

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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MARCH & APRIL 2015

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF SEVEN BIBLE TRANSLATIONS (PART 2)



PLUS: The Warning Passages in Hebrews (Part 1) •

The Legacy of John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Chapter 1) •

AND MORE!

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A few weeks ago I was rear-ended by a Ford F-250. Fortunately I walked away from the accident with only a sore back and neck (and some sciatica). It could have been much worse as the guy who hit me was doing about 40 MPH and I was stopped, waiting to make a left turn after traffic cleared. When Sharon called the office later that day, Shawn answered the phone and told her, "I'm afraid it looks like Bob's been hit by a truck." She said, "I know, but he has a nice personality."

This issue covers a variety of key topics.


Shawn Lazar has a very practical explanation of the first two warning passages in the epistle to the Hebrews.

John Niemelä explains why the testimony of the Apostle John concerning the Lord Jesus Christ is trustworthy.

My second article on Bible translations should provide some additional help for those who wonder what the difference is between the seven leading English Bible translations today.

A Voice from the Past article from 25 years ago (1990) by Brad McCoy does a great job of explaining what the Apostles meant when they said that the Lord Jesus is "the Christ."

In April we expect to release a new book by me entitled, *A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus*. In this issue we provide you with an evaluation of the first chapter of that book, "What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, 'Follow Me'?"

We can't control the fact that life will throw us a few curveballs (or a few Ford F-250s!), but we can let the Word of God change us so that we're more like Christ in how we handle what comes our way. And then we'll find that even getting rear-ended by a truck can bring glory to God! 




Warnings, Testimonies, Translations, and More.

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

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF SEVEN BIBLE TRANSLATIONS (PART 2)

BY BOB WILKIN

In Part 1 we saw that English translations of the Bible vary a lot. While all are reasonably reliable, they are not equally reliable. The King James Version (KJV) and New King James Version (NKJV) came out ahead if, as I argued, the majority of manuscripts do carry the correct readings.

We also looked at two New Testament texts that are important to Free Grace theology: Jas 2:14 and 1 Cor 5:11. We found that the best translations based on the actual text of Jas 2:14 (which is not in dispute in these passages) were the KJV, NKJV, and Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). The best translations based on 1 Cor 5:11 (again, there is no textual problem here) were the KJV, NKJV, and the English Standard Version (ESV).

In Part 2 we consider two other texts from the New Testament, Gal 1:8-9 and Rom 8:1, and one from the Old Testament, Gen 15:6.

Let Him Be Accursed: Galatians 1:8d (and 1:9d)

KJV "...let him be accursed."

NKJV "...let him be accursed."

NASB "...let him be accursed!"

ESV "...let him be accursed."

HCSB "...a curse be on him!"

NIV "...let him be eternally condemned!"

NET "...let him be condemned to hell!"

Four translations have "let him be accursed" and one has a similar rendering, "a curse be on him!" Those four are literal

renderings of the Greek (*anathema estō*) and the fifth captures the sense well. These translations are admittedly ambiguous and could refer to a curse in this life, or in the life to come, or both.

The last two translations, the New International Version (NIV) and New English Translation (NET), are not really translations at all. They are interpretations. The word *condemned* is not found here. Nor are the words *eternally* or *hell*. The translators have allowed their theology to color their translation. Evidently they believe that there is no such thing as a regenerate person who at some later point actually promotes a false gospel. I would say that there is a lot of evidence in Paul's writings and even in Galatians (see 2:14) that some genuine believers fall doctrinally and actually preach false theology and even a false gospel.

Additionally, practically speaking, how would a believer in Corinth "let" someone be "eternally condemned" or "condemned to hell"? Would this mean that they weren't to witness to them? Would it mean that they were to pray that they never came to faith (since under this view they must be unregenerate)?

If we leave the translation as vague as the original, then the practical application is simple: treat these people as people who are cursed, like people who have the Black Plague. Do not support their ministry financially, prayerfully, or with your time and talents. People who are proclaiming a false gospel, which in Galatians is any

whose it shall be; that the scripture might be fulfilled, saying: *a* They have parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they have cast lot. And the soldiers indeed did these things.

25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen.

26 When Jesus therefore had seen his mother and the disciple standing whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son.

27 After that, he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own.

28 Afterwards, Jesus knowing, that all things were now accomplished, *b* that the scripture might be fulfilled, said: I thirst.

29 Now there was a vessel set there full of vinegar. And they, putting a sponge full of vinegar about hyssop, put it to his mouth.

30 Jesus therefore, when he had taken the vinegar, said: It is consummated. And bowing his head, he gave up the ghost.

a Ps. 31. 19. — *b* Ps. 68. 22.

31 Then the Jews, because it was the sabbath, that the graves might not remain open (for that was a sabbath day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

32 The soldiers therefore came: and they brake the legs of the first, and of the other that was with him.

33 But after they come to Jesus, when they saw that he was dead, they did not break his legs.

34 But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side, and immediately came out blood and water.

35 And he that saw his testimony is true: he knoweth that he saith true; that you may believe.

36 For these things done, that the scripture might be fulfilled, shall not break a bone.

37 And again scripture saith: they shall look on him whom they pierced.

c Ex. 12. 46. — *d* John 12. 32.

CHAPTER XX.

1 *a* And after these things Joseph of Arimathea (because he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews) besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. And Pilate therefore, and the Jews, came thither, and took away the body of Jesus.

2 And Nicodemus also, who came at the first, came to Jesus by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about hundred pound weight.

3 They took therefore the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

4 Now there was in place where he was crucified, a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein no man yet had been laid.

5 There, therefore, because of the passover, the Jews, they laid Jesus, because the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

a Christ's resurrection, and his ascension to his Father.

1 *b* And on the first day of the week, Mary

a Matt. 27. 57. — *b* Luke 23. 55. — *c* Matt. 28. 1. — *d* Luke 24. 1.

gospel other than justification by faith alone (Gal 2:15-16), whether they are Christians who have fallen or unbelievers who never knew the truth, are ones we are not to aid in any way.

It's easy to see why people who hold to Reformed theology consider us who proclaim the Free Grace message to be bound for hell whereas we consider many of them to be errant believers who are nonetheless bound for the kingdom along with us.

There Is Therefore Now No Condemnation: Romans 8:1

This example deals not so much with differences in how the verses were translated, but in which words were translated. Two of these versions contain an additional phrase at the end of the verse that potentially changes the way it is to be understood.

KJV "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, *who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*"

NKJV "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, *who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*"

NASB "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

NET "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

NIV "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

HCSB "Therefore, no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus..."

ESV "There is therefore now no

condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The reason the KJV and NKJV have a longer reading is because the majority of manuscripts of this verse contain the longer reading.

The NET has a footnote here that is instructive as to why it excluded the longer reading:

The earliest and best witnesses of the Alexandrian and Western texts have no additional words for v. 1...Later scribes...added the words...‘who do not walk according to the flesh,’ while even later ones...added...‘but [who do walk] according to the Spirit.’ Both the external and internal evidence are completely compelling for the shortest reading. The scribes were obviously motivated to add such qualifications (interpolated from v. 4), for otherwise Paul’s gospel was characterized by too much grace. The KJV follows the longest reading found in Byz.¹

I’ve always found these types of arguments to be extremely subjective. Might it be that those who adopt the *shorter* reading have misread the text? After all, if the same idea is found in verse 4, why is it so antithetical to the context to have it in verse 1 as well?

