

GRACE FOCUS

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MAY & JUNE 2016

“THE FINGER OF GOD”

REFERS TO HIS POWER

BY BOB WILKIN

PLUS Wayne Grudem on Genuine Faith / From Fishermen to Fearless / Grace for Good Works
Ecclesiastes and a Judgment of Works / Facing Trials Biblically / **AND MORE**

MAY/JUNE 2016

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FROM THE EDITOR

Shawn told me about a friend of his who owns a lawn care service. He's a rough-looking character, a man of the street (which he is proud of). And he drives an old, beat-up pickup truck (which he is rather proud of too). He drives from client to client, with his mower, clippers, fertilizer, and other lawn care supplies in the bed of the truck.

One day he drove through a red light and was pulled over by the police. The officer came up to his window and asked, "Sir, do you have any grass in this truck?"

"Of course," my friend replied. "I love grass. That's how I make my money."

The policeman immediately ordered him out of the vehicle.

Words matter. They mean things.

Sometimes what you mean by a word isn't necessarily what someone else means by it.

Isn't that true for the Bible?

We talk about having faith in Jesus. But if you ask ten Christians what it means to have faith, you'll get thirteen different answers.

In this issue we explore the meaning of several Biblical words.

Shawn Lazar examines how famed Evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem defines "faith," and why his definition must certainly lead to confusion and loss of assurance.



Words Mean Things

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

Brad Daskocil also looks at the confusion that can arise by changing the meaning of "faith."

D. L. Starkey explains how he came to Free Grace views after studying the meaning of "repentance."

Joe Lombardi gives us some insight into the NT use of the words for "perseverance."

And I do a study of the meaning of the phrase, "the finger of God."

Those are just some of the edifying subjects addressed in this issue. I pray that every word we print will matter to you, and more importantly, to Jesus, whom we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Wilkin".

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a white, textured robe. One hand is resting on the fabric of the robe, while the other hand is reaching down, with the index finger touching a surface of fine, golden-brown sand. The lighting is warm and directional, creating soft shadows and highlighting the textures of the skin, the robe, and the sand. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

“The Finger of God” Refers to His Power

“And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with *the finger of God*”
(Exod 31:18, emphasis added).

By Bob Wilkin

Ask any Biblically literate person about the expression *the finger of God* and he will either refer to God writing the Ten Commandments with His own finger (Exod 31:18) or to the mysterious fingers of a man’s hand that appeared out of nowhere and wrote a mystical message on the wall in Dan 5:5, 24.

But most Christians have never given much thought to the expression *the finger of God*.

Recently while seeing that expression in the NT, I realized I needed to give it more thought. This article is a result of my further thinking on the subject.

The Finger of God Writing the Ten Commandments Twice (Exodus 31:18)

Moses tells us, “And when He [the Lord] had made an end of speaking with him [Moses] on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with *the finger of God*” (Exod 31:18, emphasis added). Of course, God the Father has no finger. Nor does God the Holy Spirit. Thus this must refer to the finger of God the Son, the second member of the Trinity.

