

MARCH/APRIL 2016

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FROMTHEEDITOR

wo GES partners went to be with the Lord in Nov-Dec 2015.
Sande and her husband David have attended the GES annual conference many times. They have lived and ministered in Tempe, AZ, for the past 42 years. Sande taught AWANA, mostly teaching High School students, for 38 years. From 1972 until only recently when her health would not allow it she listened daily to J. Vernon McGee and the Thru the Bible Radio Program. She had Stage IV adenocarcinoma of the pancreas and went to be

with the Lord on Nov 22, 2015. She was 73.

Carolyn and Arch Rutherford attended nearly every GES annual conference. Arch pastored and Carolyn ministered for nearly 40 years in Ohio, Montana, and Southern California. Arch and Carolyn were good friends of Zane Hodges and had him in their home many times. Sharon and I are also good friends with the Rutherfords, having stayed in each other's homes many times. Seven years ago Arch and Carolyn moved to Colorado and became missionaries with Biblical Education by Extension in India and in Burma (Myanmar). On Dec 11 Carolyn went to the hairdresser and suffered a massive heart attack. CPR brought her back, but two days later she passed into the presence of the Lord on Dec 13, 2015. She was 74.

Whenever a beloved friend dies, it reminds us of two things.

First, the pain caused by our separation from our loved ones reminds us that God created us for relationship. That's what makes the separation so painful. We long to be with our departed loved ones because God created to live in fellowship, not



A Little While Yet

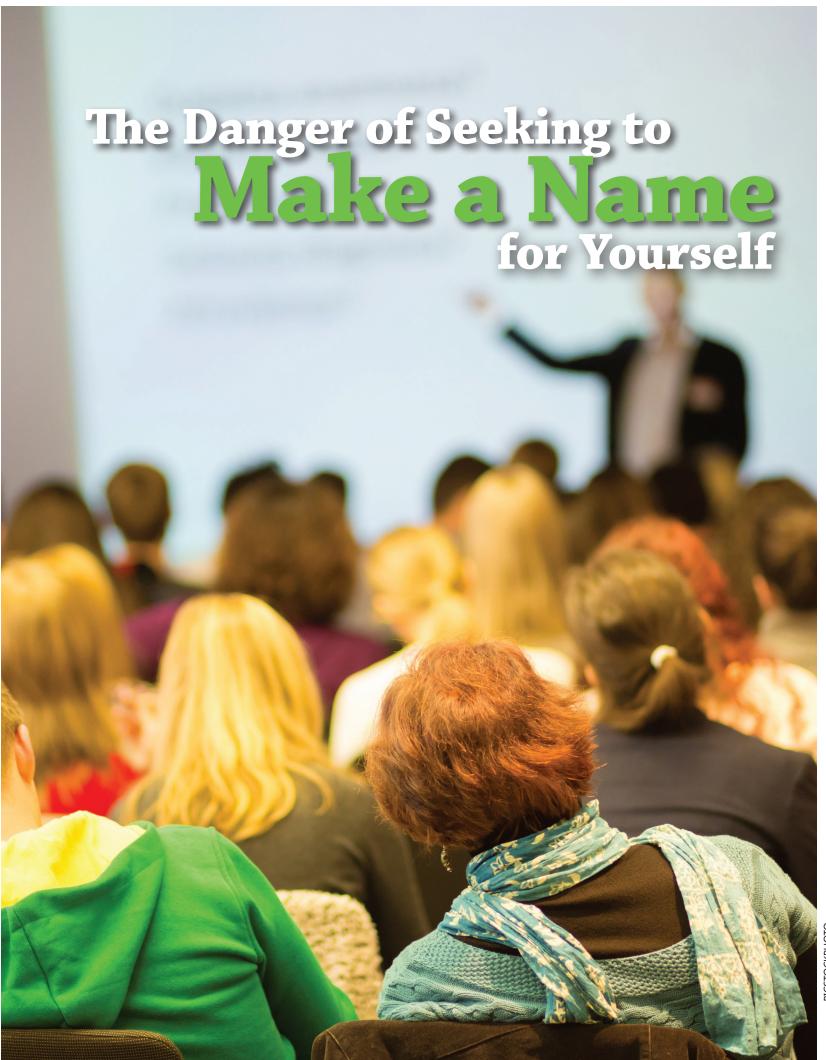
Bob Wilkin, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Sol Will.

just with each other, but especially with Him. And He wants that loving fellowship to continue into eternity.

Second, we are reminded that Christ took away the sting of death. When a believer goes to be with the Lord, we know our separation from them is temporary. Soon we will be reunited with them, not just in spirit, but in body too. As believers, we do not need to say "Goodbye," but "See you soon!"

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By Bob Wilkin

The Warning of Zane Hodges in 1983

was taking a Greek course on the exegesis of James and the Johannine epistles with Zane Hodges as my professor. I remember the day we discussed Jas 4:4, which says, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Commenting on this verse, Zane warned us about the danger of seeking to become recognized in the academic world as Bible scholars. Here is what I wrote in my class notes:

"There is danger in having a deep desire to find approval by the unsaved scholars. That never really comes unless one slides in his theological position and hence becomes a liberal himself. The root problem is a desire for friendship with the world."

I was in the doctoral program at the time and hoped to graduate within a few years. I found his warning to be much needed by me, and by all of us in the class.

The Warning of Eta Linnemann in 1990

In light of some of the writing and research I've been doing lately, I purchased Eta Linnemann's Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology? I came across a quote that reflected the same concerns I'd heard from Zane in 1983. But Linnemann's warning was especially jarring because here was a woman who for years had been recognized as a leading New Testament scholar and a very dedicated liberal. Then she came to faith in Christ and her views amazingly changed. She soon became a proponent for a conservative view of the Scriptures.

She wrote:

The exegete's task [in liberal circles] is to *discover* and solve "difficulties" in the text of the Bible. The better the interpreter, the more ingenious this will be. For to amount to anything a professor must "make a name"... It is necessary to strive for human recognition, even if the professor is characteristically disinterested in such accolades...They are under compulsion to make a name for themselves and to strive for human honor (Historical Criticism, pp. 87-88).

These Warnings Are for All of Us

Linnemann then applied this same warning to those studying the Scriptures: "A theology student who has not yet died to the need for the recognition of men stands under the same pressure" (*Historical Criticism*, p. 88).

Of course, this same warning applies to all students of the Word of God, whether they be in a Sunday School class, a discipleship group, a home Bible study, a course in a Christian college or seminary, or just a worshipper on Sunday morning. We are to take what we learn from God's Word and share it with our children, our friends, our family, our neighbors, and anyone who will listen. But if our goal is to impress people, then we are misguided. James warned, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (Jas 3:1). While all Christians are to teach their children and others, only some are official teachers in a congregation. The ones who nurture the flock will be especially accountable at the Bema for what they said in the church.

I must confess that I like it when on those rare occasions I receive feedback that a particular article or sermon was well liked by a number of people. Most of the time I receive very little feedback. That makes it easier to see God as my true audience. But I do try hard not to write or preach so as to make a name for myself or to gain the praise of men.

However, even though the Free Grace position is a minority position, we must take care that we don't even seek the praise of men within our own orbit. If we ever forget that it is God whom we want to please, we are in trouble. No matter how small our church or group, if we are seeking the praise of men, we need to stop that.

Each of us must guard our own hearts. We must seek to please God, not men. We should pray about this regularly.

I love the story of one pastor of a very large church. After each service he would shake hands. When

"Each of us must guard our own hearts. We must seek to please God, not men. We should pray about this regularly."

people would say, "Great sermon, Pastor," he'd say, "Thanks so much" or "Thanks for the encouragement." After the final service was done and the last person had been greeted and thanked, he would go to his study for a few moments alone. He would kneel by a chair and pray something like this, "Lord, I realize that You are worthy of all praise. Thank You for giving me the opportunity to preach Your Word. Please keep me focused on pleasing You, not on pleasing the congregation. Please help me to proclaim clearly what You have said."

Don't we all want to hear the Lord say, "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19:17)? Wouldn't that be fantastic? Better to have His praise and men's rebuke than the other way around. Of course, this

is no excuse to be rude or impolite. We aren't to seek to make people mad. But if we share our faith clearly, many will be displeased. If we share the grace message, many will mock us.

As the late Baptist evangelist Ron Dunn used to preach, "God is our audience." May we never forget that.



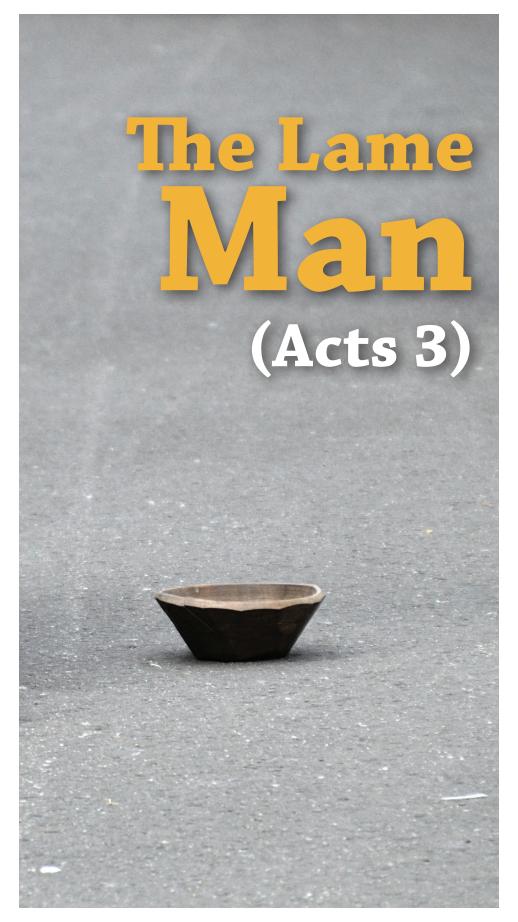
Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and his wife Sharon live in Highland Village, TX.

1. Eta

Linnemann's testimony is far from clear. You can read it here: http:// www.gracevalley.org/teaching/2001/ Eta_Linnemann_Testimony.html. In her testimony she indicates, "I began to go to the meetings every month I was available, and after one year and one month, I gave my life to Christ. I heard a message and was so hungry for this life with Christ the speaker had spoken of. When he gave an altar call, I was about to jump up, but then he asked, 'Is there anybody who wants to believe in Christ?' I told myself, 'Oh, that's not for me because I already believe in Christ.' That is the problem with theologians; they think they are believers. But then he repeated it, asking who was willing to surrender his life to Christ. Then I knew it was for me. I lifted my arm, the Lord saw my heart, and my life was changed."







By Zane C. Hodges

Introduction (3:1-12)

3:1-8. In Acts 3, Peter and John heal a man who was lame from birth. There are three ways to look at the miracle of this passage.

First, we can look at the man himself. Over 40 years old (Acts 4:22), he was doubtless a pitiable sight. It is not unlikely that for 15-30 years he had sat at this spot—long since without hope of health—yet the grace of God reaches him even after all these years have passed. His healing was a token of God's mercy. Just as the name of Jesus of Nazareth was associated with such merciful healings in His life, so now it would be associated with the same miracles in resurrection life. As Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8).