In addition to the longer versus shorter reading, there is one word in this verse whose meaning none of the seven translations got right, at least in my opinion. That key word is the one translated *condemnation* in all seven translations. It is the Greek word *katakrima*. According to Moulton and Milligan it means “penal servitude,”² that is, slavery to sin.

In his commentary on Romans, Zane Hodges shows that *katakrima* is not the normal word for condemnation and that the other two uses of the word in Romans (5:16, 18)

and the context in Romans 8 show that it means *servitude to sin*.³

Might not Paul’s point in verse 1 be that those who walk according to the Spirit do not experience slavery to sin? After all, this verse is part of Paul’s *sanctification section* in Romans. The verses which follow clearly deal with sanctification and not justification. Paul spent much of chapter 6 showing that believers are no longer slaves of sin and challenging them to no longer live in their experience as slaves of sin. In chapter 7 he shows that a legalistic mindset will not free the believer from sin’s bondage, but will increase it.

The very last verse in Romans 7, the one immediately preceding this one, alludes to slavery to sin! It says, “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself *serve* the law of God, *but with the flesh* [I serve] *the law of sin*” (emphasis added). Does it not make sense that the next verse would build on this idea of serving God or serving sin based on whether we live according to the Spirit or the flesh?

Then in chapter 8 Paul shows how it is the Spirit of God that enables us to live in our experience as we are in our position: as those free from slavery to sin.

Regardless of how you understand Rom 8:1, it is vital that you are looking at what Paul actually wrote. Readers of English translations should realize that the issue is not merely how the translators handled the Hebrew and Greek text, but also *which text* they translated.

Abraham’s Justification: Genesis 15:6

We will now look at one famous Old Testament passage dealing with

“Might not Paul’s point in v 1 be that those who walk according to the Spirit do not experience slavery to sin?”

THINKSTOCK

grace issues to see how these translations handle it.

KJV “And he believed in the LORD; and *he counted it to him for righteousness.*”

NKJV “And he believed in the LORD, and *He accounted it to him for righteousness.*”

NASB “Then he believed in the LORD; and *He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*”

NIV “Abram believed the LORD, and *he credited it to him as righteousness.*”

HCSB “Abram believed the LORD, and *He credited it to him as righteousness.*”

ESV “And he believed the LORD, and *he counted it to him as righteousness.*”

NET “Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD *considered his response of faith worthy of a reward.*”

Here we find six translations in near agreement. But why is the NET translation so radically different? The word *righteousness*, found

in all six of the other translations, is missing here. Instead we have the word *reward*. Where the others speak of belief as being *counted* or *accounted* or *credited*, the NET Bible has *considered worthy*.

Since this text is quoted twice in the New Testament by Paul, each time with the Greek representing the idea of being accounted righteous, it seems especially odd to put forth a translation that essentially makes Paul’s use of this text illegitimate (see Rom 4:3-5 and Gal 3:6).

The NET does have four separate notes explaining how it arrived at this translation.⁴ The first explains that “believed” refers to “‘consider[ing] something reliable or dependable.’ Abram regarded the God who made this promise as reliable and fully capable of making it a reality.” This is outstanding.

The second note explains why they changed the third singular pronoun *he* to the LORD. There is certainly no problem with this, though it is really an unnecessary change.

The third note says, “*Heb* ‘and he reckoned it to him’...In this case

one might translate ‘and he reckoned it to him—[namely] righteousness.’” That is fine. Why then doesn’t the text put it that way?

The fourth note starts, “Or ‘as righteousness.’” Then an extremely odd reference is made.

“The verb translated ‘considered’ (*Heb* ‘reckoned’) also appears with *tsedaqah* (‘righteousness’) in Ps 106:31. Alluding to the events recorded in Numbers 25, the psalmist notes that Phinehas’s actions were ‘credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come.’ Reference is made to the unconditional, eternal covenant with which God rewarded Phinehas’s loyalty (Num 25:12-13). So *tsedaqah* seems to carry by metonymy the meaning ‘loyal, rewardable behavior’ here, a nuance that fits nicely in Genesis 15, where God responds to Abram’s faith by formally ratifying his promise to give Abram and his descendants the land.”

For a translator to jump from a famous text in Genesis that is oft cited in the New Testament to an obscure text in Psalms that is never

cited in the New Testament is an odd thing to do.

Frankly, I am delighted to find someone in print who takes my view of Ps 106:31. So in this sense I'm happy this note is in the NET Bible. But it would have been better if this note and translation had occurred for Ps 106:31 only.

While there are some common words in the two contexts, the differences far outweigh any similarities. Besides, Paul translates and explains Gen 15:6 for us and his translation and explanation don't match up with "Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord considered his response of faith worthy of reward."

The translation suggested in the four notes in NET is fine. But the one actually printed in the text changes *the* key Old Testament text on justification into a text on rewards. That's a shame.

How I'd Rate the Seven Translations

I rate them on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent) on the question of whether they are literal in their translation choices or whether they seek to interpret the text for the reader. This is based on our five test passages in which there was clear diversity of translation (Jas 2:14; 1 Cor 5:1; Gal 1:8-9; Gen 15:6). I will put after each how many of the four test passages they got right in terms of a careful rendering of what it says.

	Rating	Test Passages
KJV	9.5	5 for 5
NKJV	9.5	5 for 5
HCSB	8	3 for 5
ESV	8	3 for 5
NASB	7	2 for 5
NIV	5	1 for 5
NET	3	0 for 5

Conclusion

We are blessed to have scores of different Bible translations in our language. I have merely picked seven of the most popular ones to evaluate today.

While there are differences between these translations, and while I have a preference for the NKJV, I am convinced that a Christian can grow and mature using any of these texts.

Having said that, it is vital for believers to know enough about translations to know that you can't trust every nuance of every word in every translation. Sometimes translators interpret for the reader and put in words not found in the text like "so-called," "claims," "this kind of," "let him be eternally condemned," "let him be condemned to hell," "Christian," "believer," "worthy of reward," and so on.

My favorite version, the NKJV, is not perfect. I would prefer a translation that better reflects the Majority Text. But the NKJV does the best job of that, so I use it. And it does

less interpreting and paraphrasing too.

I would think that Free Grace people would want to avoid translations that fairly often introduce Lordship Salvation interpretations rather than simply translating the text. Thus I would recommend against the use of the NET Bible and the NIV for pew Bibles or for the Bible the pastor primarily uses.

Along with the NKJV, I think that the KJV, ESV, and HCSB would be quite helpful.

Whatever version you choose as your primary Bible, realize it is a translation and that no translation is perfect. Compare translations. If you can use tools that help you with the Greek and Hebrew, do so. But do not assume that your favorite translation always gets it right. It doesn't.

Whatever version you use, including the NET Bible and the NIV, I hope you use it! That is the key. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).

Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

1. *NET Bible*, 2127, fn. 9. Accessed February 2, 2015, <http://net.bible.org>.

2. J. H. Moulton & G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 327-28.

3. Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 206-209; see also 152-55.

4. *NET Bible*, 57, n. 19, 20, 21, 22. Accessed February 2, 2015, <http://net.bible.org>.



Jesus Is *the Christ*

By Brad McCoy

The New Testament term *Christ* is a very significant one. Sadly though, our familiarity with this word has in a sense devalued its impact for many modern Christians. Recently I did a word study on this term in the Gospel of John and the Epistle of 1 John. In this article I will share some of my observations based on that study. Recognizing just how strategic the title *Christ* is in the writings of John the Apostle will help us to better appreciate and apply its significance in our lives today.

First, *Christ* is the exclusive title of Jesus—who is “the Christ.” John the Baptist three times denies the application of this title to himself, or to anyone else but Jesus, in John 1:20, 25; 3:28.