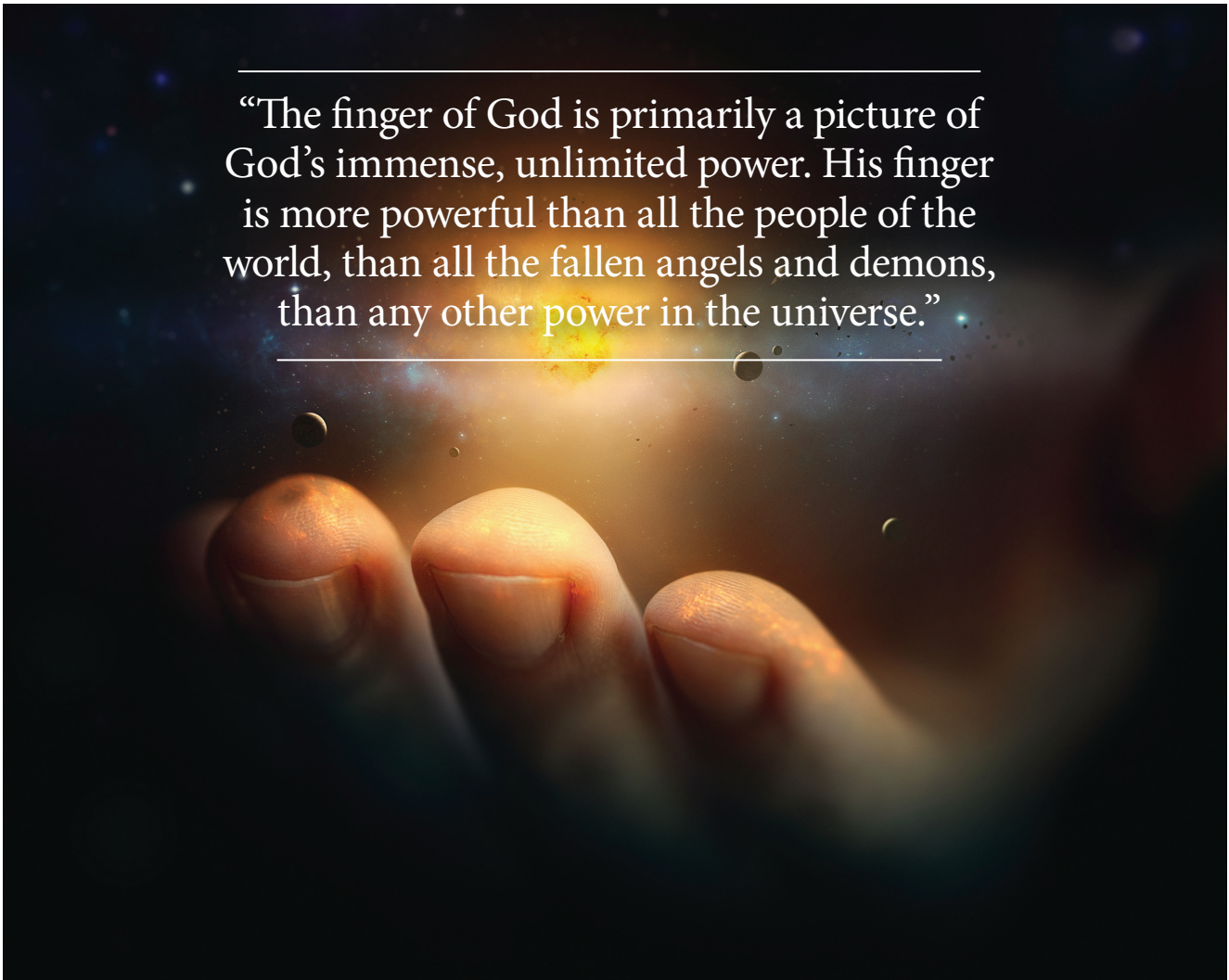
The Lord Jesus wrote the Ten Commandments twice. Why? Because Moses broke the original tablets when he saw that the people were rebelling against God in his absence (Exod 32:19). So the Lord Jesus wrote the Ten Commandments a second time on two new tablets of stone (Exod 34:1ff).

In this case *the finger of God* refers to God’s power and to His revelatory power. He not only is great and powerful but He also communicates His will to mankind, in this case, to His chosen people, Israel.

The Lord Jesus Writing in the Dirt Twice with His Finger (John 8:6)

I am indebted to Ken Yates for my understanding of Jesus twice writing with His finger in the dirt in the account of Jesus’ testing due to the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11). I heard Ken preach on this. He suggested that the reason John does not tell us what Jesus wrote in the dirt is that the content of what He wrote is not the point. The point is the very fact that He wrote in the dirt *with His finger* and that He did so *twice*.

The religious leaders of Israel were trying to catch Jesus in an impossible situation. They knew He was



“The finger of God is primarily a picture of God’s immense, unlimited power. His finger is more powerful than all the people of the world, than all the fallen angels and demons, than any other power in the universe.”

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very gracious and forgiving. Thus they figured He would not condemn the woman caught in adultery to death. Yet the Law of Moses commanded that anyone caught in adultery should be stoned. Thus the leaders felt they had Jesus trapped and that He would violate the Law of Moses.

Of course, they felt He violated the Law of Moses every time He healed on the Sabbath too. But this case would be something that they could more easily sell to the masses as being a violation of the Law.

So notice the three elements: 1) Jesus writing with His finger, 2) Jesus doing so twice, and 3) Jesus doing so in a dispute about the Law of Moses.

Ken pointed out that by writing with His finger in the dirt, His audience should have understood that He was claiming to be the one who wrote the Ten Commandments with His own finger. Certainly we today should pick this up. Thus they were trying to test the very Person who gave them the Law in the first place.