Second, we can look at it as a sign to Israel. It is called a *sign* by the leaders themselves (Acts 4:16). But what did it signify? In speaking of it, Peter used the same Greek root that can mean both *healing* ("made whole") and *salvation* (cf. Acts 4:8-12). Thus the healing of the lame man is a sign of the spiritual salvation so needed by the nation itself.

From its birth, the nation of Israel had been lame. Their history as a nation, beginning with the Exodus, is marked by their utter inability to walk in God's laws and statutes. Nor, as their history showed, had they gained the ability since then. Israel needed the healing power of Jesus' name.



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As the lame man sat at the gate of the temple, "the house of God," so Israel sat, as it were, on the threshold of the kingdom (which is symbolized by the exaltation of the house of the Lord, cf. Isaiah 2; Micah 4). Peter offers that generation of Israel the kingdom in verses 19-21. Sadly, they refused the spiritual healing the sign symbolized, but a future generation will receive it (and enter the kingdom, God's house). Thus the miracle is at once a sign and a prophecy.

As the lame man was carried daily to the gate of the temple, so Israel will someday be carried by the hands of God to the threshold of the kingdom once more. Perhaps even today this movement to the "gateway" of opportunity has begun.

The lame man asked for money because he had given up the hope of being healthy. Likewise, Israel, during this age, is so oblivious to the hope of spiritual healing as to be almost solely occupied with material things, silver and gold. (Though today in the Jewish state there is an incipient feeling that these are not enough.)

Third, we can take this healing as a picture of ourselves. Each of us, in our pre-salvation state, is pictured here. The man was "lame from his mother's womb." He was not a cripple through some misfortune of experience or environment. He was lame from birth. So are we. "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps 51:5). We are

unable to walk in God's ways for us from birth and onward.

The man was also a beggar. We are spiritual beggars in the sight of God. The man could not give, only receive. And as spiritual paupers, we too have nothing to give God for our salvation. We can but receive "such as He has."

The lame man sat outside the house of God, just as sinners are outside God's house (the Church). But he sat at that gate of the temple which was called Beautiful. In the remainder of the New Testament the word *beautiful* (*hōraian*) is only once more used, in Rom 10:15, of the feet of the gospel messenger. The idea being, human feet are usually ugly, yet these take on beauty because of the spiritual beauty of the gospel. The gospel is

to be associated with beauty for the loveliness of its message. It is well symbolized by a "beautiful" gate, for it is a gateway to eternal life, eternal blessedness, heaven, and the presence of God. Sinners who are evangelized sit, as it were, at the gate "Beautiful."

As for the lame man, so for us, there is salvation only in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:12). By salvation our "feet and anklebones" receive strength to walk in God's will (Rom 8:1), and we can thus enter into His courts, as this man, with praise. The miracle occurred at the hour of prayer. And it is doubtful that any soul has received the healing of the gospel apart from prayer by someone, somewhere.

3:9-10. There was no possibility of this miracle being doubted or questioned (as so many are today), for the lame man was a familiar sight to all who frequented the temple. His malady was obvious and well known (e.g., "they knew [epeginōskon] that it was he that sat for alms..."[v 10]). God's signs give no basis for human doubt.

3:11. There was no effort or intent on Peter and John's part to gather a crowd through this sign (unlike modern-day publicity techniques). Apparently, since they were now in Solomon's porch, which was in the Court of the Gentiles, while the Beautiful Gate (so far as we know) was the one leading to the Court of the Women, they had now emerged from prayer and were on their way out. They would have gathered no crowd had not the lame man held them. So different from the deliberate crowd-gathering of professed healers of our day.

3:12. Peter does not commence to speak of his spiritual experience (e.g., Pentecost), not even of the Holy Spirit. Peter is not occupied with himself, nor even with his spiritual experiences ("Why look so intently on us..."). The sermon is devoid of any reference to the Spirit or His work—whether baptism or filling— but it is full of Christ.

Once again we see the Spirit, faithful to His mission seeking to retire into the background and exalt Christ (cf. John 16:13-15). Anyone occupied with their own subjective experience of the Spirit, more than with Christ, know less than they suppose about the Spirit!

Peter seeks to turn their gaze from himself to his Risen Lord. Happy is God's servant who can do this. "As though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk..." Human power and human holiness are not the basis of miracles. Note that John the Baptist was a holy man of God, and filled with the Spirit (cf. Luke 1:15), yet he did no miracle. The difference between John the Baptist and Peter here was not one of holiness, but a matter of God's will (cf. Heb 2:1). John the Baptist did no miracles because this was not God's will for him. Peter did them because it was. Miracles and the miraculous are not the necessary or inevitable accompaniment of holiness. Indeed unholy men may perform miracles (cf. Revelation 13; Matt 7:21-23). Holiness is determined by obedience to God's Word.

Note also that this sermon occurs in Solomon's porch (v 11). This is doubly appropriate because Solomon and his reign are a type of the Millennium, and Peter offered Israel the kingdom (vv 19-21),

and because Solomon's name is synonymous with wisdom, and Peter presented Christ, who is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-24).

Conviction of Their Guilt (vv 13-16)

3:13-15. The words of Peter are no doubt totally unexpected by the crowd. They were worshippers who had just been praying to the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Peter does not commend them for this, but instead accuses them of the crucifixion of Christ. They are religious, yet guilty of the world's greatest sin. The verses of this passage thus give deep insight into the nature of sin.

Peter begins with the glory of God as given to His Son. The enormity of Israel's sin could only be properly understood when measured by the glory of God (cf. Rom 3:23).

Peter reveals three great insights in regard to sin.

First, sin perverts human will (v 13b). The tragic insistence of the Jews that Christ be crucified even though Pilate desired to let Him go, only exemplifies the deep stubbornness and fixity of will which characterizes the sinner once he sets out on the path of his lust. No opportunity to turn aside, no barrier to the commission of sin, suffices to deter him.

Second, sin perverts human *choice* (v 14). The unspeakable preference of the Jewish rabble for Barrabas over Jesus, for a murderer over One who was just and holy in word and deed, for a destroyer of life over One who saves it, exemplifies the awful choice of every sinner. Sinners choose that which is ugly, repulsive, and filthy, over that which is holy, just, and good.

Third, sin perverts human *action* (v 15). Nothing is more incongruous or supremely unnatural than to kill the Prince of life, i.e., the very Author of life upon whom creatures are dependent for every breath they draw. Likewise, sin is itself an unnatural perverted act contrary to the very nature of creation. It is destructive of life and its end is death.

However, their unnatural act was frustrated, for the resurrection of the Prince of life was inevitable (cf. Acts 2:24). So also sin is ever self-defeated, bringing in its wake irreversible consequences: "whatsoever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal 6:7).

3:16. The cure for sin, illustrated in the beggar, is faith. The faith referred to is the beggar's because Peter has so little to say of himself it is hardly likely he would be speaking of his own faith.

This is an illustration of salvation. Just as in salvation it is the sinner's own faith which saves, surely it was so here.

Also note, if the Beautiful Gate was that one which led from the Court of the Gentiles to the Court of the Women on the east side of the temple, Jesus must have frequently passed by there, because He often came to and from Bethany and Mt. Olivet. Perhaps the lame man had seen Jesus, but thought he had gone unnoticed in the crowd. He may often have wished that Jesus would heal him. Wonderfully, we may be sure that the Savior had noticed him. And, in grace, the Lord waited for the right moment when He would not only make the man well, but also place him as a mighty sign to the nation of His resurrection power. It is always wise for us to wait God's

time. When, therefore, the words of Peter (Acts 3:6) were spoken and the Apostle's hand stretched out to him, the beggar was ready to stretch out his hand in an act of faith in the name of Jesus Christ (Messiah) of Nazareth.

No doubt whatever hopes the beggar might have had that Jesus would heal him as He often passed him going in and out of the temple, seemed dashed to earth by the crucifixion. Yet the lame man finds a second opportunity, after the resurrection, through the power of

"The mercies of
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the name of the risen Christ.

Israel might well have supposed (as the believing element did) that the crucifixion ended the hope of kingdom blessings, the times of refreshing (v 19), and the reconstitution of all things (v 21). Yet, as for the beggar, so for the nation, opportunity is renewed after the resurrection. Verses 19-21 constitute a renewed offer of kingdom blessing on the basis of repentance.

The mercies of God are revealed in His willingness to ask a guilty nation (vv 13-15) to reconsider. The renewed offer manifests the matchless longsuffering of God. It also reveals the effectiveness of the Savior's intercession for them (cf. Luke 23:34).

The Offer of Mercy (vv 17-21)

3:17. Israel's ignorance is used by God as a basis for opening a door of mercy to them. Verse 17 is a remarkable statement (especially since it includes the rulers) when we recall the plotting, scheming, jealousy, hatred, viciousness, and mockery of the people and rulers. Yet all sin is rooted in ignorance (cf. Eph 4:18; 1 Pet 1:14). Read John 8:31-32, where it is clear sin enslaves us through ignorance of the truth.

The only sin offering of the Old Testament was for sins of ignorance (Leviticus 4). There was no sin offering for knowing sins (e.g., David's adultery). In the light of New Testament revelation, we see that Christ can be a sin-offering for the sins of the whole world, for in the last analysis, all sin springs from human ignorance. Thus as Paul grew in the sense of the enormity of his sin, he grew also in his sense of the depth of his ignorance which brought him mercy (cf. 1 Tim 1:13-15).

There is no sacrifice for Satan or his angels, and no suggestion that they sin in ignorance. After all, they come from the Divine Presence itself. When they sin against God, they know what they are doing and are eternally doomed. By contrast, "no man has seen God [the Father] at any time" (John 1:18), and we are made that God might be able to have mercy upon us. However, men may choose to remain in ignorance. If the heathen see the evidence of God's power and divinity in creation, they must

realize they do not know God. If they fail to seek Him, and choose ignorance instead, hell is that place where men will abide forever in their ignorance of God.

3:18. Human ignorance is counterbalanced by divine wisdom. God used this means to bring to pass the prophetic word. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise You…" (Ps 76:10).

There are but two classes of men: those who fulfill God's purposes unconsciously, and those who do so consciously. No created being fails entirely to serve the ends of His Creator. May we do so consciously, instead of unconsciously.

3:19-21. These verses describe the "regeneration" of creation (cf. Matt 19:28; Jas 1:18; and Rom 8:12-32). The key expression is the phrase "times of restitution of all things." Thus there are parallels between the regeneration of creation and the regeneration of the soul.

First, comes the blotting out of sins. In the case of earth's "regeneration," Israel's sins must first be blotted out.

Second, there will be times of refreshing (which can come only from the presence [prosōpou] of the Lord, since earth cannot refresh the redeemed soul, cf. 2 Cor 4:6, "the face of Jesus Christ.").

Third, will be revealed the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (note v 20), i.e., Christ in us.

Fourth, there shall be the reconstitution (*apokatastaseōs*) of all things in his experience (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).

According to verse 21 if such "times" arrive, Christ must be here, for it is only in or for such times that heaven will see Him return. "Whom the heaven must receive until..." (It will not relinquish Him

till then!) These times then are the times of His personal presence. So also in the individual's life it is the living, vital presence of Christ that produces a new experience, i.e., a reconstitution (of life). God is not willing to send Him to earth, or to the human heart, until such times are inaugurated.