Second, Jesus Himself claims to be “the Christ.” In John 10:24-25 our Lord affirms under direct questioning that He is “the Christ.” See also John 8:58.

Third, the title *Christ* is equivalent to *Messiah* as seen in John (1:41; 4:25, 29); and 7:41-42. The Old Testament had predicted that the Messiah would suffer for sins (Isa 52:13-53:12 and Ps 22:1-21). Both the Old Testament Prophets (1 Pet 1:11) and the New Testament Apostles (Acts 3:18-20; 18:28; 26:23) affirmed this fact.

Fourth, the truth that Jesus is *the Christ* is the essential content of saving faith. This is directly taught in John 20:31 and 1 John 5:1 and reflected in John 11:27 and 1 John

2:22. John 20:31 states, “but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” First John 5:1 is even more direct, declaring, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...” The perceptive reader of the New Testament will in fact notice that the gospel call is in effect simply an exhortation for men and women and boys and girls to believe on Jesus as “the Christ.” This is clearly seen in repeated apostolic gospel appeals in the Book of Acts. Notice the consistent theme articulated in the following verses:

Acts 5:42 And every day in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as *the Christ*.

Acts 9:22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this Jesus is *the Christ*.

Acts 17:2-3 And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that *the Christ* has to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am

proclaiming to you is *the Christ*.”

Acts 18:5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was *the Christ*.

Acts 18:28 And he [Apollos] powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was *the Christ*.

It is a tragedy that many Christians think of the term *Christ* simply as little more than the last name of Jesus. In fact *Christ* is a highly significant title identifying Jesus of Nazareth as the All-Sufficient Savior of everyone who places faith in Him! To believe on Jesus as *the Christ* involves supernatural enablement from God (Matt 16:16-17) and appropriates the blessed gift of eternal life (John 5:24). May we stand amazed at the glory and the grace of Jesus the Christ and propagate the tremendous truth of who He is and what He has done so that all may hear! **GLH**

Brad McCoy is the pastor of Tanglewood Bible Fellowship in Duncan, OK.

*This article originally appeared in *Grace in Focus* in November of 1990.



LIGHTSTOCK

We Know That John's Testimony Is True

(John 21:24b)

By John H. Niemelä

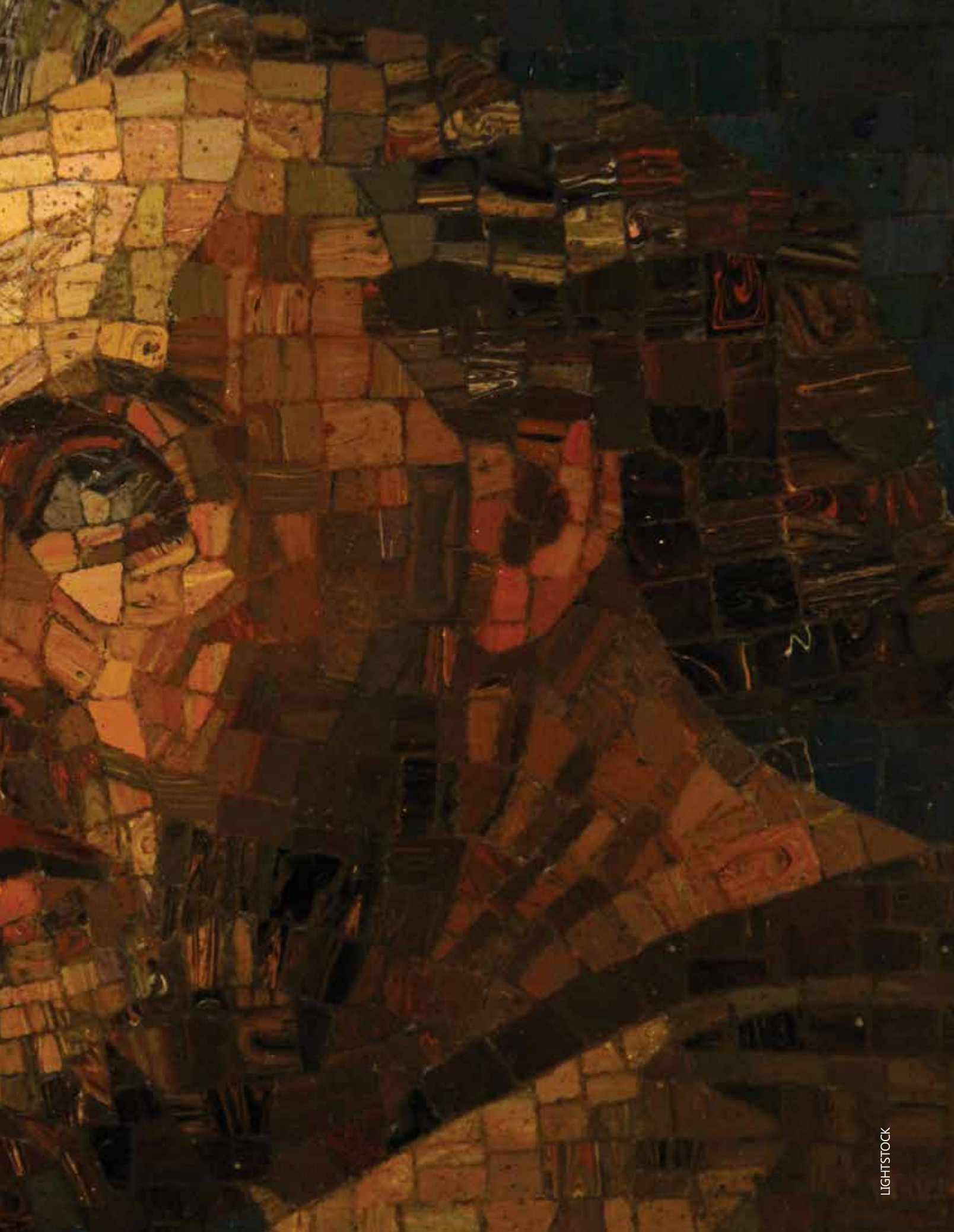
**A Date for John's Gospel before
AD 70 Is Suggested by John 5:2**

Within conservative Evangelical circles, John's Gospel is commonly dated around 95-96 AD, with a few dating it three decades earlier.

A date before AD 70 is actually required because John 5:2 says, "Now a pool is by the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem (called Bethesda in Hebrew), having five colonnades."

John says *is*, present tense, not *was*. If he had written after the siege of Jerusalem, he would have said that a pool *had been* there. Bethesda (a casualty of the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70) was uncovered in the late 1800s. Archaeologists identified it by its four surrounding colonnades and a fifth passing through the center, dividing its twin pools.





A Date Well before AD 70 Is Suggested by John 21:24

John 5:2 shows the book was written before AD 70. However, a sleeper verse in the Gospel, John 21:24, points to an even earlier date:

This is the disciple who testifies about these *things* and wrote them. Indeed, we know that his testimony is true.¹

The book's author, John, is clearly the referent of *This* in the first part of the verse and *his* in the second. Who are the *we* of the second sentence? If one surmised that John used an editorial *we* in 21:24b, he

receive the testimony of a man like John the Baptist:

You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. Now I receive no testimony from man, but I say these *things* so you may be saved.

Now, if Jesus can recommend the testimony of John the Baptist to others (cf. John 1:6-8), He certainly could do so with regard to testimony by the beloved Apostle (cf. 1 John 5:9f). The testimony of John the Apostle, his Gospel, is inspired Scripture, the very Word of God. Who would imagine that any of the Eleven would be unwilling to

encamped among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of *the* unique *One* from *the* Father, full of grace and truth.