It was the pre-incarnate Jesus who met with Moses at Sinai. He gave Moses the Law. He wrote it once on two tablets of stone. Then when Moses broke the tablets, He wrote the Ten Commandments a second time.

The finger of God in John 8:6, 8 refers to the fact that Jesus, God in the flesh, is the Person who revealed the Law in the first place. He is the Lawgiver. Revelation and authority and power come from Him. To oppose Him is to oppose the Law of Moses whether they realized it or not.

The Ten Plagues of Egypt as the Finger of God (Exodus 8:19)

The Egyptian magicians could duplicate some of the ten plagues which God did through Moses and Aaron. But they could not duplicate the plague of lice. In that case the magicians said, “This is the finger of God” (Exod 8:19). Surely the Egyptian magicians knew that

all of the plagues were the finger of God. But when they can't duplicate this one, they confess that "This is the finger of God."

The idea here is one of great power. God has more power in His finger than any man has in his entire body, or indeed more power than a whole nation of men have.

The finger of God is a picture of great power.

Jesus Casting Out Demons by the Finger of God (Luke 11:19)

When Jesus cast out demons He was accused of doing so by the power of the ruler of demons, not by the power of God (Luke 11:15). As part of His response the Lord Jesus makes this great statement, "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:19). Once again the finger of God is a picture of omnipotence, of unlimited power.

Contrary to the conclusions of most in His audience, observant Jews should have seen in His casting out of demons evidence that "the kingdom of God [had] come upon [them]." Never once in the Old Testament are we told of demon possession or of anyone casting out demons. This evidently was the first time in history when demon possession occurred and when the casting out of demons occurred. That should have shown that Jesus is the Messiah and that He was offering the kingdom to that generation of Jews.

The Hand Writing on the Wall in Daniel 5 (Daniel 5:5, 24)

We are not told that this is God's hand or the finger of God. Indeed we are told this is "the fingers of a man's hand" (Dan 5:5) and "the fingers of the hand" (Dan 5:24). While Daniel says, "the fingers of the hand were sent from Him [i.e., God]," that does not mean that these were God's fingers.

I think it wise not to press this passage as conveying the same image. The hand could have simply been a disembodied human hand, which is what the text seems to say. Or it could have been the hand of an angel (remember angels appeared as men many times

in the Old Testament), with the rest of his body invisible. To see this as the hand of God (i.e., the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ) is to go beyond the text. Clearly the revelation is from God. But that doesn't mean that this is another finger of God passage.

Conclusion

The finger of God is primarily a picture of God's immense, unlimited power. His finger is more powerful than all the people of the world, than all the fallen angels and demons, than any other power in the universe. The finger of God is a picture of God's sovereignty.

At Sinai and in the account of the woman caught in adultery in John 8, the finger of God looks at power that is channeled in revelation. The Son of God is the light of the world, and as such He revealed the Law of Moses to Israel and He interpreted it again and again for His first century Jewish audience.

There aren't many passages in Scripture that mention the finger of God. But the handful that do are powerful and should inspire in us a

sense of awe at God's majesty. 

"The finger of God in John 8:6, 8 refers to the fact that Jesus, God in the flesh, is the Person who revealed the Law in the first place."



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX with his wife Sharon. His latest book is, What Is the Outer Darkness?



From Fish to Fearless

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Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1-22)

By Zane C. Hodges

The Church's First Fight

Although our Lord was more often confronted by Pharisees, the infant Church finds its first clash with the Sadducees. While Pharisees represent religious hypocrisy, the Sadducees represent religious unbelief.

4:1-2. And the Sadducees came upon them. While the Pharisees hated our Lord manifested in flesh, as a sect, the Sadducees seemed little disturbed by Him. They may have viewed Jesus as but another Rabbi whose teachings about angels, spirits, and resurrection were popular and Pharisaic.

Note the phrase **preached in Jesus**. The apostles used Jesus as proof of resurrection truth. Given the empty tomb, and the witnesses to His resurrection, Jesus became more than a Rabbi who taught *about* resurrection, He was proclaimed as a living *example* of its truth, and the Sadducees could not tolerate that. They were **greatly disturbed**, suggesting their emotional involvement.