Motivation to Acceptance (vv 22-26)

3:22-26. Peter presents Israel with three great motivations to accept the kingdom offered by Christ.

First, is the greatness of the Person who had spoken to them (vv 22-23). Jesus is a prophet like unto Moses (most authoritative name in Judaism), to be hearkened to in *all* things. Disobedience to Him will be visited with severe judgment.

Second, the greatness of the times in which they lived (v 24). They lived in days spoken of by all the prophets. The challenge of living in the prophetic spotlight was to seize the opportunities thereby presented.

Third, the greatness of the privileges they possessed (vv 25-26). They were children of the prophets, and of Abraham, and of the covenant; through them God desired to bless the world; Christ had come to them first. Such were their privileges.

The same three motivations are effectual for God's people today: the greatness of the Person through whom God has spoken (cf. Heb 1:1-3; 2:2-3; 12:25); the greatness of the times in which we live (cf. 2 Tim 3:1-5; Luke 21:24, etc.); and the greatness of our privileges (cf. Eph 2:12-20, esp. vv 12 and 19). God likewise desires to bless others

through us (cf. John 7:37-39). We become children of Abraham by faith (cf. Gal 3:7) and, in Christ, become a channel for Abrahamic blessing.

What God raised His Son (ton Paida autou, i.e., the Servant of Yahweh) to do first for Israel, He raised Him up to do also for the Gentiles (cf. Rom 1:16). We too are blessed when we turn from our iniquities. Verse 26 refers to all the nation of Israel, but as individuals. The national deliverance of Israel will only come when all living Jews in Israel become believers in Jesus Christ and are walking in fellowship with Him.

Zane Hodges taught New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Theological

Seminary. His book, Acts of the Risen Christ is forthcoming.



No Strings Attached Salvation

By Al Acevedo

t was the winter break before my last semester of seminary at Liberty University Online, and I did not know where I stood on the Calvinism/ Arminianism debate.

Was I a Calvinist? If so, how many of the five points did I accept?

Maybe I was more Arminian? After all, it was hard to swallow the whole "God overriding our will" thing. But if I was an Arminian, I would have to believe that I could lose my salvation, which I did not believe.

Maybe I was "Calminian?"

These were some of the thoughts that were racing through my mind.

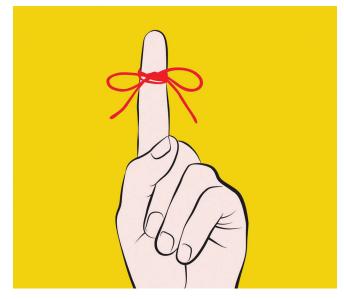
I felt I had a good grasp on the gospel (or so I thought): Repent of your sins, place your faith in Jesus, and if you're *really* saved there *will be* evidence that you are. That was what many Christian leaders were (and still are) teaching.

I was about to graduate and I knew that I had to get my soteriology (doctrine of salvation) straight if I was going to help lead people to Jesus. So, I decided to take a month to pray and figure out what someone must do to be saved.

I started my journey by reading R.C. Sproul's *Chosen by God*. I read the book with an open mind, following Sproul's logical conclusions. Although he really made God appear harsh, but if it was the truth I had to accept it.

Next, I read Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free*. It seemed to make sense, but I still wasn't satisfied.

I had one more book to read, *Salvation and Sovereignty* by Kenneth Keathley. I was sure this book about Molinism (i.e., God arranges circumstances knowing



what people would freely choose in any given situation) would help me figure out salvation, and in a way it did.

I was reading the chapter on eternal security when the author mentioned Grace Evangelical Society (GES) in a footnote. I had never heard of GES, so I went to my computer and looked up faithalone.org and read the doctrinal statement. I thought, "This makes sense!"

Then I watched a video by Bob Wilkin called "Repentance: Does Your Mind Need Changing?" It was the push that led me down the road of grace.

I watched other GES videos, purchased copies of books by Zane Hodges and Bob Wilkin, and subscribed to *Grace in Focus*.

Over the next few months my views about salvation and certain passages of the Bible began to change.

My eyes were opened up to a "no strings attached" salvation.

Sharing the gospel became exciting and simple.

The burden of judging other Christians who were "not living for God" went away.

The burden of Lordship Salvation was lifted off of me, and I came to the conclusion that I was a zeropoint Calvinist and zero-point Arminian.

I'm 100% Free Grace!



Al Acevedo is the director for Grace Skate Ministry in Jacksonville, Florida. He is a graduate of Liberty Seminary (M.A.R., M.Div.), who enjoys reading grace-filled books. In his spare time he likes to train at the gym, skateboard, watch movies, and go to the beach with his wife.

THE GOSPEL ACC

JOH

The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, ¹ and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own,² and his own people³ did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

14And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") 16And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, 4 who is at the Father's side, 5 he has made him known.

The Testimony of John the Baptist

19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about

¹ Or was not any thing made. That which has been made was life in him ² Greek to his o in Greek. ⁴ Or the only One, who is God; some manuscripts the only Son ⁵ Greek in the labout 4 ₹№. ⁸ Greek him ³ Isa. 40:3

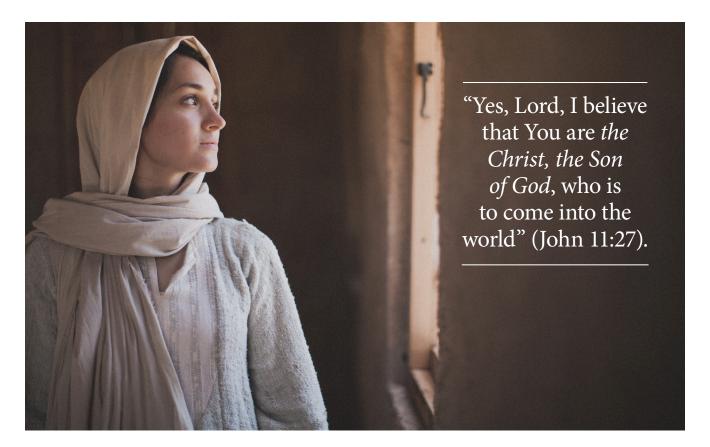
Three Gospel Studies

By Bill Fiess

Study I: Four Simple Observations from the Evangelistic Ministry of the Lord Jesus

recently did a Logos software study revealing four facts which, while simple, have significant implications:

- 1. Jesus Christ did not spend a lot of time convincing unbelievers that they were sinners.
- The Lord also did not spend much time convincing individual unbelievers to repent. However, He did spend a lot of time announcing judgment against Israel and its cities for not repenting and believing in Him. And He spoke quite a bit to believers about repenting.
- 3. Neither *metanoein* (to repent) nor *metanoia* (repentance) are even mentioned in the Gospel of John (which was written so that people could get eternal life).
- But Jesus does spend a lot of time trying to convince unbelievers that they need to believe in Him, that is, that they need to believe that He is the Messiah.



Study II: Jesus Is "the Christ, the Son of God"

Then I did a Logos software study of the expression the Christ, the Son of God (Greek: ho Christos ho huios tou Theou), I found it only occurs six times in the New Testament, all in the Gospels. Three times it is found in John's Gospel, twice in Matthew, and once in Luke.

Probably the most famous of these six uses is in the purpose statement of John's Gospel:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of God*, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31, emphasis added).

The Apostle says that anyone who believes that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God" is born again. But what does that expression mean?

In Jesus' famous dialogue with Martha He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Martha's response contains the second most famous of the six uses of this expression:

"Yes, Lord, I believe that You are *the Christ, the Son of God*, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27, emphasis added).

To believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God is to believe that He is the resurrection and the life, i.e., that He guarantees that believers will be in His kingdom forever (bodily resurrection) and have everlasting life that can never be lost (life).

Twice Peter used this expression, each time adding *tou zontos*, "of the living":

Simon answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God [lit. "You are the Christ, the Son of God, the living One"]" (Matt 16:16, emphasis added).

"Also we have come to believe and know that You are *the Christ*, *the Son of the living God* [lit. "You are the Christ, the Son of God, the living One"]" (John 6:69, emphasis added).

The final two uses are not well known. Both come from unlikely sources.

Caiaphas, the unbelieving high priest, during one of Jesus' mock trials, said,

"I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are *the Christ, the Son of God*!" (Matt 26:63, emphasis added).

Did Caiaphas know this expression from Old Testament prophecies, from reports of Jesus' own teachings, or did the Holy Spirit put it on his mind just as He did when He had Caiphas' prophecy (unwittingly) about Jesus' substitutionary death (John 11:50-51)? While we can't be sure, it is significant that he uses the expression that John 20:31 says if one believes (in the sense John intends it) he is born again.

The final use is from the lips of an even stranger source: demons.

And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are *the Christ*, *the Son of God!*" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ (Luke 4:41, emphasis added).

Since Satan knows that Jesus gives everlasting life to living humans¹ who believe in Him (Luke 8:12; 2 Cor 4:4; cf. John 11:25-27), it makes sense that demons would know that as well. But it is a bit shocking to find one of only six uses of this expression on the lips of demons.

Notice, too, that the demons use the full expression "the Christ, the Son of God," but Luke reports simply that "they knew that He was the Christ." This helps explain a verse like 1 John 5:1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

God not only uses people like Peter, Martha, and John to proclaim His message, He even uses the Jewish high priest and demons to proclaim it too.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Do you believe this?

Study III: Why Is the Expression "Father in Heaven" Only Found in the Synoptic Gospels?

he expression "Father in Heaven" is found fifteen times in Matthew, twice in Mark, and once in Luke.

That's it.

It is not found in John, Acts, the Epistles, or Revelation.

I wonder why that important expression is only found in the Synoptic Gospels? Why isn't the Lord's prayer ("Our Father in heaven..."), for example, found in the epistles? Indeed why do we never see

the expression "Father in heaven" anywhere in the epistles?

In the epistles we find "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" six times (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). We also find "God the Father" fifteen times in the epistles (1 Cor 8:6; 15:24; Gal 1:1, 3; Eph 5:20; 6:23; Phil 2:11; Col 3:17; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:17; 2 John 3; Jude 1) and once in the Gospels (John 6:27).

Might it be that the Apostles did not feel worthy of using the exact expression the Lord Jesus used of His own Father?

It seems that "God the Father" and "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" are ways in which someone could communicate the same truth but without the risk of sounding blasphemous. After all, while God is our Father, He is not our Father in the same sense in which He is Jesus' Father, as part of the Trinity. Jesus is uncreated. He is eternal. He created all things with the Father and the Spirit.

Possibly another explanation might

be that once God became a man and dwelt among us, we who believe in Him now have special access to God the Father. It is as though we are seated with Christ in heaven (Eph 2:6).



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

1. As opposed to people who have died, only to realize in Hades that Jesus really was the Christ. At that point, it is too late to believe and be saved.

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THE SAN ANTONIO REGIONAL CONFERENCE

n Friday, January 29, we held our first GES regional conference in San Antonio, TX, and it was a resounding success. We've only had one regional that ever had 100 people in it. This one had 150 people in attendance.

