by the gift of regeneration, but rather in the promise of what God freely gives to us in Jesus Christ.”

Randall C. Zachman,
*The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of
Martin Luther and John Calvin*, p. 210.



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previously (cf. John 16:23-24). The ascension adds new meaning and depth to *prayer*. Hence prayer becomes prominent in Acts.

Asking in the name of the Lord Jesus means to stand before God in that name. Thus the ascension means two things:

1. Christ represents us in heaven in prayer before God.
2. We represent Him on earth in prayer before God.

Note two features of the prayer the disciples engage in:

1. They **continued** (persevered) *in prayer* (*ēsan proskarterountes*)
2. Their prayers were united: **These all** (*homothymadon*)

Collective prayer of this nature is honored by God (cf. Matt 18:19). We do not know what they prayed for, yet there is no reason to doubt that their prayers involved a request for the promise of the Spirit (1:4-5), for true prayer builds upon God's promises and claims them (cf. Dan 9:2, 3ff.). I regard this as certain. Compare Luke 11:13 and also Luke 3:21-22. Luke (alone of the evangelists) seems to think of the coming of the Spirit as an answer to prayer. All God's promises are answers to prayer, even the Second Advent. Yet such prayer, i.e., specifically for the baptism of the Spirit, is out of place today in the light of 1 Cor 12:13, though we may well pray for new realizations of His power. It is not mainly important here what they prayed for, but rather *that they prayed*. The Christian Church was born in a prayer meeting.

Note that this transpired **in an upper room**. The life of prayer—either individual or corporate—secures a

spiritual elevation above the level of the world. The prayerless life soon sinks to the level of the “street” in terms of outlook and viewpoint, expectation, and hope. The soul is morally uplifted by seeking the face of God (cf. Lake, *Beginnings IV*, p. 10, for Jewish thought about upper rooms). The upper rooms of the Bible are without exception the scene of great spiritual events (cf. Mark 14:15 and Luke 22:12; Acts 9:37, 39; Acts 20:8). Every life needs an “upper room” of prayer.

Thurston suggests that the upper room may have been a room built into the outer wall of the Temple. Women were permitted to enter that area. Moreover, the Sanhedrin met in a chamber built into the Temple wall, suggesting that there were rooms able to accommodate one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15). The view seems not to be widely accepted.

Finally, it may be observed that they had actually gone to Jerusalem to wait (cf. v 4), but found themselves praying. The impatient heart is usually prayerless (cf. Luke 18:1-8), but the waiting heart is a praying heart. Waiting is a spiritual exercise deeply beneficial to the soul (cf. Isa 40:31; Ps 27:14). The Lord told His disciples to wait and it led to prayer. Waiting involves expectancy (as here), and expectancy begets prayer!

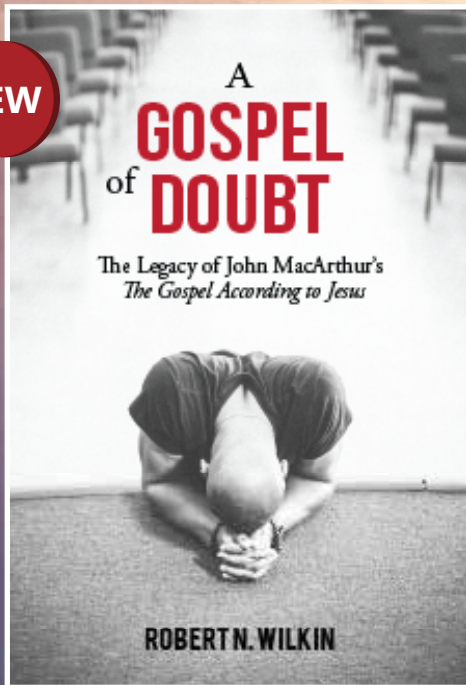
Note that it is **with the women**. They are not among the official witnesses of His resurrection (v 13), but through prayer they play an integral part in the witness. ■

“The upper rooms of the Bible are without exception the scene of great spiritual events. Every life needs an ‘upper room’ of prayer.”

Zane C. Hodges taught NT Greek at Dallas Theological Seminary for 27 years. This is an excerpt from his class notes on Acts, which will be soon published as The Acts of the Risen Christ.