Imagine their frustration. They could not disprove the resurrection. They could imprison its witnesses. While they were not supposed to believe in a resurrection (cf. Acts 23:8), upon hearing about Jesus, perhaps an intolerable doubt had entered their minds. It raised the possibility of eternal judgment, a thought they could not endure. As the hypocrite hates reality, so the religious infidel hates the testimony to the truth and reality of the world to come.

“It may take years for our new nature to firmly displace the old in manifestation so that we appear, as Peter here, to be new men.”



123RF

4:3-4. For it was already evening. The evening setting is appropriate spiritually, for even as the shadows were lengthening and night falling upon the temple courts, so this rebellion of human authority (i.e., the Sadducees) against divine authority (i.e., the apostles) took place, so as to speak in the gathering shadows of impending wrath which would leave not one stone of the Temple upon another. Man's greatest rebellions are ever at evening, in the shadow of divine judgment (cf. Great Tribulation). The Jewish "day" of opportunity was fast fading away.

And they laid hands on them. The Sadducees could seize and imprison the apostles, but not imprison the Word of God

(cf. 2 Tim 2:9). Even as they arrest the apostles, multitudes are being saved, **about five thousand**.

We may be removed from the scene (by persecution, sickness, or death), but if we have presented God's Word and not our own, that Word can continue to work and bear fruit (Isa 55:10-11).

The miracle of the loaves had been repeated in its true spiritual significance before Satan roused himself to attack. Five thousand men had eaten of the bread of life (not to mention the women and children, Matt 14:21). No doubt the number refers to the new total of Christian men as a result of that day's evangelism.

Ironically, as the Sadducees seek to suppress resurrection truth, multitudes are experiencing

resurrection in their very midst (cf. John 5:24-25). Those that heard the word in faith here lived! They passed out of death into life.

Testifying Before the Sanhedrin

4:5-6. Peter's boldness stands in contrast to his previous denial. Peter and John stand before the very council which had condemned their Lord to death (cf. Mark 14:53-55, 64). And Caiaphas is present, in whose courtyard Peter's failure occurred (John 8:15).

In that situation, worldly wisdom might have counselled caution and tact. Instead, there is boldness. If ever Peter compensated for his past failure to confess Christ, it was here, for this seems an appropriate climax to the boldness displayed at

Pentecost and in the crowd under Solomon's porch.

At this point, but not previously, he is truly ready to follow his Lord "both into prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). The former he had spent the night in, the latter was now conceivable. What seemed on the night of our Lord's arrest a failure in His work on Peter, now is proved to have been but a stage before success was attained. It is seen here.

Were gathered together at Jerusalem. Instead of a "captive" audience, there were "captive" preachers, who gain this audience before the council only because they *are* captives. This body of men, to whom God would bring a testimony, would probably have gathered for a testimony under no other circumstances than these (cf. Luke 21:13).

4:7-8. "By what power or by what name have you done this?" The question expresses scorn. How have you, *of all people*, done this? Yet the boldness of Peter and John is undeterred by the rulers' disdain of them. In fact, the Holy Ghost fulfills the promise of Christ and speaks through them (cf. Luke 21:12-15; 12:11-12).

4:9-11. Peter responds with a barb toward the council. The council had the authority to examine men for evil deeds, but they had nothing more against the apostles than the accusation of "**a good deed done to a helpless man.**" The sword of the Spirit convicts the council of sin by way of contrasting what they did to Jesus ("**whom you crucified**"), with what God did to Jesus ("**whom God raised from the dead**"). The council's responsibility, and failure, as God-answerable builders is driven home

by the Word of Scripture ("**the 'stone which was rejected by you builders'**").

4:12. Nevertheless, despite the council's actions, the door of mercy is opened to them, as it had been to the crowds outside. They too had acted in ignorance (cf. Acts 3:17), and might have found mercy as did a certain Pharisee named Saul (cf. 1 Tim 1:13). But they could find it only in the name of Jesus. "**Nor is there salvation in any other...**"

The grace of God is especially evident in being shown toward those most guilty for the death of His Son. That Annas and Caia-phas were specifically named (v 6) emphasizes this point because they were supremely guilty. Both had presided at an interview with Jesus on the night of His trial (cf. John 18:12-14, 24). There is no evidence that they accepted the offer of salvation then or ever. Everything points the other way, especially later events in Acts. If this is so, and they are in hell, their memories of Christ, Peter, and John, all standing before them in witness to the truth, must be very dreadful.

