

GRACE FOCUS

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MAY & JUNE 2014



Eternal Rewards

**The Antidote to Legalism
and Antinomianism.**

SALVATION AND REWARDS, *p.5*

WE BELIEVE IN REWARDS, *p.11*

ENTERING THE KINGDOM, *p.18*

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EDITOR'S NOTE

What should motivate the secure believer to live for God? We are all asked that question.

One motivation comes from the *doctrine of eternal rewards*. Eternal salvation is a free gift, but eternal rewards are earned. Understanding the difference between salvation and rewards is one of the keys to avoiding the errors of legalism and antinomianism.

In this issue, we've collected several articles that deal with this theme of rewards.

We begin with a work from the pen of C. I. Scofield: "Salvation and Rewards" (from his book, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 1888), which lays out some key verses that clearly demonstrate the difference between eternal salvation and eternal rewards.

We have an article by Zane Hodges which originally was published in our Journal twenty-three years ago (in 1991) entitled, "We Believe in Rewards." This is an excellent overview of rewards, and why aiming for rewards is godly, not selfish.

Ken Yates served in the Air Force before a twenty-year stint as a chaplain with the Army, retiring as Lt. Colonel. He gives us an article sharing lessons he learned about our coming judgment by Christ at the Bema from his years as an officer with annual evaluations that determined his future rank and service.

Shawn Lazar has an article on self-control, and why exercising that virtue is key to obtaining rewards.

John Niemelä answers a question about 1 John 5:13, which sounds like the believing readers currently did not know that they had everlasting life. But Niemelä shows that is not the case, that the issue is John's desire that they continue to know that they have everlasting life.

There is also an article by me on what the Lord meant when He spoke of entering the kingdom. I



What's Your Motivation?

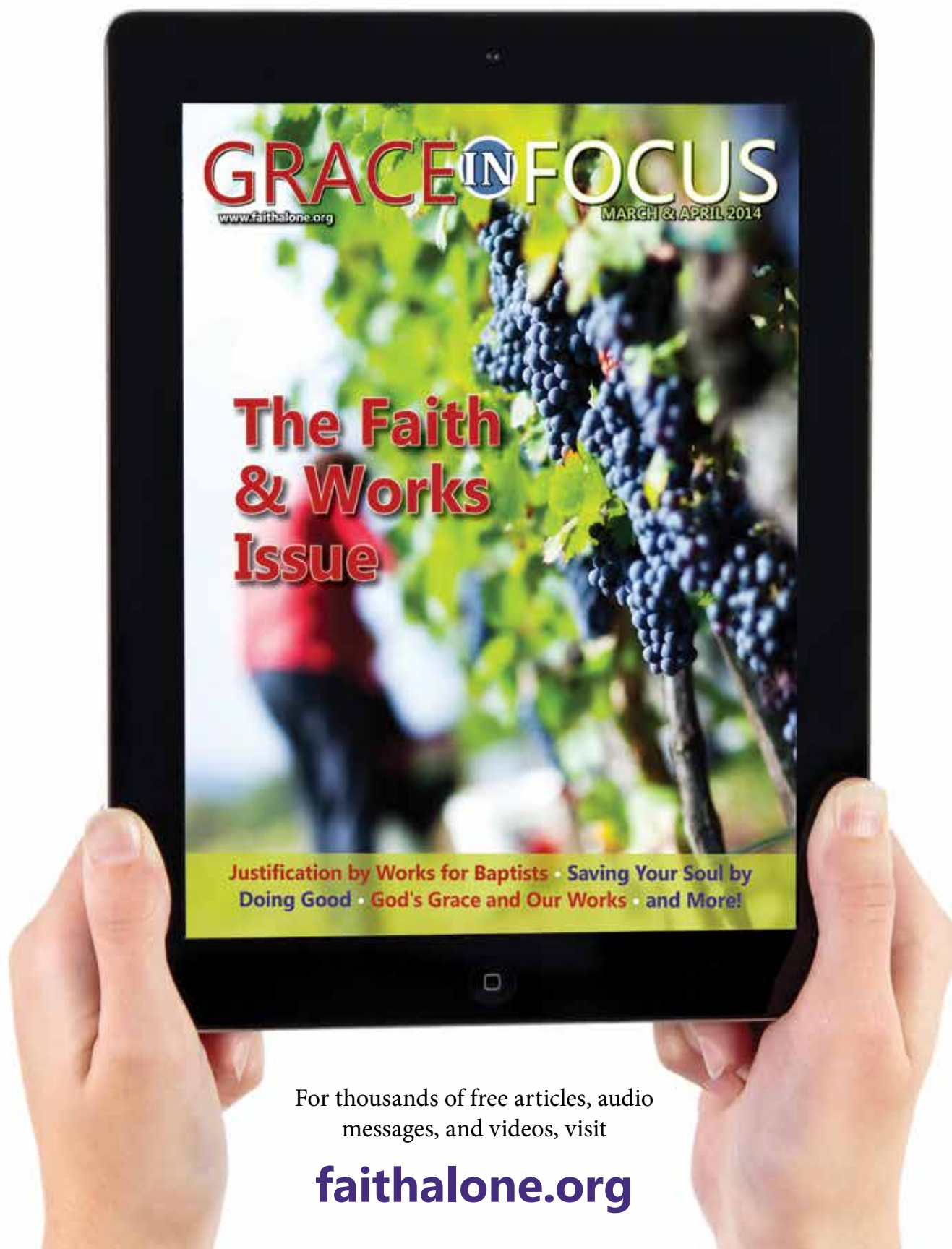
Bob Wilkin, **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

argue that entering the kingdom means just that, and that in all the contexts the issue is believing in Jesus, not ethical righteousness.

If this is your first issue of our magazine, welcome. Please email us with any comments, questions, or suggestions at ges@faithalone.org.

Enjoy. 

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C. I. Scofield



SALVATION AND REWARDS

The New Testament Scriptures contain a doctrine of salvation for the lost and a doctrine of rewards for the faithful services of the saved. And it is of great importance to the right understanding of the Word that the student should clearly make the distinction between these. What that distinction is may be seen by carefully noting the following contrasts.

Salvation Is a Free Gift

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew *the gift* of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have *given you* living water’” (John 4:10, emphasis added).

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk *without* money and *without* price” (Isa 55:1, emphasis added).

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life *freely*” (Rev 22:17, emphasis added).

“For the wages of sin is death, but *the gift of God* is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23, emphasis added).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is *the gift of God*, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph 2:8-9, emphasis added).

Works Pleasing to God Shall Be Rewarded

In contrast with the freeness of eternal salvation, note that God rewards our works.

“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Matt 10:42, emphasis added).

“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” (2 Tim 4:7-8, emphasis added).

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and *My reward* is with Me, to give to every one *according to his work*” (Rev 22:12, emphasis added).

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? *Run* in such a way that you may obtain it. 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*” (1 Cor 9:24-25, emphasis added).

“God’s purpose in
promising to reward
with heavenly and
eternal honors the
faithful service of His
saints is to win them
from the pursuit of
earthly riches...and to
encourage them in the
exercise of Christian
virtues.”

“And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities’” (Luke 19:17, emphasis added).

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone *builds* on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, *each one’s work* will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s *work*, of what sort

it is. If anyone’s *work* which he has built on it endures, *he will receive a reward*. If anyone’s *work* is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor 3:11-15, emphasis added).

“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. *Be faithful until death*, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10, emphasis added).

Note that this last verse does not say receive “life”—the suffering saints in Smyrna had life (i.e., eternal life) and were suffering for righteousness’s sake—but a “crown of life” they should receive. Crowns are symbols of rewards—of distinctions earned. It may be remarked that four crowns are mentioned in the New Testament: that of joy, or rejoicing, the reward of *ministry* (Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19); of righteousness, the reward of faithfulness in *testimony* (2 Tim 4:8); of life, the reward of faithfulness under *trial* (Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10); and of glory, the reward of faithfulness under *suffering* (1 Pet 5:4; Heb 2:9).

Salvation Is a Present Possession

The believer has eternal salvation the moment he believes in Jesus for everlasting life.

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

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me *has* everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but *has passed* from death into life” (John 5:24, emphasis added).

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me *has* everlasting life" (John 6:47, emphasis added).

"Who *has* saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Tim 1:9, emphasis added).

"Then He said to the woman, 'Your faith *has* saved you.² Go in peace'" (Luke 7:50, emphasis added).

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy *He* saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5, emphasis added).

"And this is the testimony: that God *has* given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11, emphasis added).

Rewards Are Bestowed in the Future

By contrast, rewards are not a present possession, but are to be given at a future time.

"For the Son of Man *will* come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and *then* He *will* reward each according to his *works*" (Matt 16:27, emphasis added).

"And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you *shall* be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14, emphasis added).

"And behold, *I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me*, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev 22:12, emphasis added).