We decided to do several things differently. First, we made it a weekend conference, starting on Friday night and ending Saturday afternoon. This allowed more working people to come.

Second, we made it free. Everyone who registered got a subscription to *Grace in Focus* and a free \$5 gift card for our book table. Since we put our books on sale, there were four books to choose from that sold for \$4 or \$5.

Third, we held it at a hotel. We thought that holding it at a church might discourage some people from coming.

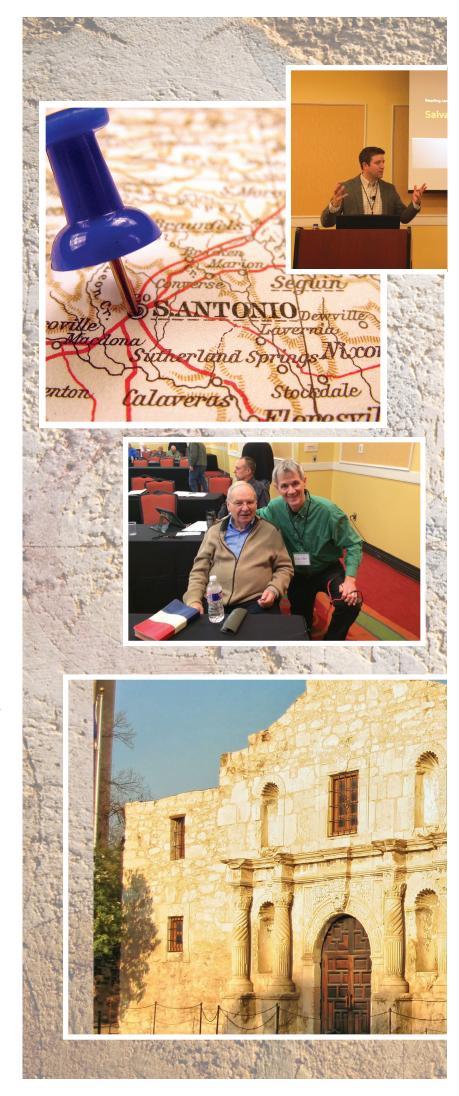
Fourth, we tried advertising. We sent out postcards to everyone on our mailing list within a two-hour drive of San Antonio. And we put on 30-second radio ads in both San Antonio and Austin.

The conference topic also had wide appeal: it was on Biblical Inerrancy and Hermeneutics. Our keynote speaker was Dr. Norm Geisler, an expert on inerrancy, who gave two messages ("Why Is It Important that the Bible Is Free from Errors?" and "Why Jonah Can't Be a Parable") which were great and were well received.

Other speakers included Shawn (who did a great job on "Reading James as Wisdom Literature"), Dr. Gary Hedrick ("The Israel of God and Identity Theft in Gal 6:16"), Pastor Bryan Threlkeld ("Inerrancy Is Fundamental, Not Peripheral"), and three messages by Bob ("The Gospel Writers Didn't Put Words in Jesus' Mouth," "Inerrancy Is Not a Big Tent," and "Practical Problems with a Broad View of Inerrancy").

This conference ministered to a lot of people. It was made possible by your giving. And given the positive response, we plan on doing more in the future, in major cities across the country, from Denver to Charlotte to Los Angeles.

See you soon! GIF





GETTING BACK TO BASICS (1 TIMOTHY 1:15-17)

By Ken Yates



Where We Come From

ne day a seminary student saw his advanced Greek professor reading a book. He noticed that it was the textbook used by first-year Greek students. The professor was extremely knowledgeable in New Testament Greek, and the student was intrigued as to why he was reading it. When he asked the professor why he was doing so, the older gentlemen said, "Sometimes it is good to go back to the basics. It reminds us where we came from."

This story reminds me of another story. Perhaps the most famous military man in the history of the United States was Douglas MacArthur. He began his career at West Point, graduating first in his class in 1903. In a career that spanned almost 50 years, he fought in wars in Mexico, the Philippines, World War I, World War II, and Korea. He served as Chief of Staff of the Army,

the Superintendent of West Point, and received the Medal of Honor, which is our nation's highest military award. After World War II, he served as the acting president of Japan and oversaw the establishment of its new constitution.

In 1962, at the age of 82, MacArthur was dying of a terminal illness. He made one last trip to West Point to receive yet another award. He knew it would be the last time to visit that institution. In accepting the award, he gave one of the most famous military speeches in our nation's history, entitled, "Duty, Honor, Country." At the end of the speech he refers to the many mornings in which as a military man he was awakened by the sound of bugles, as well as the sounds he heard on so many battlefields. He also told the audience that he knew his life was all but over:

The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here. My days of old have vanished—tone

"The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here. My days of old have vanished—tone and tint. They have gone glimmering through the dreams of things that were."



and tint. They have gone glimmering through the dreams of things that were. Their memory is one of wondrous beauty, watered by tears and coaxed and caressed by the smiles of yesterday. I listen then, but with thirsty ear, for the witching melody of faint bugles blowing reveille, of far drums beating the long roll. In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange, mournful mutter of the battlefield.

It is not surprising that a man of his background would speak of these things. It is natural that a life filled with so many accomplishments on so many battlefields would remember sights, sounds, and events. But what is interesting is what MacArthur said next. He wanted the audience to know what memory he would have of his career as he approached death. He said, "But in the evening of my memory always I come back to West Point."

West Point was where it all began for him. For this great American General, going back to West Point was going back to the basics. It was remembering where he came from.

In the New Testament we read of another soldier. He was a soldier of God. He spoke about the need to wear the armor of God (Eph 6:11). And what a soldier he was. Most would say that he was the greatest soldier of God that ever lived.

I am, of course, referring to the Apostle Paul. Like MacArthur's military service, Paul's list of accomplishments in serving the Lord is impressive. He was called by the Lord Himself to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. He established churches throughout the Mediterranean world. He performed many miracles through the power of God. These included making the blind to see, making the lame to walk, casting out demons, and even raising the dead. He wrote almost half of the books of the New Testament. He endured almost unbelievable hardships as a good soldier of the Lord, including beatings, imprisonments, and

shipwrecks. Finally, he gave his life for the One he served. It is no overstatement to say that he changed the world.

One wonders what thing would occupy the mind of this man when he neared the end of his life. If he were to have given a speech, what would he have said? Fortunately, from one of his books, we know.

Pastoral Service

The books of Titus, 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy are known as the Pastoral Epistles. They were written to two men who were Paul's lieutenants in the work of the Lord. They are also the last books written by Paul in the New Testament.

In writing to Timothy, who was at Ephesus, Paul says that he gives thanks to Christ allowing him to serve Him (1 Tim 1:12). But even though perhaps we might understand if Paul were to brag about his accomplishments in that service, he does not do that. Instead, he says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim 1:15).

As Paul is coming to the end of his ministry and time on earth, and he reflects on his past, he tells Timothy that there is something that is rock solid. There is something a Christian can take to the bank. And as Paul reflects upon

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this thing, he is going back to the basics. He is going back to where he came from. Like MacArthur understood that West Point was the place from which everything in his career flowed, Paul is saying that what he reflects on is the source of all he has experienced as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The Grace of God

For Paul, it all began with the fact that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Whatever Paul accom-

plished on his journeys was not something he deserved. This man of God saw himself as the worst of all sinners. For him, going back to the basics meant meditating on the wonderful grace of God. God sent His Son in order to save even a person like him.

He marveled at this grace. Formerly he had been one that persecuted the Church and blasphemed God, but God had shown him undeserved favor (1 Tim 1:13-14). But even at the end of his life, and after many years of faithful service, he realized that he was a servant of the Lord because of that wonderful grace. For, Paul says, I am the chief of sinners. He doesn't say he *was* the

chief of sinners. He *still* saw himself as one who owed everything to the grace of God.

But what does Paul mean when he says that Christ "saved" him? He does not leave the reader in doubt. In the very next verse he states that he, the chief of sinners, became "a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." On the road to Damascus Paul had believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life. He was at that moment hunting down and persecuting Christians. He was at that moment blaspheming God.

But God, in His infinite grace, gave him eternal life through faith in His Son. In a ministry that spanned approximately 30 years, and that saw so many works of God, this is what Paul reflects on. For him, going back to the grace that was shown him on the road to Damascus, was like going home. All that would flow in the next three decades began with Paul receiving eternal life by faith because of God's grace.

Our Solid Foundation

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And thus it is with every child of God. When we believe in Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life we receive it at that moment. It is a gift that can never be lost. Such a gift is completely undeserved. Whatever we accomplish for the Lord, through His enablement, ultimately goes back to that grace.

The last words of MacArthur's speech were addressed to the students at West Point, who were

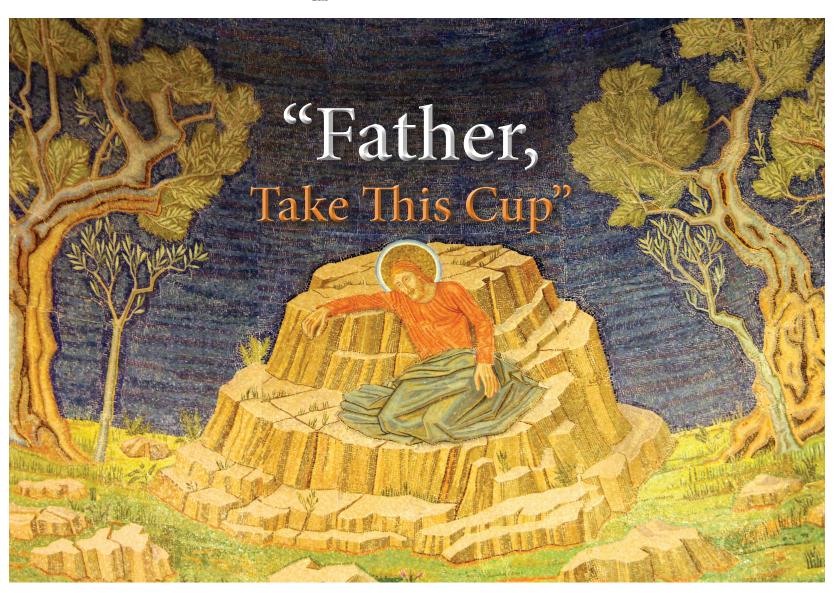
known as the "Corps" (pronounced "Core"). He said that when he lay dying, his last thoughts would be "of the Corps, of the Corps, and of the Corps." He saw it as the rock solid foundation of his life. As believers in Jesus Christ, when we think of our foundation as children of God who have received eternal life as a free gift, we should think, "of grace, of grace, and of grace."



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

1. Paul's last

letter was Second Timothy, likely written just weeks before his execution. In 2 Tim 4:6-8, Paul reminisces and speaks of the eternal rewards awaiting him and all who have loved Christ's appearing: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."



By John H. Niemelä

any Christians find our Lord's Gethsemane prayers perplexing, even downright troubling. Seemingly, Jesus tries to convince the Father into allowing Him to avoid crucifixion. How could that be?

The Cross Was Unavoidable

Jesus' repeated predictions of the cross and resurrection—starting with John 2:19—prove that He knew that His death on the cross was unavoidable. Note Matt 12:39-40 and the following trio of predictions common to each synoptic.