Peter's Dynamic Change

4:13a. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John. Upon reading Peter's sermon, and noticing his boldness, the speaker seems a different person than the figure we know from the Gospels. And so, in a sense, he is. For here he is "Peter" (v 8), where often in the Gospels it is "Simon" (cf. esp. Luke 22:31). In bearing two names, one by natural birth, one by spiritual when first he came to Christ (cf. 1 Pet 1:3, 23), Peter is a living representative of the new birth. Yet only now does "Peter" truly

cause "Simon" to virtually disappear from the scene (though never entirely, cf. Gal 2:11-21).

In the same way, it may take years for our new nature to firmly displace the old in manifestation so that we appear, as Peter here, to be new men.

Yet, in another sense, it is the same Peter we knew before—quick to speak.

In Acts 2-3 and here, Peter speaks out first. But what once had been a weakness, in that he spoke too fast, now becomes a strength in that he is quick to speak for his Lord.

God is able to take our weak points and transform them into strength for Him. Don't we often look for the abilities in the unsaved and think how God might use their *strengths* if only the person believed? But God may see a *weakness* which He can fill with His strength. Every born-again person has weaknesses. If so, he has something God is capable of using. His strength is perfected in weakness which is why Paul gloried in weaknesses that the power of Christ might rest upon him (2 Cor 12:5)!

And what about John? Would John have liked to speak here, or earlier, on Solomon's porch? Peter is first to speak both times. Perhaps John did get some words in "edgewise" (cf. Acts 4:1-2, 13). Nevertheless, John was a contemplative sort, quite different from Peter. The writings of John (especially the Gospel and first epistle) are obviously the products of deep thought. In fact the vision of Revelation begins, it would seem, in a moment of deep spiritual contemplation (cf. Rev 1:10).

Quick-speaking Peter finishes his life in a relatively short time.

John, slower to speak, outlives him nearly 30 years. Whereas John's writings were evidently late in life, after years of meditation, Peter had written his two books long before. John can afford to let Peter have this opportunity to speak here in Acts 4, for John's voice will still speak long after his companion's has been stilled in death.

Two witnesses, Peter and John, are chosen by God to bear this testimony to the Sanhedrin. Yet as individuals they are strikingly different, both in temperament, and in their ministry experience.

So God ever calls many men to witness for Himself, but has never called, molded, guided, or dealt with any two who were exactly alike.

Ignorant, Unlearned, and Used by God

4:13b. Two evidently **ignorant and unlearned men** stood before the most learned body in Israel.

This shows how things highly esteemed among men are an abomination with God.

So little does God respect the learning and wisdom of earth that the first gospel witness to this educated council came, not from a Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea—as we might expect and think prudent—but from two unlettered fishermen.

In our desire to impress men with our learning we fail to impress them with our boldness (as did Peter and John) or to truly turn men's thoughts to our Lord.

Human attainments in a witness may actually hide the One to whom he witnesses. Often a man's boldness shrinks in proportion as his education increases. He becomes too "sophisticated" to be

zealous. Better to possess boldness and lack learning, than to possess learning and lack boldness.

They marveled, but they did not know the half of it. As remarkable as it was to find such boldness before so august a body, the judges could scarcely have believed that these two "ignorant and unlearned" men would one day become authors. They would

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leave behind seven books as their literary legacy which would have world-wide circulation, be translated into countless languages, and be studied and written on by the learned and educated in colleges and universities. God not only can use the ignorant and unlearned man, but can use him far above all that he might ask or think.

And they recognized they had been with Jesus. As the council stare incredulously at Peter and John, searching for some explanation of their boldness, it dawns on them that they have seen them

before—with Jesus! No doubt they had seen Peter and John often with Jesus in the Temple, yet took so little note of them as to not recognize them until now. So little had the rulers esteemed the followers of Jesus, they had let them go when they arrested Jesus. They did not think of them as dangerous. How wrong! For these men took Jesus' gospel worldwide.

Perhaps the apostles' unfearful manner before the council reminded them of Jesus' calm poise. Unwittingly they stumbled on the explanation for their boldness, i.e., *being with Jesus*. Companionship with the Lord will ultimately result in boldness.

The apostles' relation with Jesus was that of student/teacher, or disciple/master. Though not formally educated Himself (John 7:15), Jesus was still often regarded as a Rabbi. Thus these ignorant and unlearned men had had schooling by being with Jesus. God calls all Christians, regardless of worldly education, into the spiritual school of discipleship, being "with Jesus" (cf. Matt 11:29).