"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you *will* receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Pet 5:4, emphasis added).

"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 (2 Tim 4:8, emphasis added).

"*After a long time* the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them" (Matt 25:19, emphasis added).

Conclusion

God's purpose in promising to reward with heavenly and eternal honors the faithful service of His saints is to win them from the pursuit of earthly riches and pleasures, to sustain them in the fires of persecution, and to encourage them in the exercise of Christian virtues. "Finally, let us heed the warning" (Rev 3:11). (See also Dan 12:3; Matt 5:11-12; 10:41-42; Luke 12:35-37; 14:12, 14; John 4:35-36; Col 3:22-24; 2 Tim 4:8; Heb 6:10; 11:8-10, 24-27; 12:2-3.) 

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921) was most famous for the Scofield Reference Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909, 1917).

1. C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (1888), Chapter 9. This excerpt was edited by Shawn Lazar. The Scripture references were updated to the NKJV.

2. Editor's note: This statement might merely refer to healing. However, many commentators speculate that the Lord may have a double meaning here. If so, then her faith not only resulted in her physical healing, but also in her gaining everlasting life. Scofield takes that view.

WHAT IS GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY?

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

Grace Evangelical Society (GES) was founded in 1986 to promote the soul-winning truth that God offers man the free gift of everlasting life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from works done before or after the new birth (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:26).

Another of our aims is to promote Christian growth by emphasizing the Biblical truths about eternal security, assurance, and eternal rewards.

We do this by publishing *Grace in Focus Magazine*, expository books, booklets, and tracts, and the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. We also hold an annual conference each Spring at Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, TX, and regularly speak at local churches and Bible conferences.

For more information about our ministry please visit

FAITHALONE.ORG



Evaluated by Christ

What the Military Taught Me about the Bema

by Ken Yates, Lt. Col. (ret.)

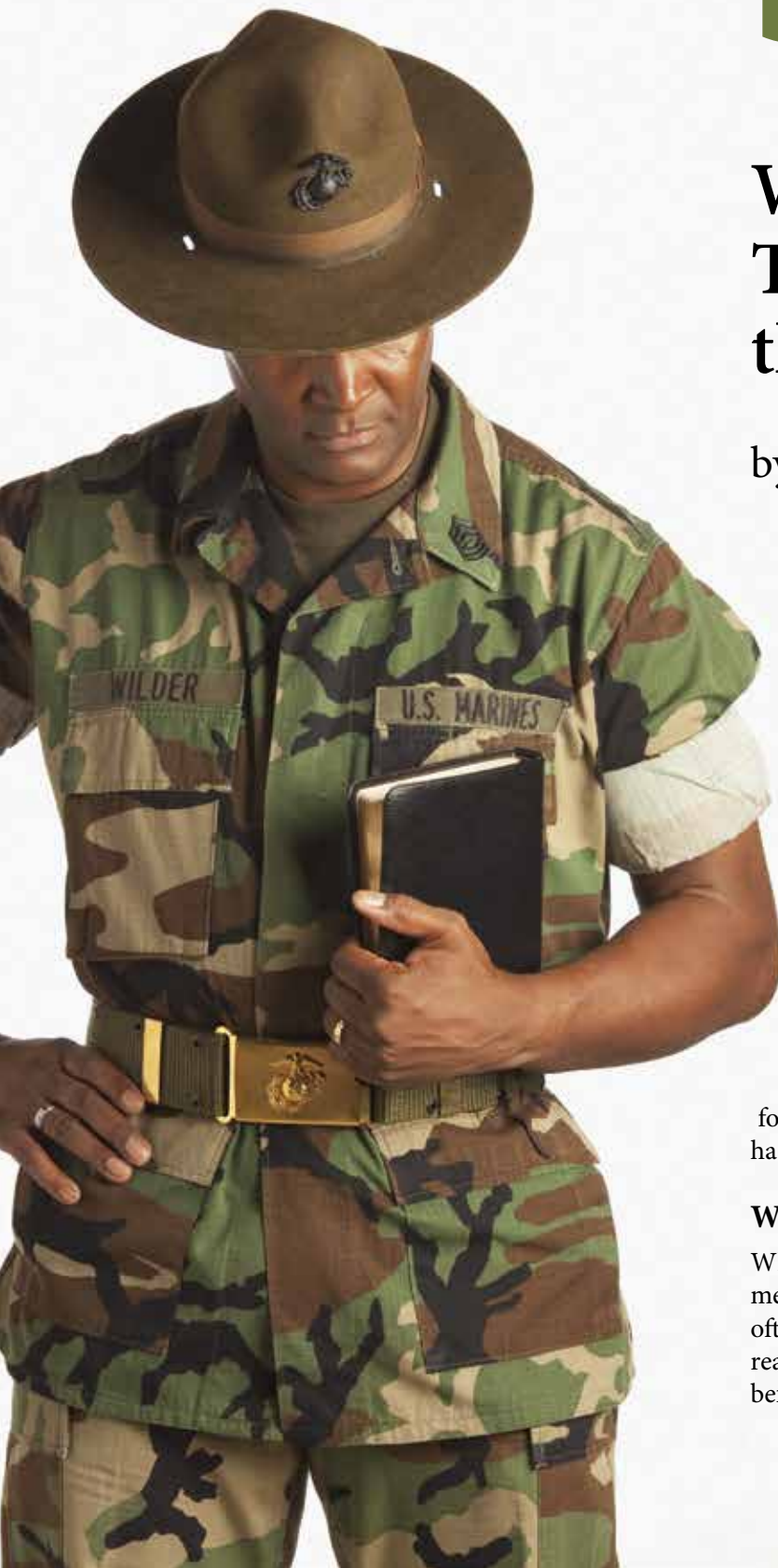
One Judgment or Two?

Many people believe that all of mankind will one day stand before God in a final judgment. At this judgment, God will either cast each person into the lake of fire, or allow them into His Kingdom. This appears to be the majority opinion of many evangelicals as well.¹

Even though this is the majority view, there are those who disagree. These people believe that only non-believers will appear before God in a final judgment to determine their eternal dwelling place. As non-believers, they will be condemned. Believers, on the other hand, will appear at a separate judgment. This judgment will be before Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ. At this judgment, rewards will be the issue. Believers will be rewarded for their faithfulness to the Lord. Free Grace theology has done much to defend this view as Biblical.

Why the Reluctance?

When people are exposed to the idea of a separate judgment for believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ, it is often difficult for them to accept. No doubt, part of the reason for the difficulty is that they have never heard it before. We all become comfortable in our beliefs and



traditions. Exposure to new teaching takes us out of our comfort zone.

But there is another reason why people are reluctant to accept the idea of judgment where rewards are given out to believers. Such a judgment involves distinctions among believers now, and among believers in God's Kingdom. This challenges how most people view the world to come. They assume that everyone will be equal in all respects. Otherwise, there would be envy and unhappiness in eternity. Also, to live the Christian life in view of rewards appears to promote living for selfish motives.

It is not my purpose to answer these objections in detail except to point out that envy will be impossible in the eternal state because believers will not have a sin nature. It is also clear that in eternity all believers will have joy and happiness. In addition, the Bible does indeed teach there will be rewards for faithfulness to the Lord (Matt 5:11-12; Luke 19:12-26; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 22:12). This is presented as a powerful motivation to live a godly life. It is not the only motivation for doing so, but if the Bible teaches it, we must not look at such a life as one lived with wrong motives.

The Power of a Good Illustration

One of the great aspects of Biblical teaching is that the Bible often uses earthly illustrations to explain spiritual truths. Of course, all illustrations have their limitations since temporal and earthly examples are used to describe eternal and heavenly realities. But these illustrations do help us understand these things.

One example of a Biblical illustration is our earthly families. To describe the relationship of the

believer with God, the New Testament refers to the believer as a child of God. God is our heavenly Father. While this illustration is not perfect because earthly fathers are imperfect, it helps anyone who has had a loving father understand his relationship with God. Included in this relationship is the fact that the believer has been born into God's family. Our heavenly Father loves us as a good father loves his children.

Other examples are found in John 15:1ff and Luke 8:5-8. Jesus describes the ability of believers to

“The time will come when Christ will evaluate our performance. We will receive our ‘heavenly OER.’ At such an evaluation, as the Scriptures teach, we will be given rewards based upon that performance. These rewards will include responsibilities in the Kingdom.”

produce fruit for the Lord as one involving branches in a vine or seeds planted in a field. I suspect that the disciples of the first century, who lived in a largely agrarian society, understood these illustrations more clearly than many of us today do. But even those of us who live in a modern urban setting can get a clearer understanding of how

fruit is produced in our lives by these illustrations. We have all seen fruit produced in trees or bushes. The basic point is that we can only produce fruit by the power of Christ at work in us, as seen in nature. The image of seed falling on soil is a great illustration of how our hearts can receive the teachings of the Scriptures.