The Lord prophesied on three different occasions that He would be killed and then raised on the third day: First, Matt 16:21, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22; second, Matt 17:22-23a, Mark 9:20-31, Luke 9:43b-44; and third, Matt 20:17-19, Mark 10:32-34, Luke 18:31-34.

These were not suggestions of what *might* occur. These were prophesies of what *would* occur.

Furthermore, in Matt 20:22-23 and Mark 10:38-39 the Lord used the imagery of drinking the cup as a metaphor for His upcoming crucifixion. Hence, this language anticipates His Gethsemane prayers.

Surely, He would not request avoiding crucifixion. It was one of the main reasons He came to earth. Yet, that is exactly how most interpreters approach Gethsemane—that Jesus was trying to get out of completing the task the Father gave Him to accomplish.

Remove This Cup

Jesus prayed three times that night that the Father would remove the cup from Him. Italicized references say that He prayed the same thing as before without recording His words: First, Matt 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42; second, Matt 26:42, *Mark* 14:39, *Luke* 22:44; third, *Matt* 26:44.

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Let us consider Jesus' first prayer as recorded in all three Synoptics:

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; however, not as I will, but as You *will*" (Matt 26:39).¹

"Abba, Father, all things *are* possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You *will*" (Mark 14:36).

"Father, Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

The wording in Matthew and Luke uses conditional statements ("if it is possible" and "if it is Your will"), but both are first-class conditions. Thus, Matt 26:39 assumes as possible that the cup could pass from Him. Luke 22:42 assumes that it is the Father's will to take the cup from Him. Mark 14:36 explicitly says that all things

(even taking away the cup) are possible for the Father. Indeed, Jesus not only assumes that taking away the cup is possible, but that the Father's will is to do exactly that.

Unfortunately, our finitude causes us to prematurely reject the right solution, because we imagine a difficulty that is really not present. Our imagined difficulty is as follows:

If it were possible to take the cup from Jesus, would not the cross become optional?

No, that is an imaginary conundrum. All we need is a little patience to consider Jesus' second petition. There, He clarifies how and when the cup would be taken away.

Do It Quickly

"My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me *unless I drink it*—Your will be done" (Matt 26:42).

Matthew 26:42 clarifies that Jesus expects the cup to be taken away *after* He drinks of it, not beforehand. While Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, it was as if He were holding the cup, without yet drinking of it. When He went to the cross, He drank of it (as Matt 20:22-23 and Mark 10:38-39 use the imagery of drinking the cup for His crucifixion). Yes, it was the Father's will to take away the cup, but only after Jesus went to

the cross. In essence, we can understand the prayers in Gethsemane to say:

"Father, please let Me face the cross quickly, so that cup can be taken from Me in short order, but do all things on Your timetable, not Mine."

This interpretation lines up nicely with John 12:27-28a. Less than a week before His crucifixion (cf. John

12:1) Jesus asserts that He would not ask to be spared from the hour.

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say—'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this reason I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!"

The common understanding of Jesus' Gethsemane prayers disagrees with what He says in John 12:27-28a. We should, instead, understand Jesus to request being allowed to drink the cup as soon as possible. Yes, indeed, the Father did remove the cup quickly. Within a matter of hours Jesus was

arrested, tried, convicted, crucified, and buried. The following Sunday morning He then rose from the grave triumphantly. As Hebrews 12:2 says:

"for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."



John Niemelä is Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis at Rocky Mountain Seminary in Englewood, CO.

- 1. All translations are by the author.
- 2. The cross was the will of both Jesus and God the Father. Yet Jesus was going to the cross not because it was His will, but it was the will of His Father. Of

course, there could be no conflict between the will of the Father and the Son. But Jesus' point is that He was going to the cross in fulfillment of the will of His Father.

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"Matthew 26:42

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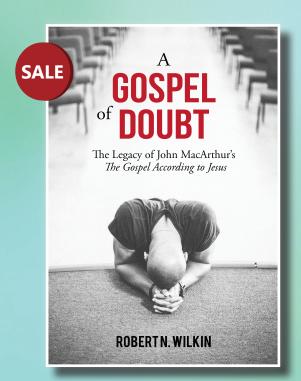
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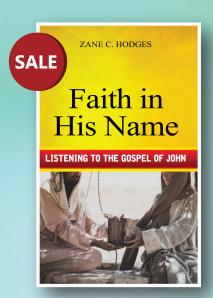


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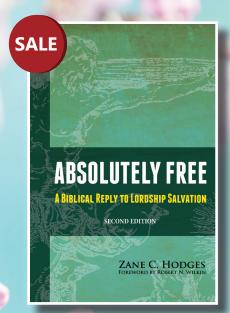
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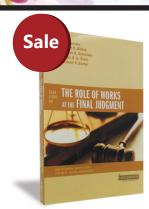
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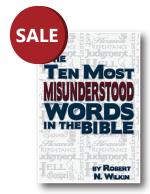


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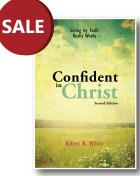


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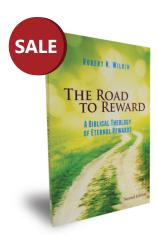
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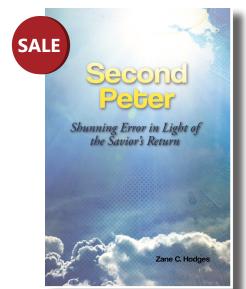
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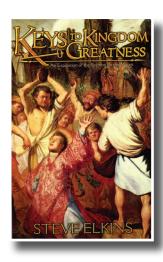
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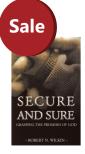


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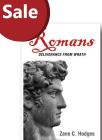


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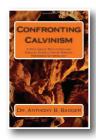


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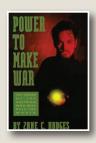


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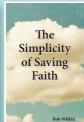
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By You

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"Dear Brothers and Sisters at GES. We appreciate the work you do. It is beneficial and of value, not only to us, but, undoubtedly, many others. The Lord sees your heart and labor. Keep on."

~J.C, Diana, TX

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(11 He Believes the Bible!)

By Phil Congdon



I was intrigued: Was this a book to help the average Christian understand what a pastor *really* thinks? Or maybe a list of things it's hard for a pastor to say, but Christians need to hear? Either could have been interesting and challenging.

Instead, the author presents the average pastor as a person who knows that *most* of what he preaches is false, and just keeps on saying it because he needs the income.

Leaving aside for a moment what he says, this is one of the most offensive and evil ideas I can imagine—that a pastor would willfully and knowingly deceive people by hiding what he really knows to be true. Sadly, just the opposite is too often true today: Pastors preach their own ideas to people who don't want to hear the truth! Paul predicted that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate to themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth" (2 Tim 4:3-4). Truly those times are here...and this book is "Exhibit A."

Take the author's ten topics: Unbelievably, he goes 0-for-10 in comparison to Scripture. His 'ten things' will never be spoken by a Bible-believing pastor. Here they are—followed by a brief response based in Scripture (in italics).

1. Creation Is a Myth

Genesis 1-2 is not God telling us about how it all began, but a fictional myth which was perpetrated by a society that was "bent on keeping women in their place" (p. 5).

Really? Too bad Jesus didn't know that: He based his teaching on the fact of the creation narrative (Matt 19:4-6). And Peter, describing those who do not believe Jesus will return, writes that "they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed" (2 Pet 3:5).

2. Our Purpose Isn't to Glorify God

Christianity usually teaches that we are here to glorify God—but "every time I hear it, I cringe...'Is that all there is?' We aren't here to just glorify God, but 'to be fully human'" (p. 12).

We can quibble about wording: The Reformers declared that man's chief end is to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever." But the problem here is in the author's focus: For him, it's all about us. Yet life is really all about God. This is all "His-story". Our purpose is to be fully God's. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).

3. The Bible Is Full of Errors

A collection of writings with "religious value," filled with errors and falsehoods ("glitches in the otherwise sterling revelation of God," p. 31), written by men who didn't understand God.

Jesus said "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Peter wrote, "Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21). And Paul declared, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). To this author, the Bible is "only a book." To me, it's alive and active (Heb 4:12)!

4. Miracles Don't Happen

Most miraculous events—creation, Jonah, the virgin birth, etc., are just myths. Other events (the Red Sea crossing, manna, Jericho's walls) have natural explanations. "Miracles are in the eyes of the beholder" (p. 40).

Miracles are real or they're not; Jesus told doubting Pharisees that His miracles witnessed to His deity (John 5:36; 10:25, 38). They're no problem for God!



5. We're Saved by Works

"There is no single answer to religion's most vexing question. The road to salvation depends upon who's standing in the road" (p. 47). We're saved "by asking for it," but faith includes works—like obeying the 10 Commandments and giving to the poor.

Half-right, but all wrong! Scripture says, "To the one who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies... his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom 4:5). It is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5).

6. The Role of Women

Biblical passages that instruct wives to "submit" to their husbands, and restrict teaching or authority roles to men, are examples of the church's "shabby treatment of women" and amount to "illegal sex discrimination" (pp. 58-59).

Odd that the author would choose the social norms of a society unraveling at the seams to "correct" God! This is extreme hubris, only exceeded by foolishness of one who sets up his own moral authority as greater than God's.

7. People Are Born Gay

"People are born gay and lesbian" (p. 72). God creates them that way; all declarations against homosexuality are outdated moral teachings. Homosexual "marriage" is a good thing.

Since the author views the creation narrative as myth, it doesn't matter that God made male and female. For some reason (I confess to my words dripping with sarcasm), he failed to cite Rom 1:26-27, which bluntly condemns to God's wrath those who practice homosexuality.

8. Other Religions Lead to God

Jesus isn't the only way to God. Paul only "preached Jesus" because He was "the best first-century vehicle for conveying" the message of God's grace (p. 82). We should have an "attitude of tolerance."

The question is not what I tolerate, but what God tolerates! Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except through Me" (John 14:6; see Acts 4:12). The author tries to explain away those words, because they prove him wrong.

9. No Eternal Hell

There is no eternal hell. Teachings of the Old and New Testaments about life after death are just religious creations. The "good guys" (those who live good lives) "have abundant life now and perhaps forever" (p. 89).

Hell wasn't made for us, but for Satan and demons (Matt 25:41). But Jesus said people do go there (Luke 16:19-31—the author calls this an "ancient Egyptian story"), and Paul taught that those who reject the gospel face eternal destruction (2 Thess 1:9).

10. Jesus Made Mistakes

"Jesus was mistaken" in things He said about the end times. We shouldn't take prophecy too literally; better to see all end-time prophecies as symbolic. The best view? "Trust God, and in the end things will all pan out" (p. 104).