He who had promised a course in fishing for men, could here survey the product of His spiritual training. Though the disciples often seemed like slow pupils, especially on the night of Jesus' arrest, His masterful skill prevailed. How much must the example of Jesus have contributed to their education, for a true teacher teaches by example as well as precept. Peter never forgot (cf. 1 Pet 2:21-24).

Thus these two men were especially "educated" for the occasion of Acts 4. It was one thing to fish for men at Pentecost, or in Solomon's porch, but quite another to

fish for men among hostile judges who could take their lives away.

Were they successful in making a catch?

Surely so, for how else would Luke know of the private deliberations of the Sanhedrin (vv 15-17; cf. Acts 6:7)? Thus, effective in the supreme act of men-fishing, they were far from being “ignorant and unlearned.” Whatever else we may learn from the “Master” this is one art in which we all (when we are in His school) receive an education (cf. 2 Tim 4:5).

The Character of Faith and Unbelief

4:14-22. The passage is designed to be one of contrasts. Where v 13 presented the contrast in education between the Sanhedrin and the apostles, v 14 onward presents the contrast between their characters of the leaders of age-old Judaism and the leaders of the new-born Church. This contrast may be epitomized as between faith and unbelief.

First, unbelief is occupied with man. Note in vv 15-17 that this religious tribunal makes no mention of God, only of men (“**these men,**” “**all them that dwell in Jerusalem,**” “**the people**”). They are primarily occupied with the sentiments and reactions of man (cf. v 21 also) and determine their action by this criterion. So ever does unbelief.

By contrast, faith is occupied with God and determines its actions in reference to Him (Peter mentions God twice, v 19).

Second, unbelief has no standard of right and wrong. Note that the council cannot speak against the miracle (v 14), but because of their real desire must discuss the case

privately (v 15). Verses 16 and 17 show no consideration of justice, only expediency. They stoop to threats (vv 17, 18, and 21), totally unworthy of judges. They have not even the courage of their unrighteous convictions and are afraid to punish them (v 21). The collapse of faith, or absence of it, inevitably entails a loss of moral standards. For these have no rationale apart from God. Expediency is the criterion of unbelief.

By contrast, faith is concerned with right and wrong because it is concerned with God. “**Whether it be right in the sight of God...**” (v 19).

Third, unbelief is illogical. Note that though they do not question the miracle (v 16), they never reason on to its implications—the living power of Jesus’ name. Unbelief cannot get the right answers for, illogically, it does not ask the right questions. They do not ask: “What should our response to this message be, for a notable miracle has been done?” This is nothing more than a non-sequitur which bypasses reality. So unbelief ever is illogical, whether in the higher critic (who assumes that the resurrection is unreal) or the man in the street who knows he must die, yet does not prepare.

By contrast, faith thinks about things with true rationality. Verses 19 and 20 exhibit the logic of faith which cuts to the heart of a matter and faces its real issue.

Fourth, unbelief is cowardly. They are afraid to punish these men for fear of the people’s reaction (v 21).


By contrast, faith has courage. Peter and John are not frightened by these threats and boldly assert

their intention to continue to witness.

Fifth, unbelief resists the spread of the truth. “**But so that it spreads no further among the people...**” (v 17). This is their chief concern (cf. v 18). By contrast, faith feels compelled to make the truth known. “**For we cannot but speak...**” (v 20).

Those most deeply tainted with unbelief, which have rejected much light, resist the truth the most vigorously. Those most deeply affected by faith, whose faith is deepest, are under the greatest inner compulsion to bear witness.

Sixth, unbelief is ineffectual. The procedure of the Sanhedrin amounted to little more than an empty bluff, exposed as such when Peter and John defied their threats; it accomplished nothing except to inspire the prayer of vv 24-30 and a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. Unbelief, sooner or later, is revealed to have accomplished nothing but its own defeat.

By contrast, faith is effectual. Here it led to this very prayer and its attendant marvelous answer. Faith has always been the secret of unbelievable accomplishments (cf. Heb 11:33-34). 



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

Ecclesiastes and a Judgment of Works

By Bill Fiess

There are some people who have the mistaken idea that people in the OT received eternal life by works. Often, this erroneous view maintains that a person in the OT had to keep the Law of Moses. Of course, nobody believes a person could have kept the Law perfectly, but if a person in the OT was to be saved, they had to do a pretty good job of following it.