An Illustration of the Judgment Seat of Christ

God, then, has placed things in our everyday lives that help us understand profound truths. The same is true concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ.

For instance, we have all seen examples of people being rewarded for doing well. Most of us have seen this in our jobs. If someone does their job well, or if they go above and beyond what was required, they are rewarded for good work, and even promoted and given greater responsibility. All of us have either experienced these truths or seen them at work.

I have certainly seen this in my profession. Over and over again I saw an imperfect illustration of how the Judgment Seat of Christ will be. I recently retired from the military after a 24-year career. Every year I had to go through a process involving what is known as an Officer Evaluation Report (OER).

The process began with a meeting with my commander. At this meeting, the commander would tell me what he expected of me. A list was made of what I would do in the coming year. Since I would change commanders on occasion, each commander would emphasize things that were important to him. He would have his own philosophy. To put it simply, the commander wanted his subordinates to reflect his values. He wanted

them to become more like him. In theory, the commander ought to be someone with more knowledge and experience than his subordinates, someone they could emulate. At this meeting he would also indicate how he would give me all the resources I needed to do the things he expected of me.

At the end of the year, I would meet with the commander to see if I had done the things he had wanted me to do. How well did I perform? Did my work in that year reflect the values that an Army officer should have (e.g., loyalty, duty, respect, service, honor, integrity, and moral courage)? Did I model the things he in theory modeled in his life?

After the meeting, I would receive my OER. This OER was extremely important. It would determine if I would be promoted within the Army. It would determine if I would be accepted in different schools. It would determine my future assignments. These schools and promotions would determine if I would be given further responsibilities within the Army.

While there are differences in the way the Army evaluates people as compared to other businesses, we all can recognize the importance and appropriateness of such evaluations. It is right that those who perform well be rewarded for their good works.

Our Heavenly “OER”

It has often occurred to me that my experiences in the Army help me understand the Judgment Seat of Christ. Our supreme commander, Jesus Christ, has told us what He expects. Simply put, He wants us to be like Him. We are to love one another (John 15:12). We are to be merciful (Luke 18:22-35). We are to be humble servants (Mark 10:43-45). We are to live our lives through

His power and the resources He provides (Gal 2:20; John 15:4).

The time will come when Christ will evaluate our performance. We will receive our “heavenly OER.” At such an evaluation, as the Scriptures teach, we will be given rewards

“While there are differences in the way the Army evaluates people as compared to other businesses, we all can recognize the importance and appropriateness of such evaluations. It is right that those who perform well be rewarded for their good works.”

based upon that performance. These rewards will include responsibilities in the Kingdom.

When I received my OERs in the military, it is important to note that any negative evaluation I received did not mean I was no longer in the military. Even with a negative evaluation, I was still a member of the armed forces. I still wore the uniform. I still received a monthly paycheck. The issue was one of promotion, privileges, and additional privileges, not membership.

The same is true for the Judgment Seat of Christ. No matter the events that transpire there, every believer will still be a believer. He or she will still be a child of God. The issue

will only be one of rewards, not salvation.

Conclusion

Of course, the system in the military was not perfect. At times officers who deserved promotions and greater responsibilities did not receive them. Those who did not deserve promotions sometimes received them anyway. The commanders would sometimes show favoritism. But at the Judgment Seat of Christ, that will not be the case. Our commander on that day will be perfect. His judgment will be perfect. Each believer will justly be rewarded for his or her deeds. Any rewards that are lost will be deservedly lost.

Throughout my Army career I had commanders that I respected a great deal. I considered it a blessing that I was in the Army. I wanted to gain their approval during my annual evaluations. When a believer looks at our Lord, it is only appropriate that we desire His approval. We should desire to become like Him. As we look for the day when we stand before Him, may we make it our aim to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” ■

Ken Yates (Ph.D., Dallas Seminary) is GES's East Coast speaker. Ken was a chaplain in the Army for 20 years and retired as a Lt. Col. He lives in S.C.

1. For different views of this judgment, see the new book *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment* published by Zondervan. Three of the four contributors hold to a final judgment to determine where all of us will spend eternity.



We Believe in Rewards

by Zane C. Hodges

Among the very last recorded words of our Lord Jesus Christ are these:

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My *reward* is with Me, to give to every one according to his *work*” (Rev 22:12; italics added).

This is a clear and definitive statement on the subject of rewards by the Lord Himself. Not to believe in rewards is not to believe His words. The Grace Evangelical Society *does* believe in rewards!

Rewards and Grace

Some Christians are troubled by the doctrine of rewards because this doctrine seems to suggest “merit” instead of “grace.” They argue that a doctrine of meritorious good works is a contradiction to the truth that we are not under the law but under grace (Rom 6:14).

This point of view is a serious misreading of the Scriptures. As a matter of fact, it badly confuses the doctrine of *divine grace* with the truth of *human responsibility*.

Look again at the words of Jesus quoted above. Our Lord says clearly

that His “reward” is according to each man’s “work.” There is no way to escape the obvious implication that “rewards” are *earned*.

Salvation, of course, is *not* earned. Therefore it can be said to be “by grace...through faith” and “not of works” (Eph 2:8-9). Our works have nothing to do with whether we go to heaven or hell. Salvation is a gift and it is absolutely free. Faith in Christ is the means by which this gift is received.

Paul taught us clearly that grace and works are mutually exclusive. His words are important:

And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work (Rom 11:6).

In the light of this clear-cut statement, we dare not confuse the Bible's teaching about rewards with the truth of God's unconditional grace to us. If we claim that rewards must be "by grace" then we are saying they can have nothing to do with "works." But if we say *that*, we contradict our Lord's words which relate His "reward" to each man's "work."

If we try to "redefine" works in terms of "grace," then according to Paul we change the character of one or both of these. Either what we call "work" is no longer really work, or what we call "grace" is no longer really grace.

Lordship Salvation illustrates this unavoidable result. Since Lordship theologians claim that people must do good works in order to reach heaven, they cannot really call their doctrine salvation by "grace." But of course they *do* claim to teach salvation by grace. Yet, according to Paul, what they call "grace" is no longer really grace!

But Christians who deny that the works considered at the Judgment Seat of Christ are really rewarded on the basis of their spiritual merits fall into a similar error. They are trying to fit "works" and "grace" together in a way that Paul says is impossible. In the process they will either distort the true meaning of grace or distort the meaning of work.

Let us hear Paul again:

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt (Rom 4:4).

In this verse, Paul uses precisely the same Greek word for "wages" that Jesus used in Rev 22:12. It is the

Greek word *misthos*, which basically means "pay, wages." It clearly carries the suggestion of getting what one has *earned*. There is no getting around this Biblical truth. God *gives* us His salvation, but He *pays* us for our good works. To confuse these two lines of truth is to subvert the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of works in Scripture. It is an attempt to mix spiritual

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apples and oranges. The result can only be confusion about the true nature of both of these great themes in the Bible.

This is *not* to say, of course, that there is *no connection* between God's grace to us and the works that we do for Him. Of course there is a connection! We would not even be able to do rewardable good works if we had not been regenerated by grace through faith. As the Apostle Peter makes clear to us, at the moment of salvation we receive "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3). That is to say, God has given us—by grace—all that we need to live a godly life.

But we must utilize this provision *diligently*. Peter says this quite plainly too:

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your

faith virtue, to virtue knowledge... (2 Pet 1:5).

Thus God graciously supplies the means by which we may serve Him, but the decision to serve, and the diligence employed in doing so, are *our* contribution. Thus our works involve *our* efforts and are rewardable.

A totally passive view of the Christian life, in which we make no effort to do right or to please God, has no foundation in the Bible. We are not mere passive vehicles for the Holy Spirit, but active ones who must apply "all diligence."

As we do, we *earn* rewards!

Rewards and Selfishness

Another problem some Christians have with the doctrine of rewards is that this doctrine seems to them to appeal to our "selfishness." Such Christian brothers may go on to say that we do not need to be motivated this way. Instead, we ought to do all that we do for God out of love and gratitude to Him.