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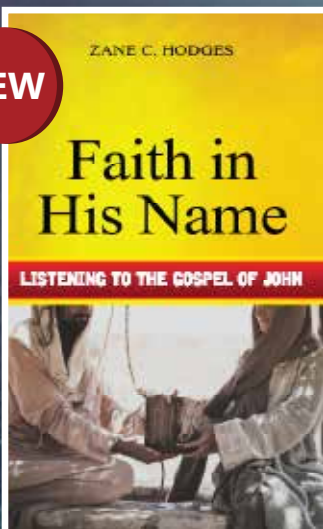
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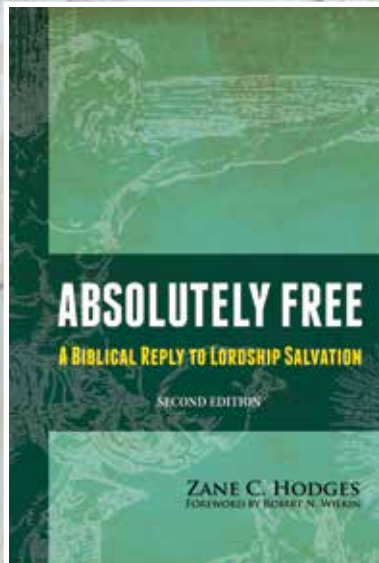
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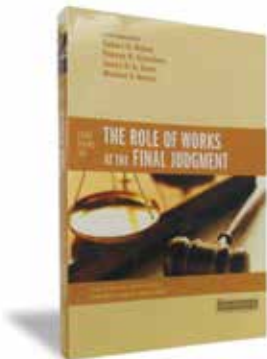
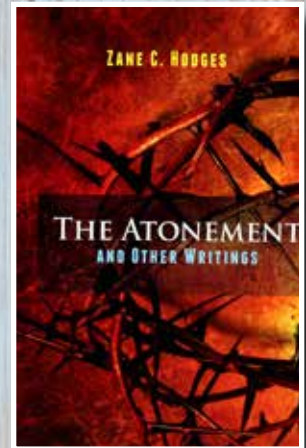
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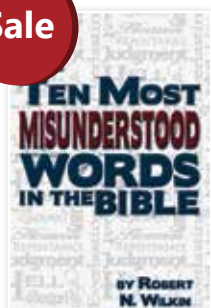
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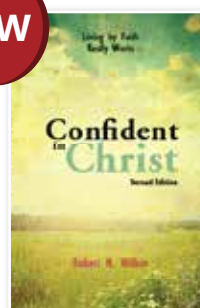
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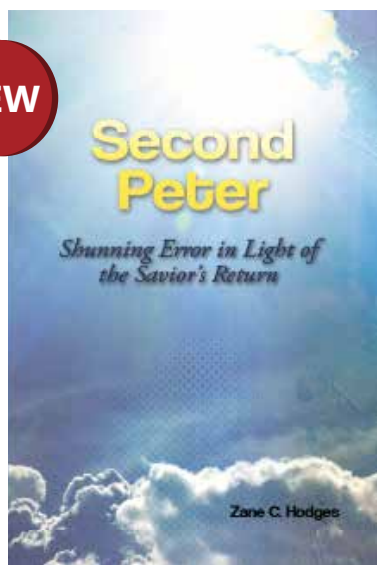
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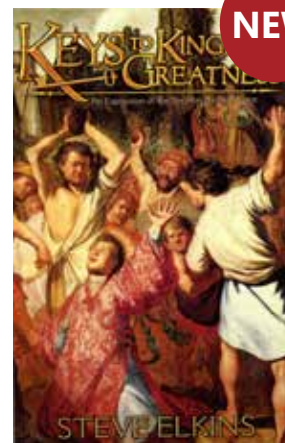
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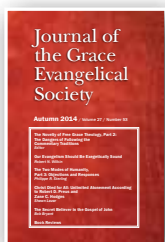
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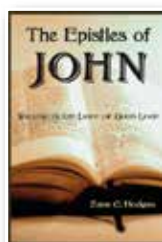


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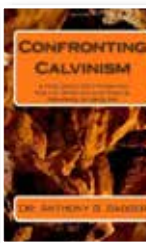
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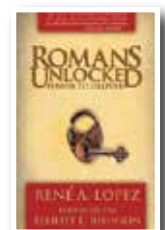
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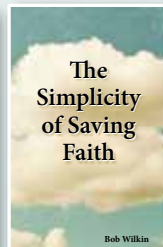
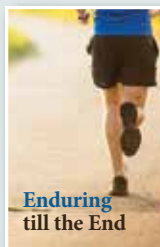
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Was the Gospel Lost until the Reformation?¹

By John H. Niemelä

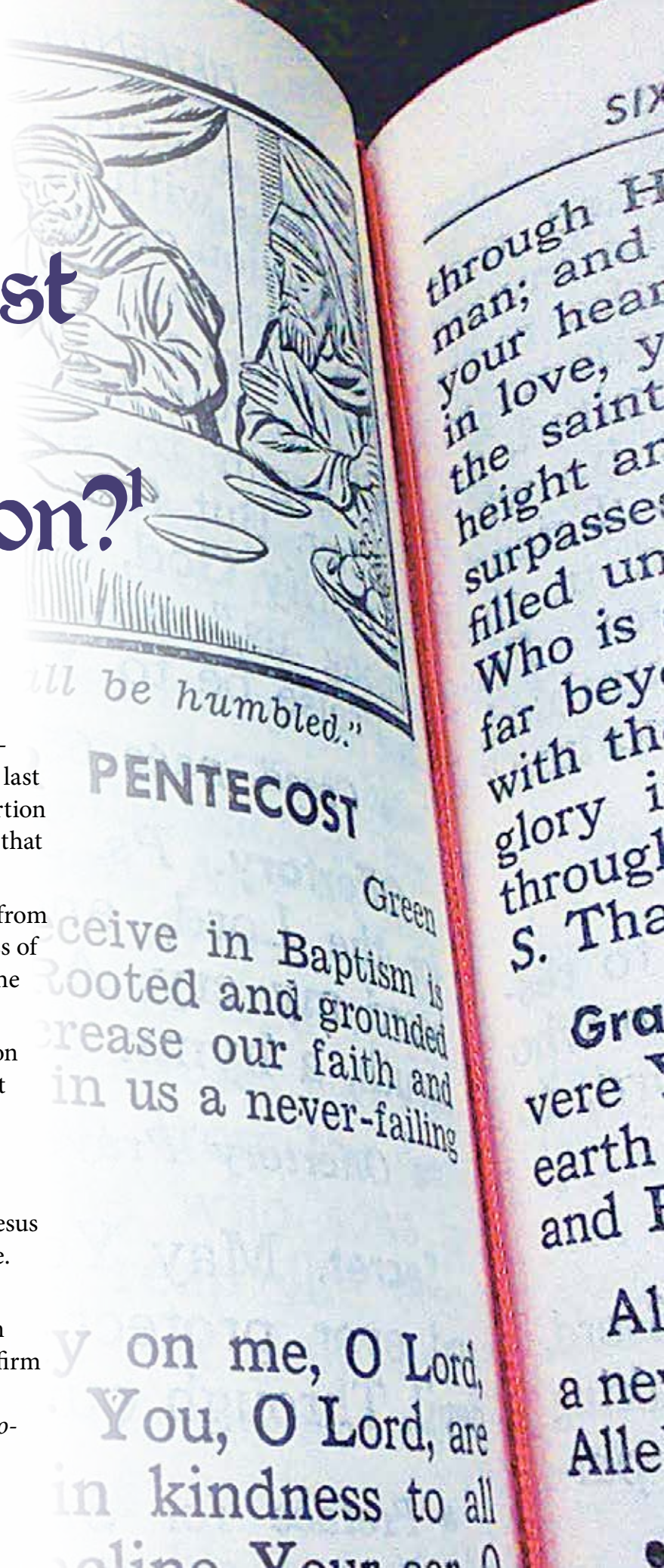
Conventional wisdom claims that clear presentations of Jesus' message of life ceased soon after the last apostle died. The following assertion by David Anderson is typical of that claim:

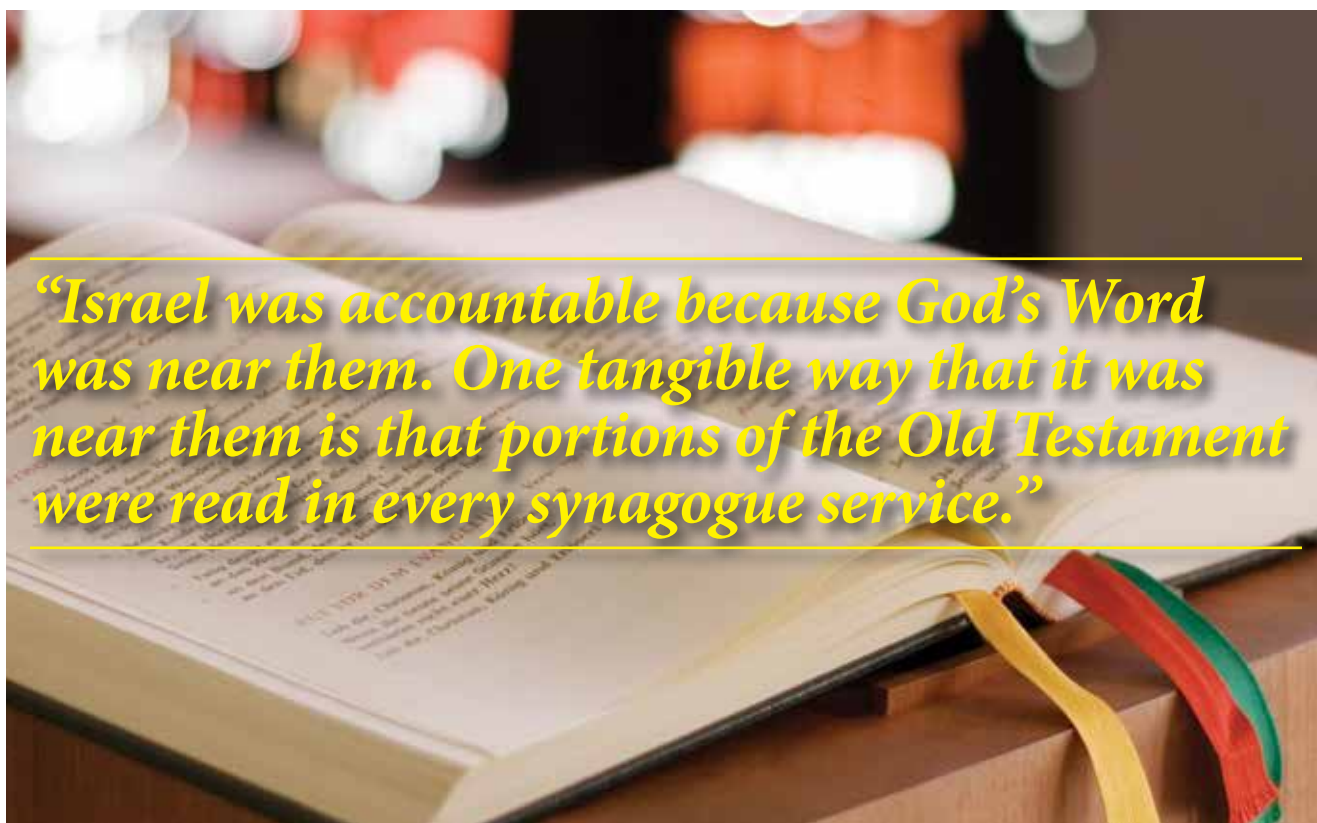
[W]e have no written record of anyone from AD 100 to AD 1500 teaching forgiveness of post-baptismal sins once and for all at the point of faith in Christ.²

That statement muddies the waters (pardon the pun) by raising the issue of baptism. Put more precisely:

The New Testament is our only pre-Reformation written record affirming eternal security at the point of faith in Jesus Christ for His promise of everlasting life.

Conventional wisdom is partially right in claiming that no writings *authored* between AD 100 and AD 1500 have emerged that affirm eternal security. However, it is dead-wrong in claiming that eternal security was not *proclaimed* for 1400 years.





BIGSTOCK

“Israel was accountable because God’s Word was near them. One tangible way that it was near them is that portions of the Old Testament were read in every synagogue service.”

Before refuting the assertion, consider what Paul says in Rom 10:8:

But what does it (the righteousness which is by faith) say? *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart [Deut 30:14]”*—that is the word of faith which we preach [e.g., our preached message for you to believe].³

Paul did not excuse Israel because of the poor quality of rabbinic preaching or writing. Israel was accountable because God’s Word was near them. One tangible way that it was near them is that portions of the Old Testament were read in every synagogue service—even if the homily that followed did not do justice to the text for the day. The standard has always been God’s Word, not human writings in Christian bookstores nor Sunday sermons.

After the close of the New Testament canon (i.e., after the last book was written) most people assume that the message of life ceased being proclaimed. It is as if God’s hands were tied until Gutenberg (the printing press) and Luther (the ninety-five theses) came along. Certainly not!

Rather, the New Testament itself was copied extensively (5,000+ Greek manuscripts and 8,000+ Latin ones survive). That is only a minute fraction of those which were produced. Someone might object,

“Literacy rates were low, books were expensive, and few knew Greek or Latin.” All these are true statements, but God’s Word went forth unhindered.

How so? A special class of manuscripts existed, called *lectionaries*. These were designed to make the Bible available in oral form to congregations. For example, on the first Sunday in January, congregations would hear a reading from a certain Old Testament passage, from the Gospels, and from the New Testament epistles. Each lectionary contained selections for each service throughout the year. The advantage of such manuscripts was that the reader had no difficulty finding the three passages for a particular service.