The word translated *encamped* could also be *tabernacled* (cf. *Young's Literal Translation*), but unbelievers today reading the book would stumble over this archaic term. However, *encamped* suggests the incarnate Word dwelling temporarily as in a tent, after leaving heaven. He temporarily (as the Shekinah glory) made His presence known from the tabernacle in the Old Testament. The following clarifies the thought:

“The testimony of John the Apostle, his Gospel, is inspired Scripture, the very word of God.”

would be testifying of himself, a *faux pas*, in light of John 8:13.² The *we* of verse 24b refers to people other than John himself.

Who might they be? The purpose statement (20:30f) gives a clue:

Thus Jesus did many other signs *in the presence of His disciples*, which are not written in this book. But these *signs* are written so you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [this], you may by His name have life (emphasis added).

John focuses on signs seen by two or more disciples. This is true of all eight signs he records. On this basis, consider the possibility that *we* (John 21:24b) refers to the rest of the Eleven. When speaking about who will testify at the Great White Throne in John 5:31ff, Jesus says that He does not receive the testimony of man (5:33f), while recommending that ordinary people should

jointly testify that John's Gospel-testimony is true? Certainly, no one would suggest that any of them would deny John's testimony.

Instead, though, most conservative Evangelicals think John wrote his Gospel after the rest of the Apostles had died or were scattered across the face of the globe. They would say, “Of course, the rest of the Apostles would have welcomed John's Gospel, but they never saw it.” But then whose endorsement of John's Gospel-testimony appears in 21:24b? If *we* means John alone, then he testifies by himself—carrying no legal weight. If *we* means people other than the Eleven, what legal weight would that carry? The only human endorsement that fits would be that of those who could jointly testify with John, namely, the Eleven.

John himself reinforces this understanding of *we* in John 1:14:

And the Word became flesh and

And the Word became flesh and did Shekinah [*skēnoō*] among us, and we saw His [Shekinah] glory [*doxa*], [Shekinah] glory [*doxa*] as of *the* unique *One* from *the* Father, full of grace and truth.

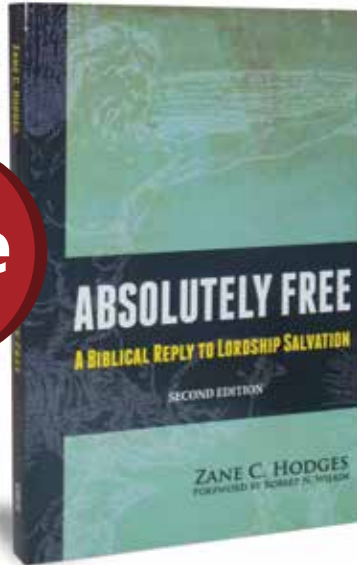
Now, the question is: Who exactly saw this glory of Jesus Christ, God's Son? John 2:11 says,

This first of signs Jesus did [water to wine] in Cana of Galilee, and He displayed His glory. So His disciples believed in Him.

His signs displayed His glory. John 20:30f says John selected eight signs from among those which Jesus did *in the presence of His disciples*. He revealed His glory, especially to His disciples, as He did His many signs. As John 21:24b says: *We know that his [John's] testimony is true*. The Apostles willingly testified jointly with John. First John also expresses this same truth.

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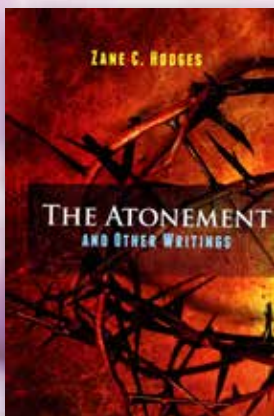
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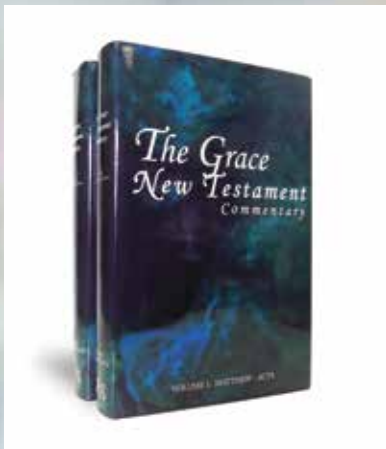
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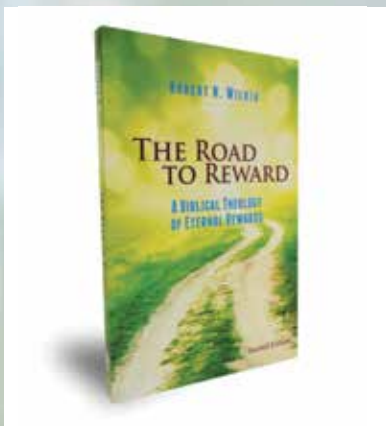
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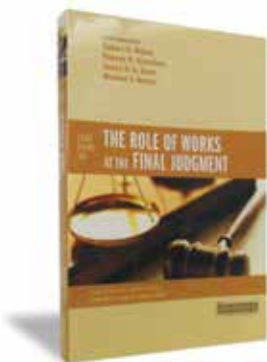
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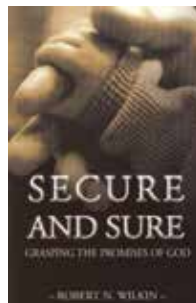
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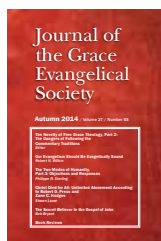
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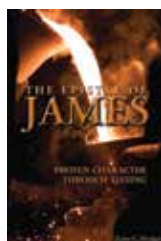
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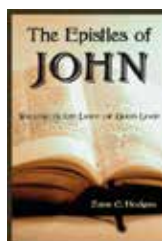


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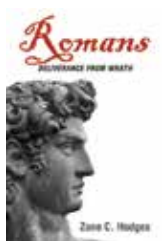


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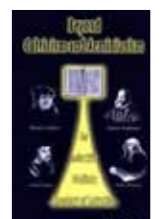


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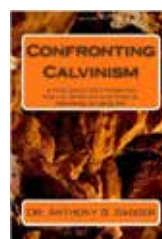


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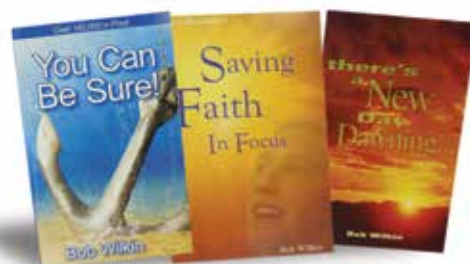
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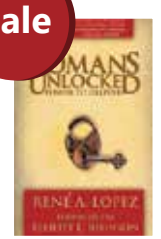
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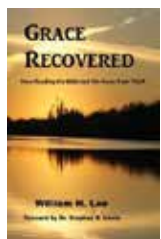