This point of view, however, confronts a serious problem of its own. Not only is a doctrine of rewards taught in Scripture, but we are actually commanded to pursue them. Thus Jesus said:

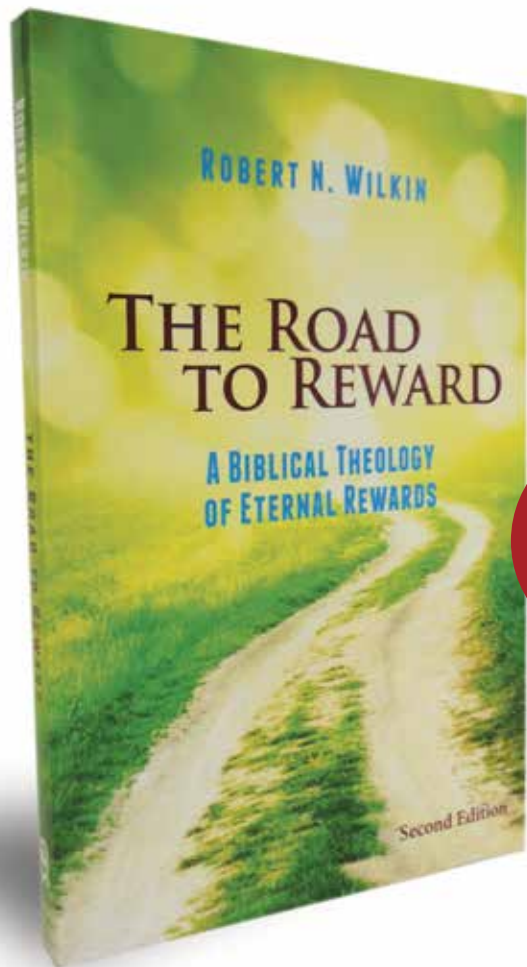
"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:19-21).

We may observe here that our Lord does not present the pursuit of heavenly treasure as though it were optional. On the contrary, it is clear that He wants every disciple of His to lay up this celestial wealth.

The reason for this is also stated. Wherever our *treasure* happens to be, that's where our hearts will be

FREE GRACE RESOURCES

May/June 2014



The Road to Reward: A Biblical Theology of Eternal Rewards (Second Edition)

Robert N. Wilkin

If everlasting life is a free gift, and believers are eternally secure at the moment of faith, what is our motivation to live for Christ? In the

second edition of *The Road to Reward*, Robert N. Wilkin takes us through the Biblical doctrine of eternal rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

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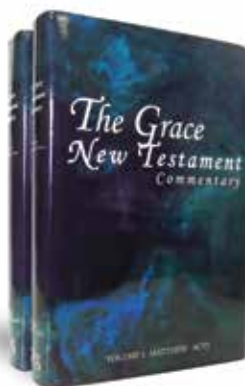
Zane C. Hodges

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The Grace New Testament Commentary

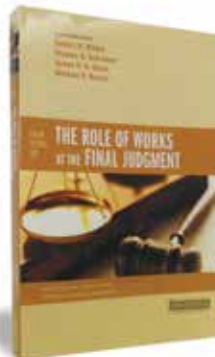
Authors include: Robert N. Wilkin, Zane C. Hodges, Hal M. Haller, Dwight L. Hunt, René A. López, J. B. Bond, and J. Paul Tanner.

Written from a conservative, Dispensational, Free Grace perspective. These two volumes explain all the difficult verses that seem to deny eternal security, justification by faith alone, and that condition Kingdom entrance upon perseverance.

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The Role of Works at the Final Judgment

Robert N. Wilkin, Thomas R. Schreiner, James D. G. Dunn, Michael P. Barber.

Through a discussion of Biblical texts, this book presents four perspectives on the role of works at the final judgment including: Robert N. Wilkin, works will determine rewards but not salvation, and Thomas R. Schreiner, works will provide evidence that one actually has been saved.

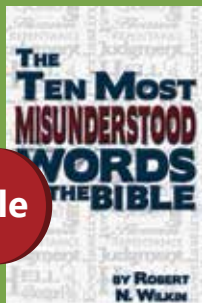
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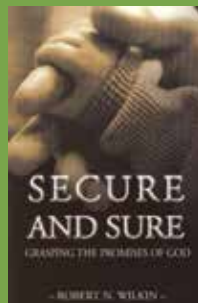
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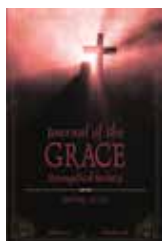
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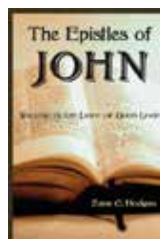


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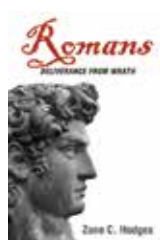


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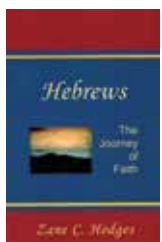


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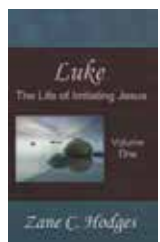


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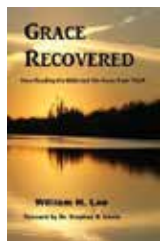


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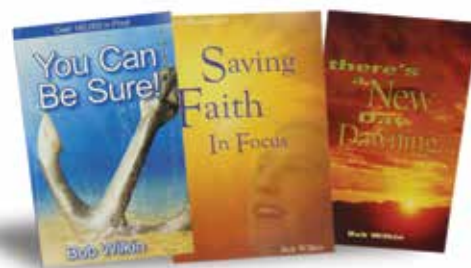
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focused. And God wants our hearts to be focused on heaven and that is why we are commanded to invest in heavenly rewards.

God knows better than we do what will captivate our hearts for Him. Evidently, rewards play a significant role in this.

It may sound pious for someone to say: “I am not interested in rewards! I serve God out of love and gratitude alone!” But such a person is claiming to be more loftily motivated than even the Apostle Paul himself, who wrote:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 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. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Cor 9:24-27).

Obviously Paul was not “running” to obtain his justification or his eternal salvation! Those things were already his by *grace alone*. It follows then that Paul is talking about the “reward”—the prize—that could be won by a person who ran a winning race.

Obviously, too, Paul is highly motivated by the thought of winning this prize. He dedicates himself to obtaining it with the same intense self-discipline that characterizes the superior athlete.

Those who disparage rewards as a powerful Christian motivation ought to read their NT again—this time, with their eyes open!

But is this motivation selfish? We believe that no motivation encouraged by the Lord Jesus and His

Apostles could ever possibly be termed “selfish”!

What is wrong, in fact, is our own incorrect view of “selfishness.” Scripture does not teach us to be uninterested in our own happiness or well-being. The very desire to escape eternal damnation is a legitimate and urgent self-interest. The instinct to preserve our lives is the same. Nor are pleasure and enjoyment illegitimate experiences.

When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, He furnished them with every tree “that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Gen 2:9). They could enjoy themselves freely provided they abstained from eating from the one forbidden tree. Similarly, Paul instructs Timothy to tell rich people that “God... gives us richly all things to *enjoy*” (1 Tim 6:17, italics added).

Selfishness ought not to be defined simply as the pursuit of our own self-interest. Instead, it should be defined as the pursuit of our self-interest *in our own way*, rather than in God’s way. Since “love” is a pre-eminent virtue in Christianity, true selfishness often involves a pursuit that violates the law of love.

But no one who seriously pursues heavenly treasure can afford to be unloving. As Paul pointed out in his great chapter on love, all seemingly spiritual and sacrificial activities are reduced to nothing in the absence of love (1 Cor 13:1-3). Loveless activity will no doubt go up in billows of smoke at the Judgment Seat of Christ as though it were so much wood, hay, or stubble (1 Cor 3:11-15).


No indeed! It is not selfish to obey God by pursuing eternal rewards. Still less can someone who does so afford to be selfish in nature. For if he is, he is forfeiting the very rewards he professes to seek.

No wonder that James censures his Christian readers for showing partiality toward the rich and neglecting the poor. In doing so they violate the “royal law” of Scripture: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Jas 2:8). A couple of verses later, James gives his fellow Christians the bottom line:

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment (Jas 2:12-13).

The doctrine of the Judgment Seat of Christ and of rewards is not merely not selfish. It is one of the strongest Scriptural motivations for an unselfish, loving, and merciful lifestyle!

Conclusion

But even many Christians who understand grace are confused by the doctrine of rewards because they try to make everything grace and eliminate “merit” of any kind from the Christian experience. But to indulge this kind of confusion is to rob oneself of a potent and spiritually energizing motivation to do God’s will. Let us get ourselves back on track. Let us give to the doctrine of rewards the same high visibility that it has in the NT. Let us sense anew the dynamic power of this truth in the lives of great spiritual men, like Paul himself. 

Zane C. Hodges taught New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Seminary for 27 years. He went to be the Lord in 2008.

This article originally appeared in the Autumn 1991 issue of *The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*: 3-11.



What Did the Lord Jesus Mean When He Spoke of Entering the Kingdom?

by Bob Wilkin

At our April 2013 conference an issue came up in one of the workshops that grabbed my attention. What does the expression *entering the kingdom* mean in the Lord's teachings in the Gospels? The workshop was an interactive session. The participants were given a list of all the *entering the kingdom* passages in the Gospels and asked to indicate what the condition was in each case.

Unfortunately, there wasn't time in the workshop to discuss any of the passages in more than a cursory way. Mainly there was time in the session to indicate what the words of the text said the condition was in each case.