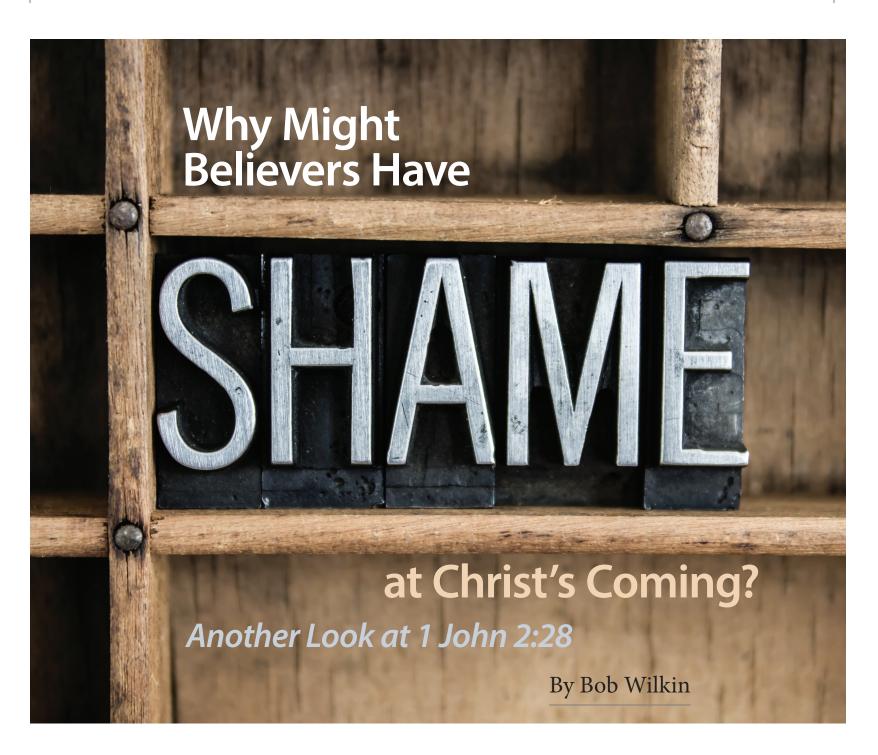
Were the Biblical authors just making stuff up, or was God playing a game of "bait and switch" with us? Why not take prophecies that haven't yet been fulfilled the same way as prophecies which have been fulfilled, i.e., literally?

There it is. Ten things a Biblical pastor will never tell you. But more importantly, pray that your pastor will tell you always and only what the Bible clearly, literally, and unambiguously says—not because he needs the job, but because it's the Truth, and because what you and I do about it matters—both now, and for eternity! GIE



Phil Congdon is Senior Pastor at New Braunfels (TX) Bible Church.

MARCH/APRIL 2016



Introduction

ane Hodges calls 1 John 2:28 the theme verse for the epistle. It reads, And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence [or boldness] and not be ashamed before Him at His coming [parousia].

Arminians and Calvinists see this as a warning regarding eternal destiny. The believer who perseveres in faith and good works will get into the kingdom. That is what is meant by having confidence before Him. The believer who fails to persevere will end up in the lake of fire, either because he lost everlasting life (Arminian view) or proved he was never really born again in the first place (Calvinist view).

The Free Grace view is that the warning here concerns eternal rewards, not eternal destiny. The issue is joy versus shame at the Bema, the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:9-10 and Luke 19:16-26).

Recently I began to wonder if the normal Free Grace understanding of 1 John 2:28 is precisely what the Apostle John meant. Let's take another look at this important verse.

The Command: Abide in Him

Anyone familiar with John 13-16 or 1 John knows of the theme of abiding in Christ. Believers are called



to *abide*, *live*, or *remain* in Christ. This speaks of experience, not position. The way in which a believer does this is by allowing God's Word to take up residence in his life. His mind is renewed rather than conformed to the world (Rom 12:2). This results in transformation of life.

Clearly the command to abide in Him refers to perseverance until Christ returns. The *parousia*, the coming of Christ, is specifically mentioned by John.

The Undesirable Result: That We Might Shrink Back in Shame

The negative result, the one to be avoided, is being ashamed before Him at His *parousia*: "that when He appears we may...not be ashamed before Him at His coming." The Old Testament shows that shame was a terrible thing,

something to be avoided. The New Testament shows this as well.

The Desired Result: That We Might Have Confidence before Him

The positive result, the one to strive for, is being confident before Him at His *parousia*: "that when He appears we may have confidence...before Him at His coming." The Old Testament shows that a good name was very important, something to be carefully guarded. The New Testament shows this as well. The one with a good name has confidence and boldness.

Why the Shift from "You" to "We"?

Only recently did it hit me. The verse does not say what I've always thought it said: "And now, little

children, abide in Him, that when He appears, *you* may have confidence and *you* may not be ashamed before Him at His coming." No. It says *we*, first person plural. Not *you*, second person plural.

Why the shift from *you* in the command, "abide in Him," to *we* in the possible outcomes?

Often, but not always, in 1 John the first person plural refers to John and the other Apostles (cf. 1 John 1:1-5). Sometimes the first person plural simply is used generically to refer to all believers (cf. 1 John 1:6-2:2).

It is possible that the first person plural in 1 John 2:28 simply refers to all believers. But if so, why didn't John say, "And now, little children, let us abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence..." The shift from *you* to *we* at the least should cause us to wonder if the Apostle has

something different in mind than we think if we miss the shift.

Comparing Verses

In the majority of Greek manuscripts 1 John 1:4 reads, "And these things we write to you in order that our joy may be full" (my own translation). John wrote his epistle so that his readers might remain in fellowship with God with the result that his joy and the joy of the other Apostles would be full.

The same thing is seen in 2 John 8: "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward" (NKJV). Most translations have "those things we worked for [or have accomplished]." But they also have "that you may receive a full reward" (NASB, NIV, HCSB). Yet the majority of Greek manuscripts read what the NKJV has. John and his co-laborers worked among these Christian leaders (cf. 1 John 2:12-14, 20-21, 27) and if they persevere, if they continue to look to themselves, then John and his co-workers would receive a full reward for their ministry. The translation of the so-called critical text actually makes no sense, which is probably why the NIV and other translations simply change "those things we worked for" to "what you have worked for," even though there is not a single Greek manuscript that reads that

This idea is also found in John's third epistle: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (v 4). Notice again that *John's joy* is associated with the faithfulness of the believer(s) to whom he ministered.

Thus 1 John 2:28 likely means that if the readers continue to abide

in Christ *then John himself* will have boldness and not shame at the Bema.

We may wonder why John could have shame if those whom he discipled did not continue?

Recently I spoke with a very godly Mom who has four believing adult children. She told me that only one of the four is walking with the Lord right now. As she told me this her eyes filled with tears. She has joy for the one who is walking with the Lord, but great sadness and shame over the three that are not. She knows all four are

"John wrote his epistle so that his readers might remain in fellowship with God with the result that his joy and the joy of the other Apostles would be full."

born again. But it grieves her that three of them are not abiding in Christ at this time.

That is not only true with our own children, but with anyone that we pour our lives into. If they continue with the Lord, that brings *us* joy now and it will bring us joy at the Bema. If they fall away, that brings *us* sadness and shame now and it will bring sadness and shame at the Bema too.

This does not mean that the success or failure of those we disciple determines whether we rule with Christ or not (see 2 Tim 2:12).

But it does mean that how much we rule will definitely be related to how well our disciples do. The Apostle Paul said, "...you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that *I* may rejoice in the day of Christ that *I* have not run in vain or labored in vain" (Phil 2:16, emphasis added; see also Luke 19:16-26; Gal 2:2; 4:11; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 3:5).

1 John 2:28 Applies to All Believers

So if I'm right, does this ruin 1 John 2:28 in terms of our own work and our own abiding? Of course not. It goes without saying that if John would be ashamed before Christ if some of his disciples did not abide, he would be much more ashamed if he himself did not persevere in abiding.

Yes, if we abide in Christ, we will have joy and not shame at the Bema *for our own service*. However, that does not change the fact that there will be some shame and sadness at the Bema for any believers we poured our lives into who failed to persevere.

It may be a Western mindset, but we often think that as long as we serve Christ faithfully our whole lives and persevere to the end, then our reward will be full. No. Fullness of reward depends in part on what others have done with what we invested in them.

Think of it like investing. Remember that in a Bema passage the Lord said, "Do business till I come" (Luke 19:13). Let's say you invested \$1,000,000 in ten different stocks. You contacted all the CEOs of those companies and told them, "Be diligent in your work so that I do not lose those things I've worked for, but that I might receive

a full reward." And let's say that 3 of the ten CEOs did not take your message to heart and they mismanaged the funds so badly that you lost 50% of the money you invested in their funds. Wouldn't that reduce your return on your investments? Wouldn't you have sadness over those losses?

Ministering for Christ is a form of investing. It is just much more important.

Whether those whom we disciple continue on should make a big difference to us. That should lead us to pray for them, keep encouraging them, and keep teaching them as well.

Conclusion

It should matter very much to all of us whether our children, physical and spiritual, abide in Christ until He returns. We should not be so concerned about ourselves that we forget others. Or maybe I should say, we

should be so concerned about ourselves that we have abiding concern for others.

If we know that the labors of others impact our own rewards, it makes us view ministry differently. Maybe we need that reminder.



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and his wife Sharon live in Highland Village, TV



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BY WES SPRADLEY

Introduction

he church I attend stands firmly on the truth of the inerrancy of the Scriptures. (That is the teaching that the Bible has no errors in it.) The Sunday school I attend is blessed with several godly men who are able to teach the inerrant Scriptures. Not too long ago, one of those men opened his lesson with John 2:23-24. He read the passage to the class:

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men.

After reading that Scripture, he went on with his class.

But my attention was arrested by a comment from a woman sitting toward the back of the room. There were perhaps thirty or forty people in the class that Sunday, and in a stage whisper loud enough to be heard by most of the people in the classroom, she said, "Yes, but did they really believe?"

I spent the rest of that class and another few weeks thinking about her question. Since the Biblical text says those people at the Passover believed, it seemed to me that her question raised questions about the reliability of the Biblical text. The question whether those who saw the wonders Jesus did at that Passover did actually believe seems to put doubts in the minds of the faithful. So I wondered where the question comes from. What would cause born-again people to

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question a rather straightforward statement of the Scriptures?

My Thesis

After a little reading and thinking and coming to some conclusions, I pondered whether to present my thesis inductively or deductively. Lest there be confusion about my message, I will tell you up front: We, the church, the Body of Christ, have been taught by Evangelical Christian teachers— I am willing to say unwittingly on their part—to doubt the Word of God. We have been taught by Christian teachers to question whether the Word of God means what it says.

Three Examples

Here are three examples from books in my library.

Alvah Hovey, in a commentary on the Gospel of John published in 1885, writes on John 2:23:

It appears from this verse that he [Jesus] wrought several miracles during this Passover, in Jerusalem...These signs led many to believe that Jesus was the promised Christ. But their faith was mere belief on the ground of evidence, implying no radical change of character. It might lead to further inquiry, as in the case of Nicodemus, but it was not in itself a proof of willingness to serve God by forsaking all to follow Jesus. To believe on one's name is to believe on what that name represents, whether of character or of office (p. 93).1

Hovey then explains that verses 24 and 25 "afford proof ...that the Evangelist did not mean to ascribe saving faith to the many spoken of in verse 23" (p. 93).