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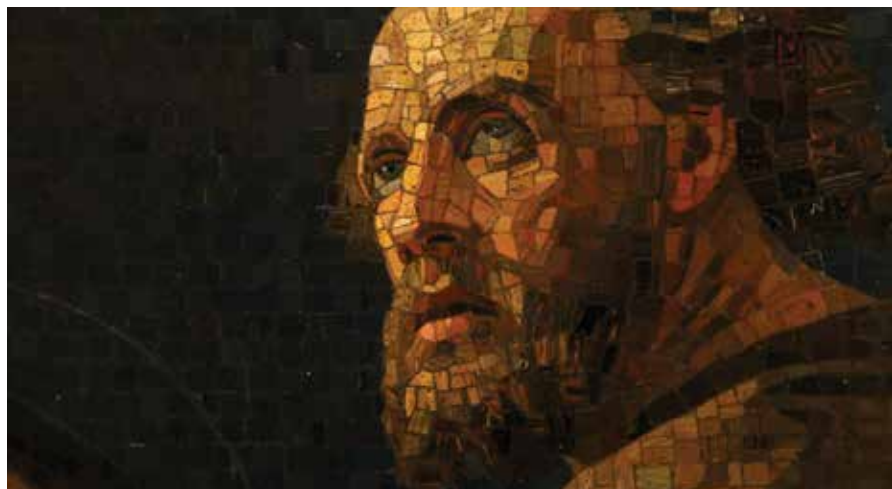
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This same understanding of the first person plural is found at the start of John's first epistle:

That which was from *the* beginning, that which we have heard, that which *we* have seen with *our* eyes, which *we* watched, and *our* hands handled concerning the message of life—and the life was manifested, and *we* have seen, testify, and announce to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to *us*—that which *we* have seen and heard, *we* announce to you... (1 John 1:1-3a, emphasis added).

Conclusion

Believers may wonder, "Why would God design only one book, John's Gospel, specifically for unbelievers?" John 21:24 may be the answer. The rest of the Eleven said, in effect, "John wrote *the final word* on the topic; one such book is sufficient." They received their message of life from Jesus Himself, just as John did. Similarly, Paul says that his message of life came directly from Jesus, not even through other Apostles (Gal 1:11f). John has recorded what Jesus wanted him to tell unbelievers; the Spirit did not need to inspire a second book aimed at that audience.

A reasonable corollary to the foregoing would be that John's Gospel may well have been distributed to the areas where each of the Eleven (and Paul) ministered. A reader could say to Peter or another of the Eleven, "Could you explain this passage in John?" What better human endorsement could John's Gospel have than the Eleven who accompanied Jesus and were appointed as Apostles by Him? ■

John H. Niemelä is Professor of New Testament at Rocky Mountain Seminary, Englewood, CO.

1. All Bible translations by the author.
2. The Pharisees charged Jesus with invalid testimony, because (they thought) He *alone* testified of Himself. He responded that the Father also testified of Him (8:18).

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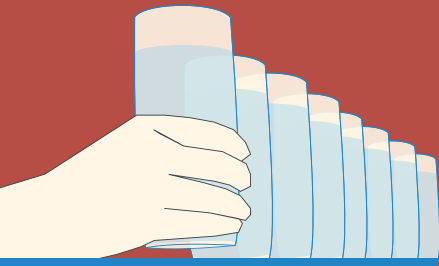
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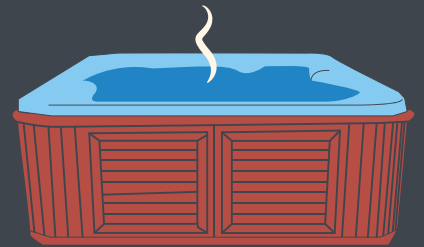
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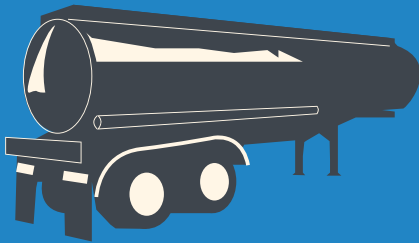
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THE WARNING PASSAGES IN HEBREWS (PART 1)



By Shawn Lazar

Have you ever stopped to read the warning labels on the products you buy? My bottle of cat shampoo says, “Caution: The contents of this bottle should not be fed to fish or children.” An electric drill I got for Christmas says, “Not intended for use in dentistry.” And here’s a children’s birthday card that says, “Keep away from small children.” The world is full of warnings. Some we can safely ignore. But there are others we ignore at our peril. This is true of the five warning passages in Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29).

Evangelicals are divided over what they mean. Arminians generally interpret them as warnings to believers that they will lose their eternal salvation if they persist in sin and unbelief. Calvinists either interpret them as warnings to false professors that they’ll be eternally lost if they don’t believe in Christ, or as exhortations to the elect warning them of a hypothetical loss of eternal salvation. Significantly, both Arminians and Calvinists agree that the warnings are about eternal life or eternal death.

What is the best way to understand these crucial passages?

In this article, I will present a Free Grace interpretation of the first two warnings in Hebrews, showing that they warn believers about God’s discipline in this life and about a potential loss of rewards in the Messianic kingdom to come.

Were the Hebrews Believers?

One of the disagreements between Arminians and Calvinists is over whether or not the Hebrews were believers or whether they were false professors. In order to settle that question, consider that the readers are described as:

- Holy (3:1)
- Brethren (3:1, 12)
- Companions (or partakers) of the heavenly calling (3:1)

- God’s house (3:6)
- Companions (or partakers) of the Messiah (3:14)
- People who should have been mature enough to be teachers (5:12)
- Enlightened (6:4)
- Having tasted the heavenly gift (6:4)
- Companions (or partakers) of the Holy Spirit (6:4)
- Having tasted the good Word of God (6:5)
- Having tasted the powers of the age to come (6:5)
- Having loved the Lord’s name (6:10)
- Sanctified (10:10, 29)
- Perfected (10:14)

Can these terms apply to unbelievers? Are unregenerate people *holy*? Are they *God’s house*? Should they be *Christian teachers*? Do they *partake of the Holy Spirit*? Do they *love the Lord’s name*? Do they have a *confession to hold fast to* or to depart from? Are they *enlightened, sanctified, or perfected*?

These questions answer themselves. There can be little doubt the warnings in Hebrews were addressed to regenerate people. In fact, the inspired author included himself in the warnings he was giving (the “we” of Heb 2:1-4), and there is no doubt that he was regenerate.

So who were the Hebrews? They were a community of Jewish believers the author hoped to visit (13:23). They were at risk of apostatizing from Christianity and returning to Judaism, so the author wrote to convince them of the superiority of Christ over Moses, and of the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant. Their faith may have been wavering, but there is no doubt they were believers.

The First Warning: Don’t Drift Away From Faith in Christ (Heb 2:1-4)

In chapter 1, the author explained how vastly superior Jesus was to anything in creation, especially angels. In chapter 2 the author drew an inference (beginning with **Therefore** [*Dia touto*]), from Christ’s superiority, arguing that since Christ is greater than the angels, the

Hebrews should give **earnest heed** to what they have been taught about Him **lest** they **drift away** from faith in Jesus. The Greek word for *drift away* (*pararreō*) also appears in Prov 3:21, where it suggests a gradual departure from the truth. David Allen points out that it is a nautical term (cf. Heb 6:19) that evokes the image of a boat that has become unanchored and is slowly drifting away at sea.¹ The author could see that the Jewish believers were at risk of slowly drifting back into Judaism, which would put them in danger of God's judgment. In that way, there's analogy between the law and the gospel, for if disobeying the law (the word spoken through angels)

a second time, apart from sin, *for salvation*" (Heb 9:28, emphasis added; cf. Rom 13:11; 1 Pet 1:5). So we shouldn't assume that salvation always means being born again. The nature of the *great salvation* needs to be identified from the context.

Second, the salvation the author had in mind was still future. We know that everlasting life is a present possession (John 3:16). But the author said the salvation he was speaking of would happen in "the world to come" (Heb 2:5; cf. Heb 1:14). That future expectation would align with his statement that Christ's Second Coming is a salvific event (Heb 9:28).