The position presented was that the condition of entering the kingdom in the Gospels is ethical righteousness (i.e., good works). Yet the speaker was not advocating works salvation. The reason is that the speaker suggested that entering the kingdom in most of the passages where

it appears in the Gospels refers to *entering into a godly lifestyle*, a kingdom way of living. The believer who produces ethical righteousness now will experience fullness of life in the life to come. The speaker was arguing that most often in the Gospels the idea of entering the kingdom does not literally refer to entering the kingdom.

The speaker did say that all believers will enter the kingdom in light of Luke 19:16-27 and 1 Thess 5:10. Interestingly, neither of those passages actually uses the expression *entering the kingdom*—or even mentions the kingdom.

The position presented was this: in the Gospels the expression *entering the kingdom* refers to calls to believers to live godly lives so that they might have eternal rewards.

I happen to think that all of the *entering the kingdom* passages actually refer to entering the kingdom. I think that those who do not enter will spend eternity in the lake of fire. But might the workshop

speaker be right? As I listened to the MP3 of the workshop, I found myself wondering if at least some of the entering the kingdom passages in the Gospels might refer to entering into a kingdom lifestyle now. I felt I needed to go through all of the entering the kingdom passages again. What if some of them refer to entering and some refer to a kingdom sort of lifestyle now? If so, I'd need to adjust my thinking and exposition.

Twelve Entering the Kingdom Passages

There are only a dozen passages in the Gospels that refer to entering the kingdom, with half being in Matthew (6 in Matthew; 3 in Mark; 2 in Luke; 1 in John). So our task is not too daunting. I have divided them into two categories: those which in my opinion *clearly* refer to actual entrance into the kingdom and those which in my estimation *probably* refer to entering the kingdom.

Before I started categorizing these, I expected to have 2 or 3 in the *clear* category and 9 or 10 in the *probably* category. However, as I reviewed these texts, the contexts did not support that sort of distribution. Instead, I found that slightly more than half clearly refer to actual entrance into the kingdom.

Seven Passages That Clearly Refer to Entering the Kingdom

Almost all agree that these seven passages actually refer to entering the kingdom.

Matthew 7:21-23. Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount the Lord says,

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' *shall enter the kingdom of heaven*, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (emphasis added).

The words "in that day" refer to an eschatological judgment, that is, a judgment after this life is over. This

either refers to the Bema (the Judgment Seat of Christ), where believers will be judged *before* the Millennium (2 Cor 5:9-10), or it refers to the Great White Throne Judgment, where unbelievers will be judged *after* the Millennium (Rev 20:11-15).

While in Paul's epistles "that Day" refers to the Bema, here the context is completely different. The issue is being with Christ ("shall enter the kingdom of heaven") or being separated from Him ("Depart from Me").

The first question is which eschatological judgment is in view?

John 3:3-5. The Lord quickly got down to business with Nicodemus:

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

"Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'

"Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, *he cannot enter the kingdom of God*'" (emphasis added).

Note that the issue in John 3:5 is *entering* the kingdom, not a *rich entrance* into the kingdom and not entering into a kingdom *lifestyle* now.

We will discuss what "born of water and the Spirit" means in the next section. The point is that future entrance into Christ's

kingdom is in view here.

Matthew 19:23-26/Mark 10:23-25/Luke 18:24-25.

Three different passages deal with Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. I am giving the Matthean version, but Mark 10:23-25 and Luke 18:24-25 are parallel to Matt 19:23-24. After the rich young ruler leaves, the Lord and His disciples carry on this conversation about him,

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to *enter the kingdom of God*.'

"When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then can be saved?'

“But Jesus looked at them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’” (emphasis added).

Notice that Jesus spoke of entering the kingdom and the disciples asked, “Who then can be saved?” In this context salvation refers to spending eternity with the Lord in His kingdom. No other type of salvation would make sense here.

In addition, in the Markan account we learn that the Lord also said, “Children, how hard it is *for those who trust in riches* to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:24, emphasis added, Majority Text reading; the so-called Critical Text omits “those who trust in riches”).

Matthew 21:31-32. After giving a parable of two sons, one of which represented the tax collectors and harlots and one the scribes and Pharisees, the Lord said,

“Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots *enter the kingdom of God* before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him” (emphasis added).

There is nothing here to suggest that anything other than actual kingdom entrance is in view. The fact that belief, not behavior, is mentioned three times in v 32 as the condition is quite telling.

Matthew 23:13. This seventh text is where the Lord is rebuking and condemning the scribes and Pharisees. He begins with a woe to them:

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up *the kingdom of heaven* against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow *those who are entering* to go in.”

Here we have a comparison between not entering the kingdom and shutting up the kingdom. The scribes and Pharisees did not enter in themselves. That is, of course, because they did not believe in the Lord and they relied on their flawed works (as the Lord goes on to discuss). And they tried to keep others from entering as well, by trying to keep others from believing in Jesus, or even hearing Him. The reason they sought to kill Him was so that they could silence Him.

Five Passages That Probably Refer To Entering the Kingdom

While some Free Grace people would disagree, nearly everyone else in Evangelicalism holds that these five

passages refer to entering the kingdom, which I believe is the natural sense of the passages.

Matthew 5:20. We start with a very famous one: “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means *enter the kingdom of heaven*” (emphasis added).

Without getting into what the condition is, the consequence seems to be actual kingdom entrance. It is hard to see how Jesus’ listeners would understand Him to be talking about anything else. It would not be hard for any believer, even the carnal believers of Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-4; 11:30) to have personal righteousness that exceeded the personal righteousness of legalistic unbelievers like the scribes and Pharisees. But does that mean that they somehow had *entered the kingdom*? I don’t see how.

Matthew 18:2-3/Mark 10:15/Luke 18:17. I am citing Matthew 18:2-3 here, but Mark 10:15 and Luke 18:17 are parallel texts. The former reads,

“Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means *enter the kingdom of heaven*’” (emphasis added).

The text speaks of *entering the kingdom*. There is no reason to doubt that is what is in view.

Mark 9:47. This verse is one of the more puzzling ones since it involves figurative self-mutilation:

“And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to *enter the kingdom of God* with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell [literally, Gehenna, which is a different word than Hades] fire...” (emphasis added).

Various ways to explain this exist.¹ What is Gehenna fire? Is this a reference to temporal or eternal torment? If Gehenna is a synonym for Hades, then entering the kingdom actually refers to entrance into the kingdom.

The most natural understanding is that entering into the kingdom here indeed refers to just that.

Is the Condition for Kingdom Entrance Faith or Works?

Obviously if the condition for any of these dozen texts refers to something other than faith or a synonym for faith, then that particular context does not actually deal with entering the kingdom, but to something else.



Let's review the conditions in the twelve.

First, we do not find a single example where the condition is commitment, obedience to God's commands (plural), self-denial, taking up one's cross, following Christ in discipleship, baptism, repentance, or anything at all remotely like that.

Second, we do find belief and faith given explicitly or implicitly as the condition several times. Though the parable of the two sons (Matt 21:31-32) gives as the condition *doing the will of the Father*, that is explained as believing in the Lord Jesus (v 32). In the Matthean passage on becoming as children in order to enter the kingdom, the Lord goes on to indicate that these children whom we are to emulate *believed in Him* ("one of these little ones *who believe in Me*," Matt 18:6).

And the Markan and Lukan accounts go immediately from being as a child to the rich young ruler passage, where the ruler illustrates one who is not yet coming as a child in faith, but is coming as an adult, trying to buy his way into the kingdom by his works.

Though faith in Christ is not mentioned in John 3:5, it is mentioned in John 3:14-18 to which John 3:5 is pointing. And though faith in Christ is not mentioned

in Matt 23:13 concerning the scribes and Pharisees hindering people from entering the kingdom, they were clearly seeking to keep people from *believing* in Jesus.

Third, all of the passages in which faith is not mentioned nonetheless give conditions that are synonyms for faith. These include doing the will of the Father (see Matt 12:50; 21:31-32; compare John 6:28-29, 39-40), coming to Jesus as a little child (i.e., with faith, which is so natural for children who have not yet learned how to be cynical and reticent to believe), being born again (which later in John 3 is said to occur only when one believes), and having righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (which the Lord taught only occurs when one believes in Him and gains His righteousness via imputation,

John 6:28; 16:8, 10; compare also Rom 3:26; 4:3, 5, 6).

Fourth, the rich young ruler passage seems to give the condition of entering the kingdom as keeping the Law of Moses. Yet we know that it is impossible for anyone to keep the Law (Gal 3:10; Jas 2:10). Indeed, in this very passage the Lord is showing the rich young ruler that he cannot be saved, that is, enter the kingdom, by his works. Compare John 6:28-29 and Eph 2:8-9. Though

“The Lord never
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Nor does He say
anything at all even
close to that.”

faith in Christ is not mentioned here, that is what one must do in order to be saved (John 3:16-17; Eph 2:8-9). And remember that the disciples equated *entering* with *salvation* and the Lord did not correct them. The rich young ruler passage is really pre-evangelism. The Lord is showing him the impossibility of salvation by works.