Lectionaries survive in many languages and dialects: Anglo-Saxon, Arabic, Armenian, Caucasian-Albanian, Coptic (six dialects), Ethiopic (earlier and later versions), Georgian (earlier and later versions), Old High German, Latin (Old Latin and Vulgate), Nubian, Old Church Slavonic (five dialects), Sogdian, and Syrian (four dialects).⁴ The existence of lectionaries in many languages shows that the oral proclamation of Scripture was widespread *in the language of local peoples*.


Paul urged Timothy, “Until I come, attend to reading, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). Revelation 1:3 blesses both reader and hearers, “Blessed be

the one who reads and those who both hear the words of the prophecy and keep those things written in it, for the time is near.” The practice continued after the close of the New Testament. Justin Martyr (*Apology* 1:16) wrote of sections from the apostles or prophets being read during church services.

Interestingly, scholarly studies of Greek lectionaries show that 93% of the Gospel of John was read in church services over the course of a year.⁵ Lectionaries in other languages also gave prominence to John’s Gospel. The Word went forth. Romans 10:8 reminded Israel that the truth that undergirded Paul’s gospel was near to them.

Elijah complained, “The children of Israel...have killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left” (1 Kings 19:14, NKJV). The LORD corrected him, “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (19:18). We must guard against an Elijah-complex in reflecting on the pre-Reformation era.

In every generation there were untold thousands of born-again people (both Jews and Gentiles) who shared their faith with others and their witness was supported by the reading of Scripture each week in church services.

Without hesitation, we affirm that the *faith-alone in Jesus Christ alone for everlasting life* message of the New Testament has always gone forth unhindered.⁶ 

John Niemelä is Professor of New Testament at Rocky Mountain Bible College.

1. This article is condensed from John H. Niemelä, “Pre-Reformation Belief in Eternal Security: The Word of Faith We

Preach Is Near” (Romans 10:8),” *JOTGES* 28 (Spring 2015): 63-80.

2. David R. Anderson, “Is Belief in Eternal Security Necessary for Justification?” *CTSJ* 13 (Spring 2008): 49.

3. Translation by Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, Introduction and selected notes by John H. Niemelä (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 297f.

4. See Niemelä, “Pre-Reformation,” 71-72, for more detail.

5. *Ibid.*, 90, n. 40.

6. In eternity we should expect to meet Christians who lived during the time between the close of the New Testament and the Reformation. God’s Word never returns to Him void. Promises like John 6:47 (“Whoever believes in Me has everlasting life”) were proclaimed far and wide as lectionaries were read publicly. Certainly, in all generations some have taken Jesus at His word and have shared their faith with others. Why do we lack written record of such people at that time who simply believed Jesus for His absolute promise of everlasting life?

It is victors (not losers) who write history books (an idea often attributed to Winston Churchill). Perseverance theologians were the (temporal) victors of the pre-Reformation era (and even afterwards). Books favoring grace and eternal security would often have found their way into bonfires. We may not often hear of mass book-burnings today, but those writing the history books about modern Christendom do not even seem to know that grace-people even exist. Or, they make snide remarks, dismissing such a notion as easy-believism.

Imagine someone five-hundred years from now (if the Lord tarries), asking, “Did anyone in the twenty-first century believe in absolute eternal-security?” It would not surprise me, if such a writer concluded, “We have no written evidence of anyone in the twenty-first century believing this truth.” My hope, though, would be that the author would add, “Bibles were everywhere in that era. Certainly, God’s Word did not return void. There must have been people in that century who simply believed Jesus’ promise.”

WHAT IS GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY?

THE GOSPEL PROMISE was under assault in Paul’s time and still is today. How many “Christians” have followed the ancient Galatians in believing they can be saved by a mixture of faith and works?

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LIGHTSTOCK

God's Faithfulness to His Promises (Hosea 2:14-23)

By Ken Yates

The Old Testament prophet Hosea wrote one of the most interesting books in the Bible. God tells this prophet to marry Gomer, a prostitute (Hos 1:2). She would prove to be an unfaithful wife. There are differing opinions as to whether his wife was a prostitute before they married, or became one afterwards. It is clear, however, that the marriage is meant to be an illustration.

Hosea is one of just a few prophets who spoke to the northern nation of Israel. God had brought them out of the nation of Egypt centuries before. He had loved them and made them His people (11:1). He had entered a covenant with them, and they had promised to be faithful and obedient to Him. They were like a wife to the Lord.

However, when Hosea prophesied to them, they were in rebellion against God. They were unfaithful to God and worshipped other gods. Specifically, they worshipped Baal, a pagan fertility god. This worship involved all kinds of sexual immorality (4:12-13). The nation was full of violence and bloodshed (4:2; 6:9; 12:1). Amos, a contemporary of Hosea, spoke out against the social injustice he saw in Israel (Amos 2:6-8; 4:1). The rich and powerful took advantage

of the poor and weak. Hosea saw the same thing (Hos 12:7).

To put it bluntly, the nation of Israel had become an unfaithful wife. By going after other gods, they had committed spiritual adultery. The marriage of Hosea to the unfaithful Gomer was a picture of God's relationship with Israel.

In the book, God tells Hosea to remain faithful to Gomer. After a period of separation (2:2), Hosea returns to her (3:1-3). The book says that God will also punish His wayward people with exile, just like the Old Covenant required, but He would restore the relationship. He says that He could never give His people up completely and that He will have compassion on them (11:8). Even after all that Israel has done, God speaks of a coming day when He will pour His blessings on them.

The day will come when God will bless them with changes in creation itself. They will forever be at peace. He will restore great fertility to them. They will be His people forever (2:14-23). This looks forward to the day when the nation of Israel will live in the Millennial kingdom.

The marriage of Hosea and Gomer is a clear illustration of the "marriage" between God and the Jewish people. Even when they acted like prostitutes in going after other gods, even when they violated the covenant with God, He still loved them. He had compassion on them. They were still His people.

But why would God act that way to such a disobedient people? The answer is given throughout the Old Testament. *God keeps His promises.* He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would be His people forever. From a human perspective, it would have been easy for God to say that He was through with the descendants of Abraham when one considers the type of "wife" they were in Hosea's day. They were just like Gomer. However, that is not how God operates. One day the nation of Israel will live in the kingdom of God.