Third, the Old Testament quotes leading up to this warning and

of His "companions" who share in his rule (see below). Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes from Psalm 102, which speaks of the Lord appearing in glory to rebuild Zion and ruling forever over the nations (vv 12-17, 25-26). Hebrews 1:13 quotes Ps 110:1 to once again emphasize the Messiah's right to rule (being at God's right hand) and His victory over His enemies. As you can see, there's no mistaking the point the author is making. All these verses point to the glory of the Messiah, His rule, His victory, and His future kingdom.

Fourth, Hebrews introduces the concept of believers as "companions" (*metochos*) of the Messiah.

"The great salvation the Hebrews risked neglecting was related to the future reign of God's Son, the Messiah, and the role of being His companions in the kingdom."

incurred consequences (a **just reward**), then so would neglecting the **great salvation** of the gospel. The question is, what kind of "salvation" were the Hebrews neglecting?

First, we shouldn't take *salvation* as a technical term meaning *salvation from hell*. If you check your concordance for the uses of *save* (*sōzō*) and *salvation* (*sōtēria*) you'll find that all the Old Testament uses, and the majority of New Testament uses, refer to deliverance from life-threatening dangers, not to salvation from hell. For example, Heb 11:7 speaks of Noah's household being saved from drowning in the Flood. But salvation could also refer to future events like the Second Coming: "To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear

immediately following it emphasize Jesus' future Messianic kingship. Hebrews 1:5a quotes Ps 2:7, a royal enthronement Psalm that ultimately points to the enthronement of the Messiah. Hebrews 1:5b quotes 2 Sam 7:14, which refers to the Davidic covenant and the promised heir to the throne, which is also a reference to the Messiah's rule. Hebrews 1:6 quotes Ps 97:7, which refers to the future reign of the Lord, when He will vanquish His enemies and be worshipped by all. Hebrews 1:7 quotes Ps 104:4, which is a creation Psalm, and points to the Son's power and sovereign rule. Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes Ps 45:6-7, which describes a royal wedding, the Messiah's eternal throne, and introduces the important concept

This is a key theme throughout the epistle. The Hebrews are called companions of a heavenly calling (3:1), of Christ (3:14), of the Holy Spirit (6:4), and of God's discipline (12:8). As F. F. Bruce suggests, calling believers *companions* carries a special meaning in that it points to their participation in the Messianic kingdom, i.e. ruling with Christ.²

Given these reasons, there is a strong case to be made that the *great salvation* the Hebrews were neglecting was not the message of how to be born again, but the good news about Christ's future kingdom, which was the main subject of the Lord's teaching between His resurrection and ascension to heaven (Acts 1:3). If believers become indifferent to that future



“Calling believers *companions* carries a special meaning in that it points to their participation in the Messianic kingdom.”

salvation, there will be consequences they can't **escape**. However, the author does not yet tell us what those consequences may be.

The Second Warning: Be Diligent to Enter God's Rest (3:7–4:13)

The second warning concerns the concept of entering “God's rest.” The author drew a parallel between the Hebrews' current situation, and the dark events described in Numbers 13–14, when Israel rebelled against God.

You'll remember how the Lord commanded that men be sent into Canaan to spy out the land, only to have ten of the twelve men come back with a negative report, warning about the imposing size and strength of the Canaanites (as if the Lord was not greater than all). Fear gripped the Israelites. They refused to enter the land to take possession of it. They wished they had died in the wilderness (Num 14:2). Some even wanted to find another leader to take them back to Egypt (Num 14:2, 4).

For God, that was the last straw. Israel had murmured and grumbled before, but now they had made an irrevocable decision. Although God forgave the Israelites their sin (Num 14:20), they still had to face a penalty for their rebellion. God decreed that, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, everyone over the age of twenty would die in the wilderness instead of entering the land (Num 14:29–35).

By recalling this event, the author of Hebrews invoked a principle about God's judgment. Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains it this way:

The principle in Scripture is that once a point of no return is reached, the offenders are subject to divine judgment. The judgment is physical, not spiritual; it does not mean loss of salvation. In fact, Numbers 14:20 does say that the people repented; it even goes on to say that God forgave the sin. It did not affect anyone's individual salvation, but the physical consequences of their sin did need to be paid. Once a point of no return is reached, no matter how much repenting one does thereafter, the fact

of coming physical judgment cannot be changed... [I]n the Old Testament, the issue is physical death and loss of temporal blessings but not loss of salvation.³

Like Israel, the readers of Hebrews risked facing a similar penalty because they were on the verge of their own irrevocable rebellion, as described in Heb 3:7–4:13. So the author warned them that since Jesus is greater than Moses (3:3–6), the penalty for rebelling against Him would be worse than that experienced by Israel. The Hebrews were warned that they should not **harden their hearts as in the rebellion**. The Israelites did not **enter** God's **rest**, and the Hebrews risked the same fate if they departed **from the living God** (3:12).

The big question is, what is “God's rest”? Does it mean the Hebrews were at risk of not entering heaven? Does it mean they were going to miss out on eternal life?

The evidence strongly suggests that once again this is a reference to

the Messianic kingdom. There are three reasons for taking it that way.

First, the concept of rest had a Messianic meaning. The Israelites who entered Canaan never possessed it fully so they developed a Messianic expectation that God's promises to them would be completely fulfilled in the future. That's why the author explained if **Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day** (4:8, HCSB). There was another day coming, when the Messiah would establish His kingdom in the land, finally providing an ultimate rest for **the people of God** (4:9; cf. Isa 11:10).

Second, the **gospel** that was **preached** to the Hebrews, and which the Israelites did not believe (**not being mixed with faith**), was not the message of how to be born again. The Bible mentions several different gospels, one of the most important being the "gospel of the kingdom," which was the good news that the Messiah had come and was offering the kingdom to Israel. That is the gospel being referred to here. The Israelites didn't believe the rudimentary message about God's promise of inheriting a land of milk and honey (Exod 3:17). Likewise, the Hebrews were at risk of missing God's promise of a Messianic rest if they neglected what they heard about His future reign (1:1-14).

Third, the rest being spoken of is conditioned on something other than faith, which suggests it is related to eternal rewards, not to eternal life. As we know, we receive everlasting life as a gift, apart from our works (Eph 2:8-9). God credits righteousness to the ungodly who simply believe and do not work (Rom 4:5). By contrast, eternal rewards are earned by being

faithful (1 Cor 3:11-15; Rev 22:12). So when the author of Hebrews warned his readers they will be **companions of Christ** if they hold **steadfast to the end** (3:14), and they may not enter the rest **because of disobedience** (4:6, 11), he was using the language of eternal rewards. Remaining Christ's companions who will share in His rule is entirely conditional on whether or not their

"If the Jewish believers left Christ for Judaism, they would suffer God's temporal judgment and miss ruling with the Messiah in His kingdom."

faith has become profitable (4:2). A believer's faith must be put into action in order for it to be profitable (e.g., maintaining one's confession during persecution or providing for the physical needs of the poor, cf. Jas 2:14-16). Paul Tanner points out that if the Hebrews didn't put their faith into action, if, instead, they actually apostatized, they wouldn't lose their eternal salvation, but they would risk being disciplined by God and losing rewards in the kingdom, such as being a companion of the Messiah.⁴ They needed to understand that once the kingdom came, and the rest was entered, believers will have **ceased from their works**. The rewards will already have been given at the Judgment Seat of Christ and there will be no more opportunity for eternal rewards.