This view is thoroughly unbiblical.

Paul makes it clear in the book of Romans that nobody can keep the Law (Rom 3:20). In both Romans and Galatians the apostle points out that both Abraham and David received eternal life the same way people today do. It is by God's grace through faith alone (Rom 4:3, 6; Gal 3:6). The difference is, believers in the OT believed in the *coming* Messiah, while we today believe in the One who has *already come*—Jesus Christ.

All of this, however, raises another question. How much did the believers in the Old Testament understand?

In this short article, I would like to look at the issue of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Specifically, I would

like to know: did a believer in the OT understand that even though he received eternal life by faith in the coming Messiah, he would also be judged according to his works to determine eternal rewards?

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes indicates that believers in the OT did.

Solomon's Judgment of Works

Both Jewish and Christian scholars have long held that Solomon was the author of the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon concludes Ecclesiastes with this statement:

Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. *For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil* (Eccl 12:13-14, emphasis added).

Once we understand that, as Paul states, the OT believer was eternally saved by grace through faith, we know that Solomon is not talking about what a person has to do to gain eternal life. Instead, he is talking about a day when men and women, including believers, will be judged according to their works. Solomon understood that even though he was saved by grace apart from works, one day he would give an account







of the works that he had done, even those done in secret.

The NT teaches a similar idea of a judgment that brings to light even our secret works, whether good or bad. It is found in numerous verses. For the Christian, the NT even gives this judgment a name.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

In the NT, there is a great deal of teaching on the Judgment Seat of Christ, where every believer will appear before Christ and give an account of the works he or she has done. Of course, these works do not determine whether a person enters into the Kingdom or goes to hell. Instead, these works determine the rewards the believer will receive and the role he or she will play in the Kingdom.

It is interesting to notice how the verses about the Judgment Seat of Christ remind us of what Solomon said at the conclusion of his book. The similarity in language strongly suggests that Solomon was thinking of a similar time. Notice the following four examples and compare them to the quote from Ecclesiastes:

“Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known” (Matt 10:26).

“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known” (Luke 12:2).

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God (1 Cor 4:5).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor 5:10).

In these verses, both the Lord Jesus and Paul state that the disciples of the Lord will one day be judged according to the works they have done. Some of these works will be good and some will be bad. Even the things we think are done in secret will be brought to light.

It is striking how similar all of this is to what is said in Ecclesiastes.

While Ecclesiastes does not give us the name of the judgment, Paul calls it the Judgment Seat of Christ, and it is clear that both men saw a coming day when men and women would be judged according to their works.

“The Lord, Paul, and Solomon all taught that all the people of God will have their works evaluated at one time or another.”

There appears to be a good reason, however, why Solomon does not give a name to this judgment.

Some Distinctions in the Coming Judgment

Technically, the believer in the OT probably will not stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Bible does not say exactly when OT believers will be judged according to their works. For the Christian, members of the Body of Christ, this judgment will occur after the Rapture. Evidently, OT believers will be judged at another time.

What is clear, however, is that the Lord, Paul, and Solomon all taught that all the people of God will have their works evaluated at one time or another. In fact, Jesus explicitly says that all men and women, including unbelievers, will have their works judged (Rev 22:12). And unbelievers both from OT and NT times will be judged at the Great White Throne according to their works (Rev 20:11-15). In some sense, even the experience of those in hell will be determined by their works (e.g., their degrees of punishment).


Conclusion

It is unfortunate that many have such a bleak picture of believers in the OT. They think these men and women saw their works as a way to gain eternal life, but that is not the case.

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While it is true that today we have the light of God's revelation in the NT, it is probably correct to say that we would be surprised at some of the things the saints in the OT understood.

Not only did these men and women understand that eternal life was a gift of God's grace through faith in the coming Messiah, they also knew that good works are important.

One day, even people who are going to enter into God's eternal kingdom will be judged by their works. God will reward good works and nothing will be hidden. Solomon understood that. We who have the light of the revelation of Christ and His apostles should understand that too. 



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

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Grace for Good Works

(2 Corinthians 8-9)

By Ken Yates

Within Free Grace theology, there is a great emphasis on the grace of God. One of the reasons for this is such a theology rightly sees that the eternal salvation of a person rests solely upon that grace. We receive eternal life as a free gift the moment we believe in Jesus Christ for it. Unfortunately, throughout church history there has always been an attempt by many to add works as a requirement for such salvation. Some proclaim that a person must perform certain works prior to receiving the gift. Others insist that works are necessary in order to keep it. In all these cases, there is a denial of God's marvelous grace.