Fifth, the lone text that doesn't seem to fit the rest is Mark 9:47. Is plucking out one's eye or cutting off one's hand or foot a figure of speech conveying the idea of faith? No, they clearly are not. However, they could be figures of speech that convey the idea of putting off anything we see or touch, or anywhere we go, that hinders us from coming to faith in Christ. A person who is high on drugs all the time is greatly hindered from hearing or understanding the message of everlasting life. The person who will never go to church and will never listen when a Christian tries to talk with him about Christ is not going to come to faith until his resistance to listening is thrown off.

For those who think this refers to repentance from sins in one's life, the question is, why didn't the Lord just say that if that is what He meant? He spoke much of repentance. The fact that He does not speak of repentance here is telling. In addition, it would be odd to speak of repentance as cutting off body parts. Nowhere else in Scripture is repentance likened to self-mutilation.

While this is indeed a hard saying, it most naturally is a call to the unbeliever to give up anything that hinders him from hearing and believing the saving message.

What Is Most Consistent and Contextual?

It seems obvious that when the Lord speaks of entering the kingdom our first thought should be that He is really talking about entering the kingdom. We should not come to some other idea of what that means unless there are some compelling reasons to do so.

But there are no compelling reasons to see entering the kingdom as something else. The Lord never once says, "Entering the kingdom refers to entering into a kingdom lifestyle." Nor does He say anything at all even close to that.

While hypothetically *entering the kingdom* could refer to *entering into a kingdom lifestyle*, the contexts do not bear out this understanding in my opinion. I urge you to be Bereans and study these texts for yourself (Acts 17:11).


“We do not find a single example where the condition of entering the kingdom is commitment, obedience to God’s commands, self-denial, taking up one’s cross, following Christ in discipleship, baptism, repentance, or anything remotely like that.”

Conclusion

Entrance into the kingdom is future. As the speaker said in his workshop, *the kingdom is not now*. The kingdom is future.

While we can and should enter into a godly lifestyle now, that is not what the dozen entering the kingdom passages are talking about.

Faith in Christ is the sole condition of everlasting life now and of entering His kingdom in the life to come. All who have everlasting life will enter the kingdom. Those who do not have everlasting life are not in the Book of Life and hence they will be cast into the lake of fire, unless they come to

faith in Christ before they die (Rev 20:15). The issue of entering the kingdom is one of life (everlasting life) and death (the second death, Rev 20:14). 

Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

1. See “Self Sacrifice & Kingdom Entrance,” Parts 1&2, www.faithalone.org/magazine/y1989/89sep2.html and “The Warning of Stumbling Blocks (Mark 9:42-48)” by Barry Mershon, Jr., www.faithalone.org/magazine/y2010/10ja3.html.

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The Rich Entrance and the Idle Workers

(2 Pet 1:8-11 & Matt 20:1-16)

by Bill Fiess

Have you ever noticed the similarity between Matt 20:1-16 and 2 Pet 1:1-11? I didn't at first.

Of course, Peter was one of the recipients of Jesus' teaching in Matt 20:1-16 (see Matt 19:27-30). In fact, it is the question Peter posed to Jesus (Matt 19:27) that prompted Jesus' response in the succeeding verses.

We also know that Peter's second epistle centers on Jesus' Second Advent (see 2 Peter 3). I believe that this parable does as well.


Don't see the similarities? Here are four points of contact between the two passages:

1. Peter (who heard one passage and wrote the other)
2. The word *idle* (Greek *argos*): Matt 20:3, 6 & 2 Pet 1:8

3. Calling and election: Matt 20:16 & 2 Pet 1:10

4. Pay: one denarius and a rich entrance to the kingdom are both pay for work done. Note 2 Pet 1:5, "add [*epichoregeō*] to your faith" and 2 Pet 1:11, "a rich entrance shall be supplied [*epichoregeō*] to you."

What Does This Mean?

I think both passages concern the reward of ruling with Christ in the life to come. Believers who work for Christ until He returns (or until they die) will rule. Those whose work is cut short by the Rapture (the end of the work day in Matt 20:1-16) will not be penalized just because they were unable to work as long as those who were born and died earlier in the Church Age. 

Bill Fiess is a mathematics professor.

TULIP or ASSURE?

by Shawn Lazar
and Bob Wilkin

We are all familiar with the Calvinistic acronym TULIP which stands for:

Total depravity
Unconditional election
Limited atonement
Irresistible grace
Perseverance of the saints.

At a recent meeting of Wesleyan scholars Shawn heard a paper presenting an Arminian response to TULIP, called ACURA. That stands for:

All have sinned
Conditional election
Unlimited atonement
Resistible grace
Assurance of salvation.

We discussed this and came up with an acronym that fits with Free Grace theology: ASSURE. That stands for:

All have sinned
Selected to Serve (not for destiny)
Universal atonement
Resistible grace
Eternal security.

The very name, ASSURE, suggests another important aspect of grace theology, i.e., that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. When we believe Jesus' promise of life, we are sure of our eternal destiny. We

remain sure as long as we continue to believe the promise.

Now let's briefly walk through the five points of ASSURE.

All have sinned is a reference to Rom 3:23. The point here is that no one is able to gain everlasting life based on his works since we all have sinned and all fall short of God's glory. This avoids the Calvinist extreme which says that unbelievers have no spiritual sensitivity at all and that they are unable to understand or believe anything in the Word of God. Their view that unbelievers are like cadavers at the bottom of a well is inconsistent with Scripture (cf. Acts 17:11, 27; Heb 1:6).

Selected to serve suggests that the only election we find in the Bible is vocational. Divine election is to ministry, not eternal destiny. For example, Aaron and his line were chosen to be priests. Moses was chosen to deliver Israel from Egypt. Jesus was chosen to die on the cross for our sins. Paul was chosen to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Matthias was chosen to take Judas' place as one of the twelve. There is not a single verse in the Bible which says that some are elected to everlasting life. Biblical election is vocational through and through.

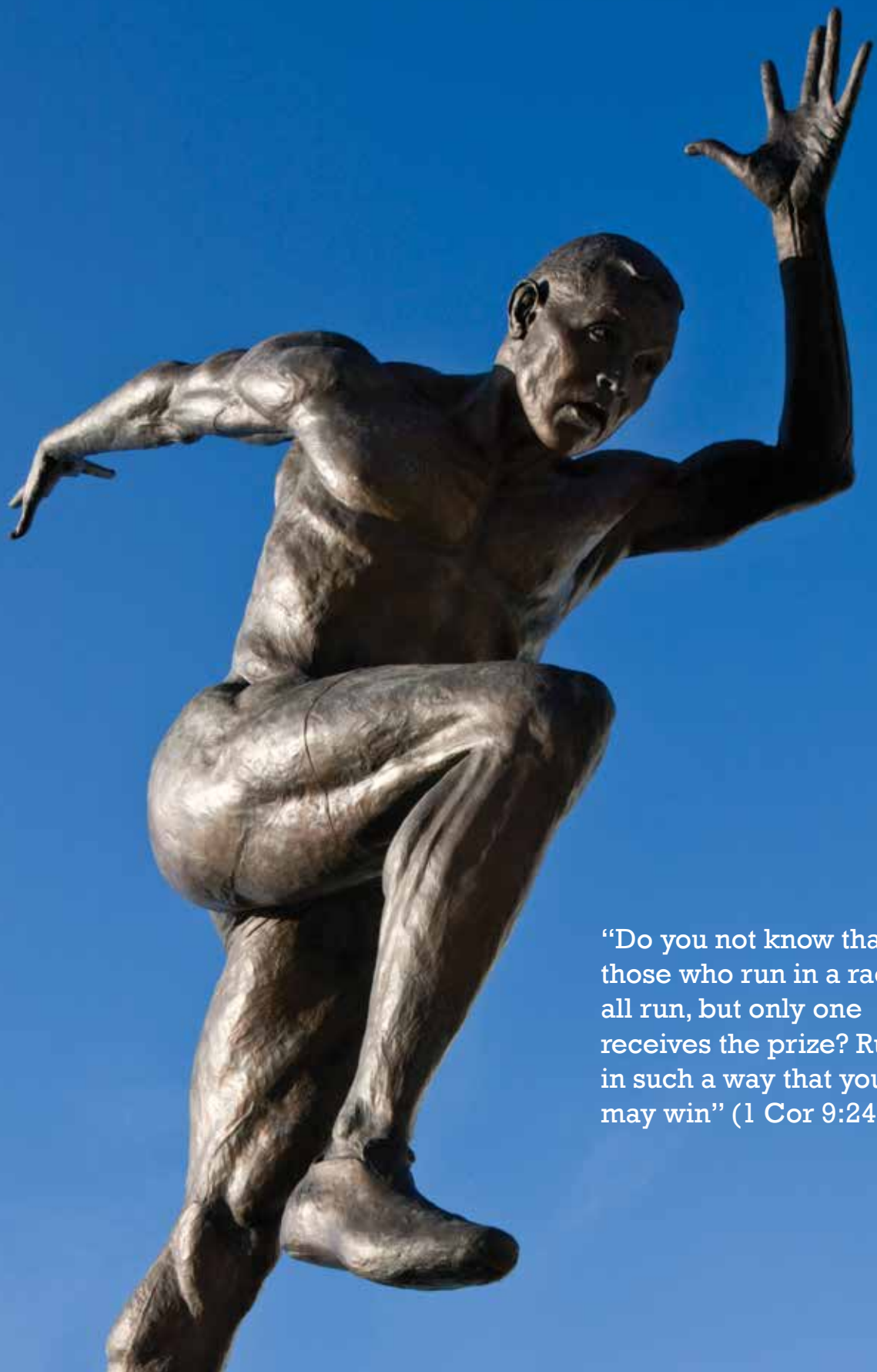
Universal atonement means that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). He did not merely die for the elect, or for those who would believe. Nor did His death merely *potentially* take away the sins of the world. It *actually* takes away the sins of the world. Because of the shed blood of Christ, people can be born again simply by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. They need not deal with their own sins. The Lord Jesus paid the full and complete price for our sins at Calvary.