In sum, this warning compares Israel possessing Canaan with the believer entering the "rest" of the Messianic kingdom, where Christ's enemies will be vanquished. However, not every believer will share in Christ's eternal victory as His companions. If the Jewish believers left Christ for Judaism, they would suffer God's temporal judgment and miss ruling with the Messiah in His kingdom.

Conclusion

If we interpret the first two warnings in Hebrews as being about a possible loss of everlasting life, we not only deny Jesus' promise of eternal security (John 10:28-29), but we also fail to do justice to the rich Messianic imagery of Hebrews and the promise of a kingdom still to come. Believers should derive hope from the fact that one day soon, if we are faithful, we will rule with Christ as His companions. But we should also realize there will be consequences if we rebel against Him in this life. **GH**

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society.

1. David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 191-92.

2. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 20-21, 68.

3. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 43.

4. J. Paul Tanner, "Hebrews," *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 2:1044.

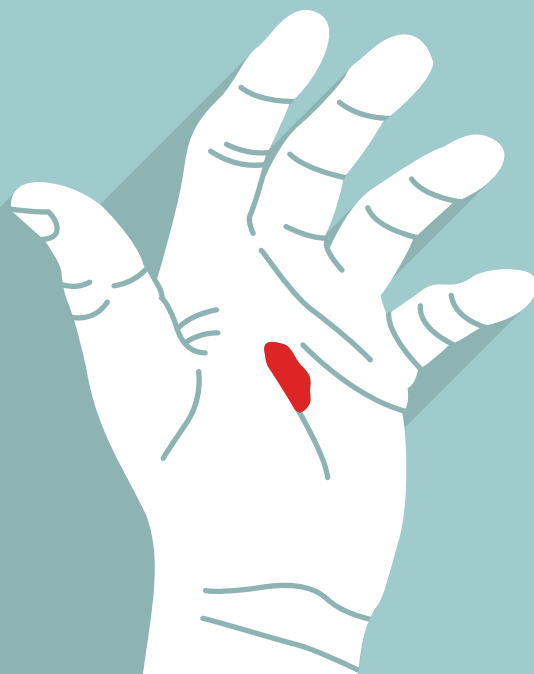


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By Bob Wilkin

“When we think of slavery, we think of the very worst kind of human existence possible. But when the Bible describes us as slaves to Jesus Christ, is that what we should think of?”

Kunte Kinte was abducted from his village in Africa and sold into slavery in the United States. He was treated horribly by his master. After running away several times, his master disabled him. Alex Hailey’s famed TV series *Roots* was a jarring introduction to the evils that often accompany slavery.

When you think of slavery, what comes to mind? Is it the millions of men, women, and children kidnapped by fellow Africans and sold to Europeans to work the colonies? Or maybe you think of the Hebrews escaping across the Red Sea from their Egyptian masters? Or Spartacus leading the revolt against Rome? Or modern-day Christian women being sold into slavery by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq? Whatever image of slavery comes to mind, it is most likely a grim one. When we think of slavery, we think of the very worst kind of human existence possible. But when the Bible describes us as slaves to Jesus Christ, is that what we should think of?

In the first chapter of *The Gospel According to Jesus* (hereafter *TGAJ*), John MacArthur argues that the Bible’s description of Christians as slaves tells us something about the nature of saving faith. In sum, slaves were subservient to their masters, hence MacArthur believes that to be born again one must surrender to Christ as Lord. Is MacArthur right?

A Word about Words

MacArthur begins by examining two words, *Lord* (*kurios*) and slave (*doulos*), and rightly sees the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus in the former term and our status in the latter term. He suggests that many New Testament translations have de-emphasized the word *doulos* by translating it as *servant*, rather than as *slave*, which he thinks minimizes its impact.

However, as is his practice throughout *TGAJ*, MacArthur makes pronouncements that are not backed by Scripture, such as this one:

Doulos speaks of slavery, pure and simple. It is not at all a hazy or uncertain term. It describes someone *lacking personal freedom and personal rights* whose very existence is defined by his service to another. It is a sort of slavery in which “human autonomy is set aside and an alien will takes precedence of [sic] one’s own.” This is total, unqualified submission to the control and the direction of a higher authority—*slavery*, not merely service at one’s own discretion (*italics added*).¹

On the one hand, MacArthur is right that *doulos* sometimes refers to a common slave. On the other hand, he fails to mention that it often refers to a king’s official or to people who are officials for God Himself.

The leading dictionary of New Testament Greek lists two main senses of *doulos*: “1. male slave as an entity in a socioeconomic context, *slave*” and “2. One who is solely committed to another, *slave, subject*” (BDAG, p. 260AB, *emphasis original*). But under the second definition BDAG lists two types of uses: “a. in a pejorative sense,” and “b. in a positive sense” (p. 260B). Under the positive use of *doulos* BDAG lists “α. in relation to a superior human being...of a king’s officials” and “β. especially of the relationship of humans to God” (p. 260B).

When MacArthur talks about being a slave, his explanation does not appear to have any positive sense at all; yet BDAG lists slavery to God as a positive thing, just as being one of “a king’s officials” is certainly a positive thing. Indeed BDAG lists being apostles and Christian prophets as positive examples of being a *doulos* (p. 260C).

MacArthur’s interpretation of what it means to be a slave does not fit with many texts of Scripture. For example, MacArthur says that Christians *lack personal rights*. However, Paul asserts that he and Barnabas,

both slaves of Christ (Acts 14:14; Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1), had rights:

Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? (1 Cor 9:4-6, emphasis added).

Also, MacArthur says that, since believers are slaves, they *lack personal freedom*. By contrast, Paul spoke of the freedom that believers in Christ have:

If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, *and you desire to go*, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience's sake (1 Cor 10:27, emphasis added).

Accepting or declining an invitation certainly sounds a lot like freedom of choice for believers. And don't believers also have freedom in the matter of marriage? Aren't believers free to choose whom they wish to marry? Paul says they are:

A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, *she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes*, only in the Lord (1 Cor 7:39, emphasis added).

When MacArthur says that Christians have no personal freedom or rights, he is misstating the meaning of *doulos* while ignoring contexts that do not support his explanation.

MacArthur goes on to mention five passages (Matt 6:24; 1 Cor 6:19-20; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 5:9; Rom 14:7-9), evidently thinking that they prove that believers have no freedom and no rights. But none of the verses he cites supports what he is saying.

For example, MacArthur says, "We have a Master who bought us (2 Peter 2:1)" (p. 28). Of course, it is absolutely true that Jesus is our Master (*despotēs*). *Despotēs* is used four times in the New Testament of the Lord Jesus as our Master (2 Tim 2:21; 2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4; Rev 6:10). And it is certainly true that the Lord Jesus bought us (*agorazō*). The word *agorazō* is used four times in the New Testament in reference to redemption, whether for all mankind (Matt 13:46) or for believers (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23). But the verse MacArthur specifically cites is 2 Pet 2:1, which doesn't refer to the redemption of believers at all:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

When MacArthur says, "We have a Master who bought us," he is referring to believers, not false teachers. Yet Peter is talking about false teachers. MacArthur misses the distinction. The fact that the Lord bought false teachers does not in any way prove that believers have no freedoms or rights.

None of the other passages MacArthur cites indicate that believers lack freedoms or rights either (Matt 6:24; 1 Cor 6:19-20; Rev 5:9; Rom 14:7-9). He is simply citing verses that use the words *Master* (*despotēs*) or *bought/redeemed* (*agorazō*) without examining whether they prove his point.

Why Such a Revolting Concept?