I find a great deal of comfort in this strange Old Testament book. Believers in Jesus Christ are part of

His bride. He has entered into a covenant with us. He has promised us that every believer in Him has eternal life. They will live with Him forever in the kingdom of God. They cannot lose their eternal salvation.

In the case of the Old Testament Jews, there were believers and unbelievers among them. Unbelievers will not be a part of the kingdom. However, the promise God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

would be fulfilled. The day is coming when every Jew will be a believer in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. They will enter into His kingdom. Regardless of periods of national rebellion and unfaithfulness in the past, God will fulfill His promises.

The believer in Jesus Christ has some very specific promises from God. God has given him or her eternal life. The believer will forever be a child of God. The believer will be

a part of Christ's kingdom. Even when a believer is unfaithful, God will never cast him away forever. Disobedience certainly brings the discipline of God in the life of the believer, just like it did to the Jewish nation in the Old Testament. But just like in the Old Testament, God's promises remain.

The story of Hosea and Gomer is an Old Testament illustration of New Testament truth. The believer in Jesus Christ has everlasting life. By definition, this life is ever-lasting. It cannot end or be taken away, even if we are unfaithful. It is based upon His promise to us and is His gift to every believer (Eph 2:8). And, as Paul says, the gifts of God are irrevocable (Rom 11:29). ■

Ken Yates is Editor of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society and GES's East Coast regional speaker.

"God has promised us that every believer in Him has eternal life. They will live with Him forever in the kingdom of God. They cannot lose their eternal salvation."

Letters

By You!

Sometimes it gets lonely in the office. We begin to wonder: are we the only ones who get it? Does no one else see how amazing God's grace is? And then we hear from you. We love to get encouraging letters and to know the Lord has people across the country who are excited about His message of free grace in Christ.

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A close-up of a Roman soldier's head and shoulders. He is wearing a silver metal helmet with a large red plume on top. He has a mustache and is looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a red scarf and silver armor. In the background, other soldiers in similar armor are visible, though out of focus.

THE WARNING PASSAGES IN HEBREWS (PART 3)



By Shawn Lazar

George Santayana famously wrote, “Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” He forgot to mention that those who do learn from history still have to watch everyone else repeat it. It gets frustrating. No doubt the author of Hebrews felt that way. The Jewish believers to whom he was writing were on the verge of making the same mistakes their ancestors had, and he wanted to warn them about the consequences that would follow. In Heb 10:26-39 he used several Old Testament references to God’s temporal judgment on Israel to show that the results of apostatizing from Christ would lead to a catastrophic temporal judgment.

The Levitical System Was Insufficient

Chapter 10 begins with an explanation of how the Mosaic Law was never meant to be an end in itself, but a pointer to “the good things to come,” i.e., to the cross (v 1). Animal sacrifices could never truly take away sins (vv 1-4). As attractive as Levitical Judaism might have appeared to the Hebrews, the Temple priests could not make atonement for sin. That was accomplished by Jesus, who made “one sacrifice for sins” and now stands in the heavenly Holy of Holies, ministering on behalf of His people in a way the Jewish high priests could only typify. So rather than *go back to Judaism*, the author urged the Hebrews to *draw near to Christ, not forsaking assembling with other believers* because the “the Day” was fast approaching (10:22-25). And then we come to the warning.

The Danger of Willful Sin

10:26-27. **For** indicates the warning follows the truths the author has just explained. But the warning was conditional (**if we sin willfully**). The *if* shows they had not yet committed the sin in question and the *we* shows the author includes himself in the warning, meaning it is directed to believers, regenerate people.

Several commentators suggest the willful sin is an allusion to the presumptuous sin of Numbers 15:

“But those who *brazenly violate the Lord’s will*, whether native-born Israelites or foreigners, have blasphemed the Lord, and *they must be cut off from the community*. Since they have treated the Lord’s word with *contempt* and *deliberately disobeyed* his command, they must be completely cut off and suffer the punishment for their guilt” (Num 15:30-31, NLT, emphasis added).

Willful sin is not something done accidentally or out of ignorance. It is not the kind of sins believers remorsefully struggle with every day. The willful sin is brazen. It is presumptuous, planned, and purposefully done to defy the Lord. If the Hebrews committed the willful sin **after they received the knowledge of the truth** about the supremacy of Christ over the Mosaic sacrifices, they needed to realize **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**. Not only had Christ’s sacrifice replaced the Temple’s animal sacrifices, but not even Christ’s sacrifice would protect them from the temporal judgment that would come upon them. In Numbers, the penalty for the willful sin was physical death (not eternal condemnation). Just so, no sacrifice would protect them from God’s **fiery indignation which would devour His adversaries** if they rejected Christ (cf. Isa 26:11). This language echoes



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the warning Zephaniah gave to Judah before Babylon utterly destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, when he wrote:

The great day of the Lord is near

It is near and hastens quickly.

The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter;

There the mighty men shall cry out.

That day is a day of wrath,

A day of trouble and distress,

A day of devastation and desolation,

A day of darkness and gloominess,

A day of clouds and thick darkness...

Neither their silver nor their gold

Shall be able to deliver them

In the day of the Lord's wrath;

But the whole land *shall be devoured*

By the fire of His jealousy,

For He will make speedy riddance

Of all those who dwell in the land (Zeph 1:14-15, 18, emphasis added).

Both Zephaniah and the author of Hebrews warned "the day of the Lord" was imminent (cf. Heb 1:2; 2:5; 3:6, 14; 6:11; 9:28; 10:25, 37), that this day would be a time of God's wrath (cf. Heb 3:11; 4:3), and that God's judgment was like a devouring fire (cf. Heb 10:27; 12:29). Zephaniah's prophecy was fulfilled in 586 BC, when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. Is it a coincidence that just a few years after Hebrews was written, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70?¹

The Danger of Idolatry

10:28-29. What is the wilful sin? The author strongly suggested he had idolatry in mind when he quoted, **Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.** This is a quote from Deuteronomy, about the penalty for idolatry:

If there is found among you, within any of your gates which the Lord your God gives you, a man or a woman who has been wicked in the sight of the Lord your God, in *transgressing His covenant*, who has *gone and served other gods and worshiped them*, either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded, and it is told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with stones. *Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses*; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness. The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from among you (Deut 17:2-7, emphasis added).