Resistible grace alludes to the fact that God is drawing all to Himself (John 12:32; Acts 17:27). He doesn't desire that any should perish. Thus anyone who does not come to faith has only himself to blame. He cannot say that God never drew him. The reason why he did not come to faith is because he resisted the grace which God was extending to him in Christ. This avoids the Calvinist claim that God only draws a small percentage of the people in the world.

Eternal security is another way of speaking of everlasting life which can never be lost. Unlike the Calvinistic doctrine of perseverance, eternal security is not dependent on the believer persevering in faith and good works. Anyone who simply believes in Jesus has everlasting life. Even if he later stops serving Christ, he remains secure. In fact, even if he later stops believing in Jesus, he still has everlasting life. The believer is eternally secure. Of course, security is no license to sin. If a believer begins to stray, he reaps the consequences, including sometimes premature death (Jas 5:19-20). But his destiny remains secure.

This is only a suggestion, a thought experiment. No doubt ASSURE could be improved upon. But we assure you, ASSURE is a much more accurate reflection of the Scriptures than either TULIP or ACURA. ■

Shawn Lazar is the Director of Publications and Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.



“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win” (1 Cor 9:24)

Self-Control

A Virtue That Wins Rewards (1 Cor 9:24-27)

by Shawn Lazar

What is the secret to a prosperous life? In their controversial bestseller, *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America*,

Amy Chua and Jeb Rubenfeld offered to explain why some cultural groups do better than others. They put it down to possessing three traits: a superiority complex, a sense of insecurity, and strong impulse control. They argue that cultural groups who have each of these three traits—such as Jews, Mormons, and recent immigrants from Nigeria, Iran, and China—tend to be more successful than other groups in America.

The third trait is especially interesting. Chua and Rubenfeld define impulse control as *the ability to resist temptation*. What they have in mind is resisting the temptation to quit in the face of a daunting challenge, and resisting the urge to spend and consume now, in order to achieve goals later on (pp 117-118). Groups that favor self-control in the present, tend to be more successful in the future.

Of course, the implication of Chua and Rubenfeld's thesis is that there are cultural groups who *lack* impulse control and that they will be less well-off than those who have it.

I believe Paul is making the same point in 1 Cor 9:24-27.

Self-Control and Eternal Rewards

In 1 Cor 9:24-25, Paul pointed to the importance of self-control for obtaining rewards:

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run,

but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games *exercises self-control in all things*. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (1 Cor 9:24-25, emphasis added, NASB).

Paul is admonishing the Corinthians to exercise self-control. He urges them to live in such a way as to obtain an imperishable crown in the millennial kingdom. The question is, what kind of self-control does Paul have in mind?

What Is Self-Control?

The word for *self-control* here is *enkrateia*. The *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (EDNT) explains how the Greeks considered it a virtue:

“*Enkrateia* is normally used with regard to all human desires, includes desires for food and drink, sex, and conversation. Thus [*enkratēs*] signifies the free, autonomous, and independent person, who does not allow himself to be tempted or diverted by any allurements” (EDNT, 377).

Paul listed self-control as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23). He also referred to it in 1 Cor 7:5, 9, where he counseled married people not to deprive themselves of the conjugal bed for too long lest they lose their self-control and get tempted by Satan; likewise, Paul suggested that single people should marry “if they cannot exercise *self-control*...For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (emphasis added).

In both of those cases Paul had self-control over sexual passions in mind. But in 9:25, Paul advised self-control “in all things.” What does that include?

An answer is suggested by Paul comparison of Christian self-control with that of an athlete (esp. a runner and a boxer). This would have been a very familiar image to the Corinthians. They lived in proximity to the Isthmian games, a contemporary to the more famous Olympic games. The Corinthians would have understood, as we do, that athletes have to maintain a strict regimen if they hope to beat out their competitors. What athletes eat, how much they sleep, how much time they spend exercising, socializing, and doing other activities, are all strictly controlled in light of the ultimate goal of winning the games.

Christians should have the same discipline.

Of course, there isn't an exact correspondence between athletics and the Christian life. Most importantly, while only one athlete can win the games, all Christians can win eternal rewards and no Christian wins a crown at the expense of anyone else. The only competitor we have is our own selfish desires, which is why Paul emphasizes self-control over our own bodies. Boxers fight their opponents, but Paul said he beat his own body (1 Cor 9:26-27).

But what kind of things must we exercise self-control over?

Three Things That Prevent Fruitfulness

While Paul talked about forgoing eating, drinking, and having a wife, in order to win people to the gospel, Jesus spoke about similar potential hindrances to fruitfulness in the *Parable of the Four Soils*. There the Lord compared the different outcomes of the Christian life to how seeds flourish in diverse kinds of soil.

According to the parable, the second soil represents someone who believed for a while only to fall away in time of temptation (Luke 8:13), while the third soil is someone who believes, but brings no fruit to maturity because they are "choked with cares, riches, and the pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14). This is a picture of believers whose fruitfulness has been hindered. Cares, riches, and the pleasures of life are precisely the kinds

of things we need to have self-control over if we want to obtain eternal rewards.

Cares are the worries and concerns that attend daily life (e.g., what we will eat, drink, wear, and where we will live). These are all legitimate concerns, especially if you have a family to take care of. And yet, even legitimate concerns can become so overblown that they

"The Corinthians would have understood, as we do, that athletes have to maintain a strict regimen in light of the ultimate goal of winning the games. Christians should have the same discipline."

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dominate our lives, and take our eyes off the prize of eternal rewards.

Riches refers to money and possessions. There are many passages in Scripture that advise how we should save our money for future times of need. Good men leave inheritances for their grandchildren (Prov 13:22). People who fail to provide for their families deny the faith (1 Tim 5:8). But while there is such a thing as Biblically prudent use of money, there is also love of money which Paul called “the root of all evil” (1 Tim 6:10). If money is something you prioritize above God, then you’re unlikely to serve Him fruitfully. You cannot serve both God and mammon.

The *pleasures of life* probably refers to *lawful* pleasures. It would be too obvious to say that we need to exercise self-control over *sins*. What is not always obvious is that even lawful pleasures can be taken to an extreme and become spiritually damaging. All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial (1 Cor 6:12), or lead to winning eternal rewards. For example, leisure time is not a bad thing. In fact, it was ordained by God who gave the Israelites one day a week to rest. But watching TV, reading the latest thriller, and taking a vacation are unlikely to win you any rewards. If we spend too much time on leisure, we risk wasting time that could have borne fruit into eternity.

The biggest temptation involved with cares, riches, and the pleasures of life is that none of these things are obviously sinful. But undue attention and involvement in them will hinder our service for Christ. Hence, these are examples of things over which we should exercise self-control.

Use Your Liberties in Light of Eternity

In 1989, Stephen R. Covey published the bestselling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The second habit he proposed was: “Begin with the End in Mind.”

That’s what Paul did. Like an athlete training for the games, Paul had an end goal in mind, and he lived his life to attain it. So Paul chose to forgo having a wife and refused to ask for financial support from the Corinthians for the sake of preaching the gospel (1 Cor 9:15-23). Instead of being free from all men, Paul chose to be the servant of all (1 Cor 9:19). Instead of eating and drinking, he disciplined his body (1 Cor 9:4, 27). Why? So he could win people for Christ and obtain an imperishable crown in the life to come (1 Cor 9:19-21, 25). And Paul urged the Corinthians to do the same, to follow his example and exercise self-control over their lives, making choices in light of eternity.