The title of this section shows that MacArthur thinks being a slave of Jesus Christ is "a revolting concept." It is true that being a slave (*doulos*) in the ancient world was a bad thing. No one would want to be in such a position, especially modern people who enjoy a wide range of personal freedoms. But MacArthur's arguments are misleading. While the New Testament does describe us as slaves, there isn't *an exact equivalence* between being the slave of a pagan and being Jesus' slave. It's a metaphor. And all metaphors have their proper limits.

The truth is, following Christ can involve hardship and suffering. But to call it "revolting" may be good rhetoric, but poor exposition. On the contrary, being Jesus' slave is a good thing, not a bad thing. It's not revolting; it's an honor and a great responsibility. For the person who understands who Jesus is and what is to come, being His slave is a wonderful concept. Indeed, it's the very best thing you can be!

To say, "They understood far better than we do what a menial position He was calling them to" (p. 29) is another exaggeration of the slave metaphor. Yes, Christ's Apostles would experience debasement. But the kind of debasement they experienced was less like a Roman *doulos*, and much more like what Jesus Himself experienced. Remember that in His first coming, the Lord Jesus Himself came as a slave:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—*just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve*, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:25-28, emphasis added).

MacArthur fails to point out here that Jesus first came to serve (though he does later, on p. 34), which is an important omission.

In His First Coming, Jesus came to serve others, not to be served. In His Second Coming the Lord Jesus will come to be served. Will serving Him be revolting? Absolutely not! In fact, if we are faithful in our service for Him in this life, we will actually *reign* with Him in the life to come (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26). Jody Dillow entitled his book on eternal rewards, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. That captures the idea well.

Christians are slaves to Christ. But that kind of slavery is not a revolting concept!

The Problem with a Feel-Good Gospel

MacArthur hopes his emphasis on slavery will help counteract what he perceives as a major problem today, namely, “a feel-good gospel” (p. 30). And what is that? He identifies it with what he calls “the no-lordship message” and “the no-lordship doctrine” (p. 30), the most disastrous form of the “feel-good gospel.” He says that “the whole gist of the no-lordship message” is as follows:

You can have Jesus as Savior and Friend here and now and decide later whether you really want to be submitted to His authority or not. It is hard to imagine a more disastrous twisting of what it means to be a Christian (p. 30).

It is unfortunate that MacArthur chose pejorative labels like “the no-lordship message” when the people he is criticizing call our view *Free Grace theology*. We believe in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and call for people to submit to Him and live for Him. The very name “no-lordship doctrine” is offensive to Free Grace proponents. And it is misleading.

Free Grace teachers say that only by following the Lord can anyone have meaning and significance in life. Believers who do not yield to Christ are miserable. Why would anyone want that?

But it is true that Free Grace proponents, unlike MacArthur, do not make submitting to Christ a condition of receiving everlasting life. Submission is a condition for discipleship and for the fullness of life which God wants us to have.

Free Grace preachers use MacArthur’s own term for his position, namely, *Lordship Salvation*. If we were to call his view *the no-grace doctrine*, *the no-grace message*, or *the feel-good gospel*, we would be using pejorative language that would offend people we hope to reach.

MacArthur does believe that the grace of God is essential for anyone to be born again. His church is called *Grace Community Church*. His radio ministry is called *Grace to You*. He speaks a lot about grace. He differs from Free Grace people in that in his view the grace of God motivates and enables “the elect” to

repent, submit, commit, obey, and persevere so that they might gain kingdom entrance. In his view the grace of God must be wedded with our works in order for anyone to escape eternal condemnation.

Since the debate between Lordship Salvation and Free Grace Salvation will be discussed throughout this book, there is no need for a lengthy discussion of the differences here. Instead, a few observations about the basic differences follow.

First, the decision to submit to Christ, which MacArthur says one must make to be born again, is just that, a decision. But the new birth is not a decision. Decisionism is wrong in terms of the new birth, as MacArthur himself says elsewhere in *TGAJ* (pp. 37, 116). Of course, an unbeliever

can and should decide to submit to Christ. But submitting to Christ won’t save anyone.

Second, MacArthur points people inward for assurance. He wants people to look for the “telltale mark of authentic saving faith” (p. 32). But the Lord Jesus pointed people away from themselves to Himself (John 3:16; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:35; 11:25-26). Believing in Jesus’ promise of everlasting life is the true basis of assurance.

Third, salvation, according to MacArthur, is hard work. It is work that does not end until death or the Rapture. But salvation, according to Jesus, is not hard work, it’s a free gift received by faith alone, apart from any work (John 3:16; 4:10; 6:28-29).

Fourth, the message of justification by faith alone is not a “feel-good” message, contrary to MacArthur’s claim. If it were, there wouldn’t be 1.2 billion Catholics, 300 million Eastern Orthodox, and 25 million

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Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses who reject the Free Grace message and instead believe in salvation by grace through faith plus works. And most of the 800 million Protestants hope to be saved by a mixture of faith and works. Clearly the message of Lordship Salvation is much more popular than the Free Grace message.

Slavery and True Liberty

MacArthur ends the chapter by saying that the gospel is an invitation to slavery (p. 34), and it's impossible not to see that he makes everlasting life depend upon a mixture of faith and works. How else can you understand the following?

The gospel according to Jesus calls sinners to give up their independence, deny themselves, submit to an alien will, and abandon their rights in order to be owned and controlled by the Lord (p. 35).


Does the law require anything more or less than such complete submission? A bit later MacArthur adds:

But remove that spirit of submission, and the most profound kind of "admiration" for Christ is not even true faith at all. Yielding completely to Christ's lordship is that vital an element of true saving faith, and therefore the proclamation of His lordship is an absolutely necessary component of the true gospel (p. 36).

Aside from the serious problems this raises for Paul's argument about justification and the law, a more fundamental question is, *what evidence is there that the call*

to follow Christ is the same as the call to be born again? MacArthur offers no such evidence.

Conclusion

No doubt the Bible teaches that believers are Jesus' slaves. And MacArthur is right to call attention to this neglected subject in preaching. But he also takes things too far. He exaggerates the analogy between grueling pagan slavery and slavery to Christ, and he wrongly makes submission to Christ as one's Master a condition for receiving everlasting life without a shred of Biblical proof to support his claims. 

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1. John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Revised and Expanded Anniversary Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 28. All quotations in this article are from the 2008 edition unless otherwise indicated. Hereafter cited as TGAJ.

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Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we send *Grace in Focus* magazine free to nearly 11,000 households. However, since we are a donation-based ministry, we don't want to waste our resources sending the magazine where it isn't wanted. In order to keep our mailing list current, every couple of years we send subscription renewal letters to people who haven't donated to GES or purchased anything from our bookstore. We hope they still want to receive the magazine. If we get a reply saying they do, they stay on the mailing list. If we get no response, they get taken off.

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From our Inbox:

"Very grateful for your stand on justification by faith. It's a very strange business that so few get the fact that when Jesus said "eternal" in John 3:16 He actually meant it. Thanks for keeping 'eternal' eternal."



From Mississippi:

"I thought you did a great job in your article on Joseph Prince. You handled it well. My dad even picked up your magazine to read a little Free Grace stuff. Thanks for your website—it's very needed. Keep up the good work!"

From North Carolina:

"This is a very good and solid magazine. I love it. I read it from cover to cover, and even the cover! I would pay a subscription price if you had one."

From Arizona:

"We have learned from and have enjoyed the magazine. Thanks so much!"

From Mississippi:

"Keep teaching the gospel of the Bible and helping to expose the many man-made gospels now being promoted in most churches. Thanks y'all!"

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