If a Jew transgressed the Mosaic Covenant and committed idolatry, he was to be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

The author of Hebrews quoted this law because the Hebrews were on the verge of committing idolatry. Except, instead of transgressing the *Mosaic Covenant*, they were on the verge of transgressing the *New Covenant* (i.e., they risked counting **the blood of the covenant** as a **common thing**). By abandoning the Lamb of God for the blood of animals, the Hebrews would be exchanging the truth of God for a type, which was tantamount to idolatry. Hence, they would fall under a condemnation similar to Deut 17:2-7. The difference is, their punishment would be worse.

The author argues from lesser to greater: if the Hebrews rejected Christ and transgressed the New Covenant, **how much worse punishment** would they suffer?

Many have assumed the only fate worse than death is suffering in hell. That cannot be the answer here because the author is addressing believers (including himself) and believers are eternally secure (John 3:16; 10:28-29; Rom 5:9-10; Heb 10:10, 14). What, then, is the punishment worse than death?

One option is to take this as a general warning to all believers that if they apostatize God will make them suffer in this life. Apostate believers may be afflicted with things like mental illness, depression, the death of a child, torment by evil spirits, emotional and spiritual ruin, and millennial disinheritance in the life to come.²

The other option is to take this as a specific warning, to a specific community, about an impending day of judgment, when there would be a unique outpouring

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem *the Spirit of grace* [*Pneuma charitos*] and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn” (Zech 12:10 LXX, emphasis added).

According to Zechariah, in the last days (which the author of Hebrews said he was in, see Heb 1:2; 10:25, 37), the Lord would send “the Spirit of grace” to bring the Jews to repentance for having killed the Messiah. That is what happened to the Hebrews: although most of their countrymen rejected and crucified the Lord, the Holy Spirit had led them to faith. If they later apostatized, they would be insulting the Spirit of grace who had convicted them.

“The Hebrews were on the verge of committing idolatry. Except, instead of transgressing the Mosaic Covenant, they were on the verge of transgressing the New Covenant.”

of God’s wrath. That kind of judgment fell upon Israel in AD 70. The ancient historian Josephus described the siege of Jerusalem in gruesome detail. The Jews at that time endured unimaginable suffering. For example, Josephus tells the story of Mary of Bethzuba who roasted and ate her own child (Josephus, *Jewish War*, VI). As Steven Ger summarizes,

The severity of this concentrated outpouring of God’s wrath is incontestable. With an estimated first-century Jewish world population of some eight million of whom three million lived in Israel, almost one million Jews were killed in the war against Rome and another ninety-seven thousand led away as slaves. It was, as Josephus recorded, the most catastrophic war that had been waged to date in recorded history.³

Everyone hopes for a quick and painless death. Josephus’s account makes very clear that some punishments are worse than death.

Hence, rather than brazenly abandon their Lord, the Hebrews needed to recognize the dangers of insulting **the Spirit of grace** (to *Pneuma tēs charitos*). This is the same term Zechariah used to describe the Spirit’s role before the Second Coming⁴:

God’s Vengeance

10:30-34. Rebelling against God should not be taken lightly. The Hebrews should have been familiar with stories of God’s righteous judgment. As the author reminded them, **“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord** and, **“The Lord will judge His people.”** This is a quote from Deut 32:35-36, part of the Song of Moses. It is significant that out of all the verses that describe God’s judgment, the author chose to quote from this song. The early Dispensational Bible teachers took it as a prophecy of Israel’s history up to the time of the Messiah (cf. Rev 15:3). They understood verses 35-36 as describing God’s vengeance on the Gentile nations who will rise up against Israel during the Tribulation. As Arno Gaebelein explained:

God foretells through Moses the future of an apostate people... The call of the Gentiles is anticipated in Moses’ song; salvation came to us Gentiles by their fall. It seems almost as if they are going to perish completely as a nation. But the song changes suddenly. Jehovah will yet arise in their behalf. It will be in a time when their power is gone, when they are helpless and their enemies press

down upon them as never before in their long, dark night of suffering and tears. That will happen in the end of this present age, during the predicted time of great trouble, which is to come upon them. Compare verse 39 with Hosea 1:15–6:3. *The judgment, which is announced by Moses in verses 40–42 is the judgment which will fall upon Gentile nations in the day when the Lord appears in His glory* (emphasis added).⁵


The general application is that God judges His people and that there can be serious consequences to disobeying Him. But if these verses in the Song of Moses prophetically point to the Time of Jacob's Trouble, does this warning specifically apply to Jewish believers living *after the rapture of the Church*? Is it cautioning *them* that if they apostatized they would suffer severe and lingering judgment during the Tribulation (the same people warned in the Olivet Discourse and Revelation)? Or was the author warning contemporary Church Age believers about perishing during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70? Whichever is the case, the Hebrews should have recognized that it **is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God** in judgment.

10:35–36. Of course, if they apostatized, their actions would have eternal consequences too. It would affect their position in the Messianic kingdom. The author urged the Hebrews **not to cast away their confidence**. Persevering in faith in the midst of trial **has great reward** in the kingdom. The author of Hebrews already encouraged his readers about becoming companions of the Messiah (e.g. Heb 3:14; cf. Luke 17:11–21), hence, they needed to endure so as to **receive the promise** of having a rich inheritance there (cf. 2 Pet 1:11).

10:37–39. The Hebrews had suffered for their faith (vv 32–34). They only needed to hang on to their Christian confession for just a **little while**, because the Lord would return soon and would **not tarry**. In order to endure the persecution in the meantime, he urged them to remember the words of Habbakuk, i.e., that **the just shall live by faith**. The prophet contrasted the deliverance of the righteous man versus the condemnation of the unrighteous (Hab 2:5–20). The author was confident the Hebrews would not be among those who **draw back to perdition**, i.e., apostatize and die under God's temporal judgment. The author hoped they would be among those who **believe** and who persevere **to the saving of the soul**, i.e., to the saving

of their physical lives from the judgment to come (cf. Matt 24:9–14⁶).