A second example of an Evangelical teacher undermining believers' simple trust in the plain-sense truthfulness of the Scriptures comes from Edwin Blum's commentary on the Gospel of John in Dallas Seminary's Bible Knowledge Commentary.² In the New Testament edition, Blum writes on John 2:23, "The effect of these miracles (which were probably healings) was

"These three Evangelical teachers illustrate an all too common phenomenon: what the Scripture calls faith too many Evangelical teachers say is deficient in some way."

to elicit faith on the part of many people.³ They believed in His name, that is they trusted in Him" (p. 280). So far, so good. Blum seems to be taking the Biblical text at face value. But then, he writes, "This was not necessarily saving faith as the next verse implies. They believed He was a great Healer, but not necessarily a great Savior from sin" (p. 280).

To justify his own doubt of the veracity of God's word, Blum writes concerning verse 24, "Jesus knew that a temporary excitement or a faith based on signs was not sufficient" (p. 280). And we might justly ask how Blum knows what Jesus knew since the text says nothing about "a temporary

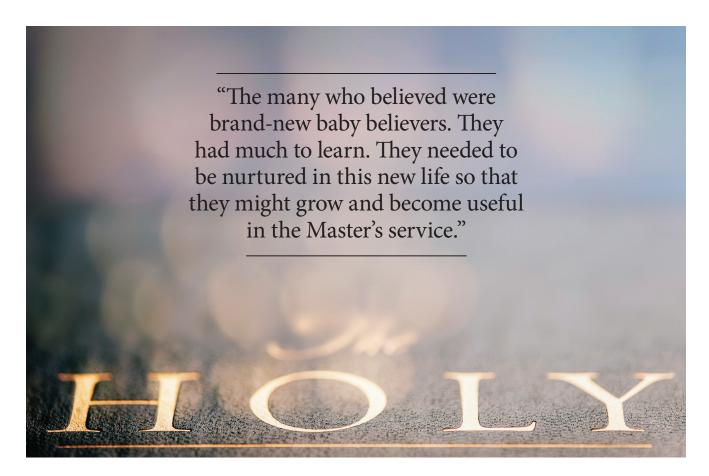
excitement" or the insufficiency of a faith based on signs (esp. in light of John 20:30-31, which says that signs were designed to produce saving faith).

A third and final example for our purposes in this article, that is, that Evangelical teachers, perhaps unwittingly, undermine the confidence of believers in the written Word of God, comes from F. F. Bruce. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Bruce titles the section on John 2:23-25 "Superficial Faith." Right away we know what he is going to do:

Jesus made a clear distinction between those who were superficially impressed because they saw the bare signs and those who penetrated beneath the surface and grasped the truth that was signified by the signs. . . . There are two levels of believing in Jesus' name – that spoken of in John 1:12, which carries with it the authority to become God's children, and that spoken of here. The former level involves unreserved personal commitment, the practical acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord, but it will not be attained as long as "we see the signs but see not him" (pp. 77-78).4

These three Evangelical teachers illustrate an all too common phenomenon: what the Scripture calls faith too many Evangelical teachers say is deficient in some way. Hovey wrote that the faith of those who saw Jesus perform signs "was *mere* belief on the ground of evidence." Blum, appealing to special knowledge of what Jesus knew, writes that though the people at the Passover believed in Jesus's name, their belief was not genuine

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and thus not salvific. And Bruce writes that what the Scripture calls faith in John 2:23 is deficient and "superficial" because it lacked commitment.

What are these Evangelical teachers doing? What are they teaching us? They are teaching us mere mortals that we cannot trust the Word of God to mean what it says. Rather, in order for us to understand what the Bible is saying we have to read their commentaries.

A Backward Methodology

What happened? These writers rightly felt a tension between John 2:23 and John 2:24. The people at the Passover believed in Jesus's name, but He did not entrust himself to them (or, we might say, He did not believe in them). Rightly,

we, as did the three commentators referenced above, want to know how to resolve the tension between the two verses.

Hovey, Blum, and Bruce erred in their methodology.

They started with verse 24, assuming they knew what verse 24 meant, and then they went back to verse 23 to explain verse 23 in the light of verse 24. We know they went in the wrong direction because they made verse 23 mean the opposite of what it plainly says.

A second problem of method is that they explained a clear verse in the light of a difficult verse. The Bible, especially the Gospel of John, has much to say about our believing in Jesus. It does not have much to say about Jesus believing in us.

A Better Way

Here is a better approach. To understand what the Lord has for us here in this passage, let's move from verse 23 to verse 24, from the clear to the less clear.

Verse 23 says that "many believed in His name." John 1:12 tells us the theological significance of believing in the name of Jesus: "to those who believe in His name" Jesus gives the privilege of becoming the children of God through regeneration.

John 1:12 is the theology; John 2:23 is the historical example.

If we take the plain sense of John 2:23, having compared it with the theology of John 1:12, what would we conclude about the many at the Passover who believed in the name of Jesus? Reasoning on the authority of the Word of God in John 1:12 and on the reasonableness of the

Word of God, that is, we expect the Word not to contradict itself, we conclude that the many of John 2:23 are born of God. They are regenerate. They have experienced the new birth. If they had died at the end of John 2:23, they would have gone to heaven. In truth, the many of John 2:23 have indeed long since left the body of this flesh behind, and we too who know the Lord will see them in heaven when we leave this old, corrupt flesh behind.

What, then, does verse 24 mean? "But Jesus Himself did not entrust Himself to them for He knows all men." The many who believed were brand-new baby believers. They had much to learn. They needed to be nurtured in this new life so that they might grow and become useful in the Master's service.⁵ They were not yet ready for meat but needed first to be nurtured on the milk of the Word (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-4). Spiritual growth was necessary for them to become trustworthy servants.

Earlier in Chapter 2, the Apostle John already gave us a lesson in discipleship just as he gave us a first lesson in the doctrine of regeneration. John recounted the incident of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. We learn what servants of Jesus are to do, "Do whatsoever He says to you" (v 5). Jesus tells the servants at the wedding to fill the water pots, and

they fill them to the brim. He tells them to draw out some of the water to take to the master of the feast, and they obey. And John makes, then, the telling point that the master of the feast did not know where this great wine had come from but "the servants who drew the water knew" (v 9). It is those who have learned to serve the Lord who are privy to the secrets of the kingdom. As the many who believed in His name in 2:23 learn from Him to follow Him, He will entrust more of Himself to them. And so it is for all of us who seek to be the King's servants.

Conclusion

Hovey, Blum, and Bruce have illustrated for us a phenomenon that happens too much in our Evangelical Christian world. Evangelical teachers far too often undermine the power and authority of the Word of God by their twisted eisegesis which comes from the doctrines of men rather than the Word of God. Such twisted nonexplanations sow seeds of doubt in the mind and hearts of believers in Christ—doubt in our own ability to understand the Scriptures under the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit, doubt in the Word itself that it means what it says.

Let us hold fast to the traditions as we have been taught. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as the authorized and only Giver of the gift, offers the gift of everlasting life to each and to all who believe in His name.

Wes Spradley graduated from DTS in 1972. He taught writing and literature at UT San Antonio for seventeen years and spent 17 years in pastoral ministry.



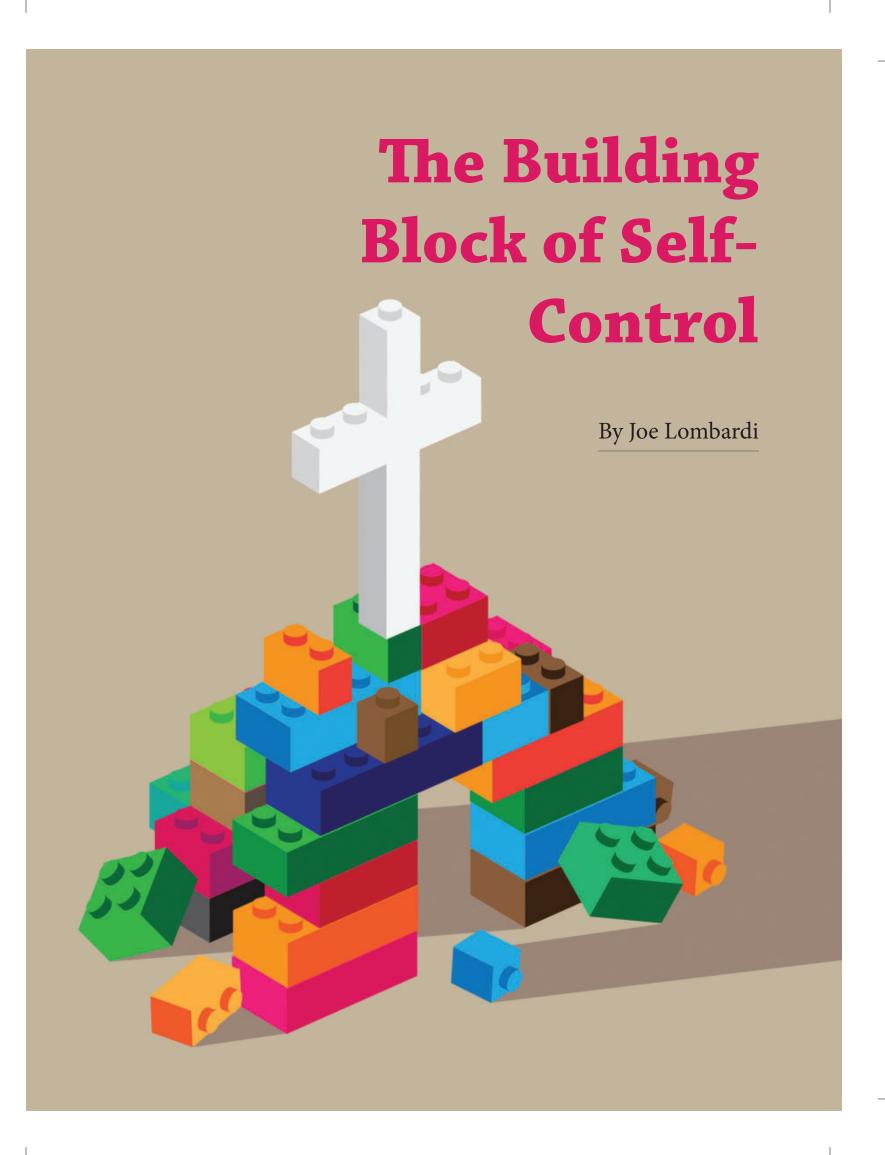
1. Alvah Hovey, Commentary on the Gospel of John, An American Commentary on the New Testament, Ed. Alvah Hovey,

Philadelphia, PA: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1885.

- 2. Dr. Blum was one of my professors at DTS and was and is a very godly man. I am not questioning his godliness or his integrity. My concern is that what he wrote unintentionally undercuts the authority of God's Word, and that is a commentary designed to undergird that authority.
- 3. Edwin Blum, "John," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament* ed., 2nd printing (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983). Blum uses bold face when he is quoting the Scripture text.
- 4. F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983).
- 5. Zane Hodges suggests that they, like Nicodemus, were not yet willing to confess Jesus before men. Hence the Lord was not yet ready to entrust them with discipleship instruction until they became willing to confess Him. See *Faith in His Name* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2015), pp. 46-48, 61-62.