Aim to Win

If Chua and Rubenfeld are right, different cultural groups can have different material outcomes based on virtues like impulse control. If Paul is right, different Christians will have different eternal outcomes based on virtues like self-control. Christians who don’t exercise self-control, and who use their freedom to enjoy temporary pleasures, won’t attain an imperishable crown and other rewards. Christians who do follow Paul’s example and exercise temperance will be rewarded. That was Paul’s expectation. Near the end of

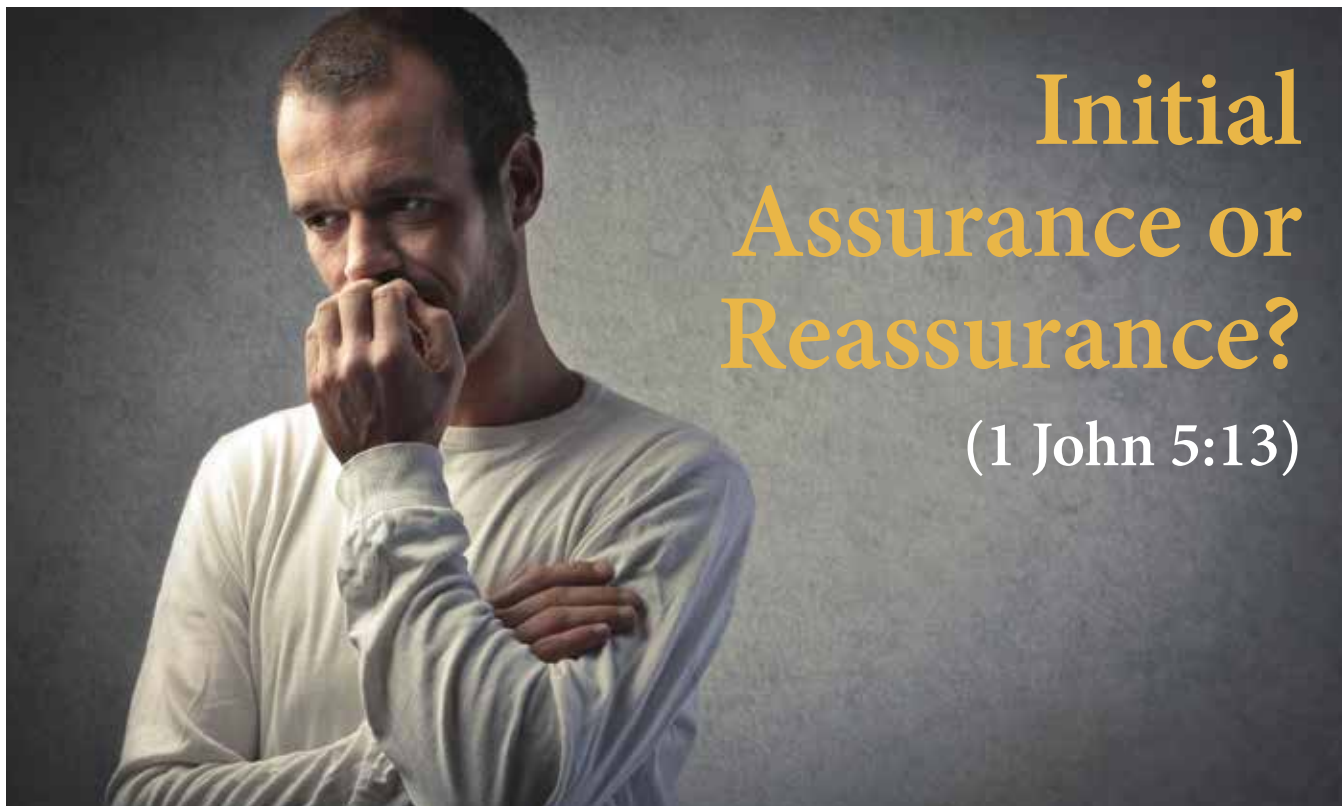


his life, Paul wrote this:

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 (2 Tim 4:7-8).

Paul knew he had lived a life worthy of reward. Given what’s at stake, given what you can win and what you can lose, do you? 

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Initial Assurance or Reassurance?

(1 John 5:13)

by John H. Niemelä

Question: If assurance is of the essence of saving faith, why does 1 John 5:13 imply that these believers might never have known that they had everlasting life?

Answer: Does the text really imply this? What we know is that John desired that they possess absolute certainty of their everlasting life. Does he suggest that they *never* possessed certainty? Or have they *lost* (or might *soon lose*) their certitude?

The Readers

Important clues about the readership of 1 John often escape us. Rather than addressing believers within one congregation, it lacks the personal greetings of John's other epistles. Thus, it may well address *leaders* of several churches under John's care (perhaps the seven churches of Asia). Zane Hodges argues:

... First John might have actually been intended for the leaders of the various churches to which it went. There are indeed indications within the epistle (2:12-14; 2:20; see Commentary)¹ that the readership is regarded as spiritually mature ["you are strong, God's word abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one"]. In that

case, the First Epistle was intended *to fortify the leaders* who would bear the major burden of resisting the false teachers.²

A leader lacking absolute assurance would be weak and overcome by the evil one, lacking the abiding Word of God (contrary to 1 John 2:14). Identifying readers is crucial for the following analysis.

The Context

Why did John address these leaders? He did not write *correctively* (as if they *already* lacked assurance).³ 1 John 2:24-26 explains that he wrote *preventatively* to counteract deceptive teachers:

Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that Himself He promised us—eternal life.

These things I wrote to you concerning those who [seek to]⁴ deceive you [and your congregations].⁵

Evidently, the deceivers denied Jesus Christ's promise of everlasting life, because the conclusion of John's response to them (2:18-25) emphasizes: "And this is the promise that He Himself promised us—everlasting life." Deceivers rejected Christ's promise; the addressees

were to continue proclaiming that promise of everlasting life.

The Readers Were Already Believers

The false teachers denied that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22). By contrast, John calls his readers *believers*, i.e., ones who believe His promise of everlasting life (1 John 5:13). In that light, 1 John 5:13 offers *reassurance*, not initial assurance.

The context of 1 John 5 further strengthens the case. In 1 John 5:13 the *these things* refer back to 5:6-12. In the closing section (5:10-12), John returns to the issue of believing God's testimony or disbelieving it:

He who believes in the Son of God has the *testimony* in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has disbelieved the *testimony* that God has testified about His Son. And this is the *testimony*: that God has given us everlasting life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

These things I wrote to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may [continue]⁶ knowing that you have everlasting life, and so that you may [continue] believing in the name of the Son of God [emphasis mine].

God's *testimony* is that *God has given us everlasting life, and this life is in His Son*. John calls these leaders *believers*, i.e., they believe the testimony about everlasting life. The inescapable conclusion is that what John's readers already believe is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, has guaranteed them everlasting life.

So then, why does John urge leaders who presently believe Jesus' promise of everlasting life to continue knowing that they have life? If they were to lose their assurance, their resultant teaching would undermine the certainty of their congregations. 1 John 2:26 tells leaders that he wrote 2:18-25 preventatively to counteract the false teachers that sought to deceive them. In turn, these leaders would need to minister to their assemblies both correctively and preventatively. That is, some congregants may have had their confidence undermined, while others were in danger of losing it.

The promise of everlasting life is an essential part of the message.

Conclusion

John sought to prevent leaders of congregations from developing spiritual-amnesia. If they were to forget that they are God's children who have everlasting life, they would join the false teachers in undermining the congregation's certitude of everlasting life. Let us not forget that God testifies through His crucified and resurrected Son that the life He promises is everlasting—guaranteed forever. The promise is at the heart of the message of life that leaders (and congregants) should proclaim. **GH**

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

1. Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Denton, TX: GES, 1999), 94-101, argues that little children = fathers = young men. Each term addresses every leader. Similarly, Paul calls the Galatians *brethren* (3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18), *foolish Galatians* (3:1), and *my little children* (4:19). Alternate terms (at times) do designate an entire audience, not diverse segments. All Scripture translation, unless otherwise noted, is the author's.

2. Hodges, *Epistles*, 27, emphasis

added.

3. The preceding shows that the readers were leaders in whom God's word abides and who had overcome the evil one. These leaders had not succumbed to false teachers, so this is preventative, not corrective.

4. My translation adds [seek to].

5. If false teachers seek to deceive leaders, they certainly sought to deceive whole congregations.

6. The uses of [continue] do not rest solely upon these being present subjunctives. Rather, the basis for this is that the addressed leaders have God's word abiding in them and have overcome the evil one. They have not caved in to false teaching. John desires that their certainty of everlasting life would continue.

A careful look at 5:10 helps. A believer who has lost certainty that Christ has guaranteed him/her everlasting life still possesses it. Though true, this truth is not the point affirmed by 1 John 5:10. Instead, the verse's assertion, "has the testimony in himself," means, "can himself testify." One who has lost assurance could no longer truthfully testify, "I have everlasting life," despite still possessing it. This understanding of 5:10 supports adding [continue] twice in 5:13.

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