Conclusion

The warning in Heb 10:26–39 is not about the possibility of believers losing eternal life, but of coming under God's temporal judgment for the sin of idolatry. Significantly, the warning contains several quotations and allusions to Old Testament passages that speak of a future Tribulation for Israel and the suffering that believers will experience at that time. Although the passage can be interpreted as a general warning about the temporal judgment that any apostate believer might expect to face, the author seems to have been warning a specific group of Jewish believers about experiencing a unique judgment from God if they abandoned Christ and apostatized to Judaism. We should learn from the example of the Hebrews and hold fast to our faith in Christ, knowing that our perseverance will be richly rewarded by our returning Redeemer. 

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society.

1. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 144.

2. See Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2013), 664–65.

3. Steven Ger, *The Book of Hebrews: Christ Is Greater* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2009), 180.

4. Terence D. McLean, *M.A.D. about Hebrews* (Alpha, OH: Discerning the Times Publishing Co., 2010), 147.

5. Arno C. Gaebelin, *Gaebelin's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1970, 1989), 186. See also George Williams, *The Complete Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1994), 107.

6. Louis A. Barbieri, Jr. "Matthew" in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1983), 76–77; Hal M. Haller, Jr. "The Gospel According to Matthew," *The Grace New Testament Commentary, Volume 1: Matthew–Acts*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 110.

Questions and Answers

By Staff



How Is Free Grace Different?

Question: Brother Wilkin, the following was posted on a list I am on. Do you think it is accurate? If not, please let me know what you feel is wrong. I am not so sure his statement about what belief is says clearly what you believe.

There are several ways to understand eternal security and perseverance:

- 1. The Arminian View: Followers of Christ lose their salvation if they fall away from Christ.*
- 2. The Perseverance View: Christians will persevere until the end because it is the mark of true faith.*
- 3. The Eternal Security View: Christians can deny the faith and yet remain saved, although they lose their rewards in heaven. It is the Holy Spirit who perseveres within the believer keeping him eternally secure. It is Jesus who perseveres with the believer not the believer who perseveres with the Lord.*
- 4. The Free Grace View: Zane Hodges and the*

Grace Evangelical Society are the main advocates, along with R. T. Kendall. They hold to a decisional view of salvation and they reduce saving faith to a notional ("mental") assent that does not include repentance. Once a person believes in Christ, he is eternally secure no matter what his subsequent life is like. Once a person "believed," he is eternally secure.

I think the best view is #3 followed by #2.

—RM, email

Answer: The first two points of that person's list are fairly accurate, though the Arminian and Calvinist views are practically the same. Both say that unless you persevere you will go to the lake of fire.

I don't know why he distinguishes between the third and fourth views because they are the same. He seems to want to attack the Free Grace understanding of faith. But he misstates the Free Grace view.

He says that the Free Grace view is *decisional*. On the contrary, Zane Hodges and Grace Evangelical Society have long taught that *faith is not a choice*. We are the opposite of decisional. For example, I cannot choose to believe that I am a panda bear or a Medieval French knight. We do not choose our beliefs. We are either persuaded by the evidence that something is true or not, but you cannot decide to believe something that you do not believe.

The truth is, views 1 and 2 are decisional. Both Arminians and Calvinists agree that faith is a matter of the will. They say you must choose to turn from your sins, commit your life to Christ, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ until death. Of course, they disagree on how that

choice is possible. Arminians say we have a free-will and so choose to believe of our own accord, while Calvinists say that our wills are bound by sin, so the Holy Spirit causes the elect to choose to believe. Either way, for them, saving faith is a choice (i.e., they are decisional).

It is interesting that he says the Free Grace view understands faith as mental assent. That is true. However, the expressions *mental assent* or *intellectual assent* carry a negative connotation that the person who assents is emotionless and detached. Thus it is better to speak of *being persuaded* or *convinced*. To believe something is to be persuaded it is true. Belief is not a feeling which can and often does follow the belief and belief is not

the actions which may and typically do follow the belief.

It is important to see that when people reject the idea that faith is mental assent, they usually mix faith and works together. The idea that saving faith is more than mental assent is the position of views 1 and 2. In their view faith is not faith at all, but is turning from sins, commitment of life, obedience, and perseverance. In the Free Grace view all that is required is believing in Jesus. Yes, that seems too easy for most people in Christianity. The funny thing is, if it is so easy, then why do the vast majority of people reject it?

The person who made the list is correct that Calvinists and Arminians both reject the idea that a person who experiences moral failure in his life is eternally secure.

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They both link eternal security with *behavior*. Thus John 3:16 in essence becomes “whoever *behaves* in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

I hope that helps.

—Bob

Was Cornelius Already Saved?

Question: Was Cornelius already saved when Peter preached to him?

In reading Acts 10, and believing that righteousness comes by believing God, it seems to me that although Cornelius did not know about Christ, his name was already in the Book of Life. What is your opinion? What exactly happened in Acts 10:44? Were Cornelius and his household saved by faith in Christ, or were they already saved, but received the Holy Spirit though faith in Christ? And how does that fit into Acts 11:17-18 where the Christians in Jerusalem seem to think the Gentiles were saved by coming to realize who Christ is?

—MR, email

Answer: No, he was born again when he believed in Jesus through Peter's preaching.

There are several clear indications that Cornelius and his household were unregenerate before Peter preached to them.

First, Cornelius was told by an angel before Peter came, “[Peter] will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14). These are words that Luke did not record in Acts 10.

Unless the word *saved* in Acts 11:14 refers to some deliverance other than salvation from eternal

condemnation, it is clear that Acts 10 records the time when Cornelius and his household came to faith in Christ for everlasting life.

There is nothing in the context to suggest any other type of salvation. In fact, Acts 11:14 explains how Cornelius and his household came to faith before Peter finished his sermon. In Acts 10:43 Peter said, “Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” Surely Peter intended to go on in the sermon and to specifically mention justification or everlasting life. But Luke says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). When Peter mentioned the remission of sins they understood that was the message of salvation the angel had spoken about. At that moment they believed in Jesus for salvation, (everlasting life).