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elix was a man of humble beginnings. However, through the influence of an older brother, he was able to rise above his lowly station in life and worm his way into a position of social prestige and political power. In his relentless quest for political and personal advancement, he was willing to resort to adultery, bribery, conspiracy, cruelty and even brutality. Concerning him one Roman historian, wrote, "He thought he could do any evil act with impunity," and he "exercised the power of a king in the spirit of a slave." His lifestyle was characterized by an undisciplined, careless, and even reckless abandonment to pleasure.

We are first introduced to this Roman rascal in Acts 23. The year was A.D. 58. It had been six years since Felix was appointed Roman administrator of the province of Iudea.

At that time there were some forty Jewish men living in Jerusalem who had conspired together to kill the Apostle Paul (Acts 23:12-15). They went on a hunger strike, vowing that they would neither eat nor drink until they had completed the act. (By the way, I don't know if they starved to death or not, because their plot was detected and their plans were thwarted [Acts 23:16-22].)

Paul had been placed in protective custody, and was about to be transferred to Caesarea, where he was supposed to appear before Felix. His accusers were ordered to present their case first, then Paul would be permitted to defend himself (Acts 23:23ff).

In Acts 24, Luke allows us to witness the courtroom drama five days later:

Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul. And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation... (Acts 24:1-2a).

Tertullus was a Roman attorney who practice law in Jerusalem. He was an intelligent and eloquent trial lawyer who began his case against Paul on behalf of the high priest, Ananias. Other high–ranking members of the Jewish Sanhedrin were also present, trying to win Felix's favor with flattery (v 21ff). After several slanderous charges were made, Paul was finally permitted to speak in his own defense (vv 10-21).

And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you" (Acts 24:22-25, emphasis added).

Why was Felix so afraid? What did Paul say that Felix could not bear to hear?

Among the topics Paul discussed with Felix was the subject of *self-control*. Just the fact that that issue was raised was probably enough to make the hair on the back of Felix's neck bristle. If there ever was a man whose life epitomized a lack of self-control, it was the moneyloving, pleasure–seeking, power–grabbing, Antonius Felix.

For example, he had already been married twice before. The name of his first wife is still unknown. His second wife was the granddaughter of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra. But then he met Drusilla, the Jewess daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the King Herod who executed James the brother of John (Acts 12:1–2). Drusilla's great-grandfather was the King Herod who tried to kill the baby Jesus. And her great uncle was the King Herod who beheaded John the Baptist.

Although she was only sixteen when she and Felix first met,
Drusilla was already married to somebody else. But Felix persuaded her to leave her first husband for him. They committed open and wanton adultery. So, is it any wonder that Paul's words concerning righteousness, *self-control*, and the judgment to come pierced Felix's heart?

The word Paul used for "self–control" in his discussion with Felix is the same word that Peter used in his instruction in 2 Pet 1:2–11.

I mentioned in a previous article that the Bible makes it clear that there is a sense in which every believer is a builder. What are we building? We are building *a house*, of course. But, we are not talking about a house of wood and glass, and of brick and mortar, but of Christian character.

If Paul warns each believer to "be careful how he builds," because "the fire [at the Judgment Seat of Christ] will test the quality of each man's work" (1 Cor 3:10, 13), it is Peter who explains how to build a life of quality that will make a difference for all eternity (in 2 Pet 2:1-11).



In the first half of 2 Pet 1:5, Peter instructs us *how* to build ("giving all diligence"). In the second half of the verse he informs us *what* to build. In past articles I have already considered the building blocks of *virtue* and *knowledge*. In this article I want to examine at greater length and depth the third building block of *self-control*.

A Biblical Definition of Self-Control

Once again, it is best for us to begin with the Biblical definition of the term. The word that Peter used here, translated *self-control*, is only found a total of four times in the entire New Testament (twice in 2 Pet 1:6 and once in Acts 24:25; I will explore the last use later in this article) and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) in Gen 43:31, "Then he washed his face and came out; and he *restrained* himself, and said, 'Serve the bread." The Greek

word restrained is egkrateia, which is derived from a root, kratos, meaning "power." So egkrateia is a power that is mastered. It is strength that is restrained and controlled. This quality is what you and I need, Peter said, if we are going to be effective and productive for the Lord.

Do you want to be effective and productive for the Lord, so that one day, you, too, will receive an abundant and extravagant reward? Then you cannot live an undisciplined life. That is, you cannot if your person and passions are uncontrolled. That is why Peter said that you need to add to your faith, along with *virtue* and *knowledge*, the building block of *self-control*.

Here are three areas of our lives that need to be brought under control. They concern, generally speaking, your *mouth*, your *mind*, and your *morals*.

Controlling Our Tongues

The Bible makes it clear, for example, that we need to learn how to control our *tongues*. To be sure, at times that would almost seem to be a "Mission: Impossible," at least, according to Jas 3:2-12. James, the half-brother of our Lord, reminds us that the tongue is powerful and poisonous, and can easily be perverted. Indeed, there is probably nothing that can trip up a believer quicker than a dangling tongue. As someone quipped, "the tongue weighs practically nothing, but so few people are able to hold it."

But there are times when we have to hold our tongue. We need to learn to speak with *tongue in check*. James said it like this, "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (Jas 1:26).

If you want another good Biblical example of someone who had a

problem with his tongue, just study the life of Peter before the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit finally got a hold of it. I think that if I had been the Lord, there were some times when I would have turned to Peter and said, "Stifle it!" (Now that I think about it, there were a couple of times when I believe Jesus actually came pretty close to saying that Himself). Yet that is precisely what you and I need to learn to do: stifle it! As Solomon said in Prov 21:23, "Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles."

Controlling Our Tempers

It was also Solomon who said in Prov 17:27, "He who has knowledge spares (i.e., controls) his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit." Obviously the Bible not only makes it clear that we need to learn how to control our tongues, but it also makes it clear that we need to learn how to control our tempers. Paul wrote in Eph 4:31 (and Col 3:5) that the believer must throw out the baggage of the old sinful nature, including "anger and rage." In other words, one must learn (among other things) to control his temper. Again, it was Solomon who wrote in Prov 14:17, "a quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated." In Prov 19:19 he added, "a man of great wrath (i.e., quick-tempered) will suffer punishment."

If you are looking for a good Biblical example of someone who had a problem with his temper, just study the life of Moses, especially on that day when he "lost his cool" in the wilderness. The Psalmist said that Moses spoke "rashly" (Ps 106:32–33), as he struck that rock angrily. And, yes, even Moses had to pay the penalty.

As Solomon wrote in Prov 16:32, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."

Controlling Our Temptations

Finally, we need to learn to control our *temptations* as well. I am referring to what the Bible calls in 1 John 2:16, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Indeed, you must get a *handle* on them, before they put a *death-hold* on you.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "Surrender to all your desires obviously leads to impotence, disease, jealousies, lies, concealment, and everything that is the reverse of health, good humor and frankness. For any happiness, even in this world, quite a lot of *restraint* is going to be necessary" (*Mere Christianity*, p. 89). I believe that many people today would like to cast off every restraint, because they themselves are living in this world without any moral reference point.

There are several examples in the Bible of individuals who had a problem resisting temptation. Perhaps David is one of the most notable. It appears from the Biblical record of his life that there was very little (if any) laughter left in his home after the time of his moral failure with Bathsheba, and the subsequent murder of her husband Uriah. Instead, there was one tragedy following another.

Today, perhaps more than ever, as a believer you need to guard yourself so that you don't over involve and over-indulge yourself in things that may even be good in moderation, but bad in excess—whether it is eating or sleeping or working or playing.

Paul said, in 2 Tim 2: 22, "flee also youthful lusts." You need to know when it is time to flee! I like the way Paul drove home this point to the believers in Corinth: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor 10:13).

The Bible makes it clear that we need to learn how to control our tongues, our tempers, and our temptations, if we are going to be effectively and productively used by the Lord. We need to learn to live a disciplined life if we hope to receive an abundant and extravagant reward.

Conclusion

The 15th–century devotional writer Thomas à Kempis said, "No conflict is so severe as his who labors to subdue himself." However, that does not mean that the goal of self-control is unthinkable or unattainable. Self–control is doable, but it is going to require at least two things.

First, it's going to require *strict training*. Paul explained in 1 Cor 9:25, "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown." The word that is translated "temperate" is a form of the very same word translated "self-control" in our primary text in 2 Pet 1:6.

By *strict training* we mean that you need to pay close attention,

first, to *where* you are and to *whom* you are with. For example, in Prov 22:24–25 we read, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul." These are choices that you can and must make.

Furthermore, this strict training requires that you pay strict attention to what you do and to how you do what you do. It means that you also have to be willing to say, "Look! I am in a strict training program right now, because I do not want to lose my prize. There are some things I just cannot do!" In addition, when it comes to those things that I can do, I am going to be careful *how* I do them. Which means, for example, that I am going to meet legitimate needs—be they financial, material, emotional, and/or social—in legitimate ways. It also means that I am going to counteract the bad that I may be tempted to do, with any good that the Lord has prompted me to do. In other words, I will not "be overcome by evil, but [I will] overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21).

Second, it's going to require *Spirit-filling.* It is the ninth and final "fruit of the Spirit" catalogued by Paul in Galatians: "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, selfcontrol" (Gal 5:22-23a). Just a few verses prior, Paul admonished the Galatian believers, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). If the Galatians wondered how that statement could be true, they found the answer just a few verses later. It is because the (unquenched) indwelling Spirit will produce the fruit of self-control. So, in the words of Eph

5:18, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; *but be filled with the Spirit.*"

Speaking of self-control, if there was anything that Felix lacked in his life, it was that. No wonder he became a little fidgety as Paul spoke of self-control. "Now as he [Paul] reasoned about righteousness, *self-control*, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when

"The Bible makes it clear that we need to learn how to control our tongues, our tempers, and our temptations, if we are going to be effectively and productively used by the Lord.

I have a convenient time I will call for you." How did Felix respond? He hesitated, then procrastinated. Essentially, he said to the Apostle Paul, "Don't call me. I will call you."

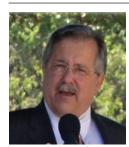
The irony and tragedy of it all is that although Felix said he was well-acquainted with the sect they called the Way, he really had no personal relationship with Jesus Christ who *is* the Way (John 14:6).

If you are wondering whatever happened to Felix and Drusilla, I will tell you what I know. In the year A.D. 60, Felix was recalled to Rome by Nero and was replaced by a man whose name was Festus. Some Jews who followed Felix to Rome went to the Emperor and

bitterly accused Felix of misconduct and mismanagement. He narrowly escaped capital punishment, and eventually died in obscurity and disgrace. Historians say that Drusilla (who also had the privilege of hearing a complete presentation of the grace Gospel from the lips of Paul), died with her only son, Agrippa, in the awful eruption of Mount Vesuvius in the year A.D. 79.

But I wonder, dear reader, how will you respond to this brief discourse on self-control?

If you have believed in Jesus for everlasting life, then I would remind you that a rich welcome into His kingdom awaits you, if in dependence on the heavenly resources available to you, you will build upon the foundation of your faith a superstructure of Christ-like character using this building block of *self-control*.



Joe Lombardi is a pastor without a charge in Tualatin, OR.



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