Second, Peter later refers to this incident at what has come to be called *the Jerusalem Council* (Acts 15). There the early church met to decide precisely what Gentiles had to believe and do to be born again and to be sanctified. Did they need to be circumcised? Did they need to keep the Law of Moses?

At the Jerusalem Council the answer was no and no. Gentiles, they concluded, are born again just like Jews are, by faith alone in Christ alone. And one of the leading speakers was Peter (Acts 15:7-11). He said, “God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe...purifying their hearts by faith...But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (Acts 15:7, 9, 11). His point is that Jews (“we”)

are saved in the same manner as Gentiles (“they”), by faith in Christ apart from works.

Third, Acts 10:43-48 is a pivotal section in the entire book of Acts (as Peter shows in Acts 15:7-11). That is where we hear of the first Gentile converts. And that is where the reception of the Spirit occurs at the point of faith, and not after baptism as in Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16.

I don't have time for a full explanation here. See the two articles by Lanny Thomas Tanton on Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16 at our website under Journals (www.faithalone.org). But the point is that for Jews who were in Palestine at the time of the crucifixion and who called out for Jesus to be crucified, they needed to repent and to be baptized to receive fellowship forgiveness and to receive the Holy Spirit. But they were born again the moment they believed in Christ.

When we get to Acts 10 we find the situation that has been normative ever since the first generation of Jews died out: at the moment of faith everyone starts with fellowship forgiveness (Acts 10:43, “the remission of sins”) and with the reception of the Spirit (Acts 10:44, 47).

I hope that helps.

—Bob

Why Are Many Reluctant to Serve Christ for Rewards?

Question: A friend of mine is a Southern Baptist Pastor and certainly believes in eternal security. But he has trouble accepting the idea that believers should work *for rewards*. He believes in the Judgment Seat of Christ, but says something like,

"I am not working for rewards, but just for love of Jesus." This, of course, is true. We should obey the Word for love of Jesus. But Jesus Himself told us to work for rewards. How can we get people to obey the Biblical imperative to work for rewards? I think that most churches rarely [if ever] mention the doctrine of eternal rewards, even if they are strong on eternal security.

—BF, email

Answer: Great question. I hear this a lot. Being motivated by love for the Lord Jesus who died for us *seems* like the only motivation we should ever need. And being motivated out of the prospect of eternal rewards *seems* selfish. But neither of those ideas is supported by Scripture. If we love the Lord, then we surely should allow His Word to guide our thinking.

First, the Bible teaches that the love of God is one of many motivations to serve Christ (2 Cor 5:14; 1 John 4:19). Other motivations are a desire for God's blessings in this and in the life to come (1 Tim 4:8; 2 Tim 1:12; 2:12; 4:6-8; 1 John 2:28), a desire to avoid temporal judgment in this life (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; Jas 1:21; 2:14; 5:19-20); and a desire to have Christ's approval and praise at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 2:15). As you say, the Lord *commanded* us to lay up treasure not on earth, but in heaven (Matt 6:19-21). This was not a suggestion.

If we say that we are *only* motivated by the love of God, we are ultimately saying that we know better than God does how we should be motivated. Of course,

I doubt your friend truly is only motivated by God's love. Surely he fears the consequences of a life of sin. He knows that a life of sin is a life of suffering, pain, and premature death. In addition, he knows that serving God makes his life and the life of those around him better than it would be.

Second, it is not selfish to want to glorify the Lord more. That is what the eternal rewards will be: increased ability to serve and glorify Him. While we indeed will have a more abundant life the more we are able to glorify Him, that is not selfish in the normal sense of the word. That is, wanting more opportunity to serve him is not greedy and it is not at the expense of others. The Lord is ready and able to reward all believers. In fact, the more you serve Him, the more likely it is that those whom you influence will gain eternal rewards as well.

Is it selfish for a pastor to want to glorify the Lord in this life by preparing and giving sound messages? No. His congregation benefits from sound preaching of the Word.

Is it selfish for a pastor to use the church's money wisely so as to please the Lord? Of course not. The entire church is blessed if the church is using its money in God-honoring ways.

All pastors know the 80-20 rule. It says that 80% of the giving and 80% of the work done in a church is done by 20% of the people. Are those 20% selfish? No. They are just doing what they can to glorify God. So should we all.

If it is good to serve the Lord now—and it clearly is, it will be even better to serve Him in the life to come. But how much opportunity we will have to serve in the

life to come will be directly related to how faithful we were in this life: "Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned *ten minas*.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority *over ten cities*.' And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned *five minas*.' Likewise he said to him, 'You also be *over five cities*.'" (Luke 19:16-19, emphasis added; see also 1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Gal 6:7-9; Phil 4:17; 2 Tim 2:12; Jas 5:9; 1 John 2:28; Rev 3:21).

All of the rewards are directly related to our love for God. Because we love Him, we want the blessings He loves to give His children. Because we love Him, we want to serve Him as best we can now and in the life to come. There is no contradiction between serving God out of our love for Him and serving Him so that we might gain a heightened opportunity to serve Him forever. ■

—Bob

Send your questions to ges@faithalone.org or mail them to Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202.






Back Row: Don Glenn, Zane Hodges, Reagan Benedict; Front Row: Ron Howe, Jim VanDine, Lee Anderson, Harlan Betz, Oren McConnell, and Dave DenHartog

In Memory of Reagan Benedict

By Kara Bishop

Reagan Benedict was born on Oct 21, 1935. He came to faith in Jesus Christ while in the military through the ministry of missionaries in Korea. After graduating from Dallas Theological

Seminary (1966), he spent over 40 years pastoring churches in Iowa, Illinois, New Jersey and Alabama. His pas-

sions were meticulous study of the text while preparing to preach, a discipline learned from Zane Hodges; memorizing nine complete books and numerous chapters of Scripture; mentoring men from all walks of life, continuing through this spring with his "Friday Friends"; and making the gospel clear to all those around him. He loved to share the simple promise of eternal life by faith alone in Christ alone apart from works based on God's promises. Reagan went to be with the Lord on May 26, 2015. He will be greatly missed! 



Reagan with David Janssen

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