But if we are to rightly proclaim God's grace, we also need to realize that such grace is also reflected in the works of believers.

Of course, some would say that if a person is saved by grace, that grace will automatically result in visible good works. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul speaks of the grace of God in the works of believers. Such works do indeed reflect that grace, but as these chapters indicate, they are not automatic.

The Grace of Giving

These two chapters contain the longest discussion in Scripture on one particular example of Christian good works. In them, Paul deals with the issue of Christian giving. Specifically, he is asking the Corinthian

believers to give financially in order to help their poor brothers and sisters in Christ in Judea.

If the first-century church is like the church today, the subject of giving was likely a touchy one. There is a natural inclination to hold on to one's money. What made this particular situation even touchier was the fact that Paul had certain enemies at Corinth. No doubt there was the danger that such opponents might accuse him of false motives in asking for money. In addition, Paul was asking a mostly Gentile church to give of their money to a Jewish church. This would involve both cultural and racial considerations.

It is interesting how Paul deals with such a potentially difficult situation. What is the basis of his appeal in asking the Corinthians to serve their fellow believers through giving? The answer is simple: the grace of God.

Even though these two chapters contain a discussion concerning Christian work, there is an emphasis on grace.

The word for *grace* occurs ten times (8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19; 9:8, 14, 15). The discussion begins with God's grace (8:1). Paul says that God gave grace to other churches, specifically those in Macedonia, by giving them the opportunity to give to the needy believers in Judea.

But the discussion also ends with the theme of God's grace. When the Corinthians give, God's grace will be evident as working in them as well (9:14). Paul then says that he gives thanks (grace) to God for this gift (9:15). While the "gift" here could possibly refer to eternal salvation, the context suggests that it refers to



the gift of having the opportunity to minister to the need of other believers.

God's grace, then, forms an inclusio around this discussion about Christian giving. It is God's grace that allows us to do good works by serving others. It is His grace that gives us the privilege of doing so.

Of course, for the believer, it is God's grace that forms the basis for making that believer a child of God in the first place. This wonderful grace makes possible the grace of serving Him.

Paul discusses this reality as well. In 2 Cor 8:9, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are aware of the grace of Jesus Christ. Although He was rich, He became poor that they might become rich.

This is a beautiful picture of what Jesus did for us. When we were in need, He left His divine throne and humbled Himself to become a man. He died the death of a criminal, taking upon Himself the sins

of the world. He did all this that through faith, we might receive eternal life.

In other words, He met our need when we were "poor." He served us.

The point Paul is making is that when Christians serve others in need, they are being like Christ. The grace of Christ provides the example and motivation for the grace of God that He gives us to minister to others.

Even though Paul is talking about a specific Christian work, that of giving financially to others, we can safely conclude that the points he makes would be valid for any good work. When a believer ministers to others, through his or her spiritual gift for example, God is giving grace to do so. The privilege of doing so is an example of God's grace.

Works Are Not Automatic

The NT surely teaches that all Christian service is a giving of

oneself to others. One need only think about the teaching of the Lord in Mark 10:43-45. Like Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians 8-9, the Lord tells the disciples that when they serve others they are being like Him.

Greatness in Christian service is serving others.

But it is also clear that such works are not automatic in the life of the believer. In this passage Paul uses the example of the Macedonians (8:1-5) to urge the Corinthians to do the same. We learn here that believers can, by their actions, provide an example for others to follow.

But it is possible for the Corinthians not to follow the example of the Macedonians. He tells them that this is something they have the option to do, and that it is not a command (8:8). Paul also acknowledges that the Corinthians may not do well in this gracious work. Their giving could possibly be miserly

“When a believer ministers to others, through his or her spiritual gift for example, God is giving grace to do so. The privilege of doing so is an example of God’s grace.”

and be the source of embarrassment (9:3-5).

Again, the same is true for any Christian good work. The believer has the power to refuse to act upon the grace of God, the privilege of serving others, and being like Christ.

Sowing and Reaping

But there is a cost for the believer when this gracious opportunity is rejected. Our Christian service is like sowing and reaping. Paul says that the financial giving by the Corinthians is a case in point. They will reap based upon what they sow (9:6, 10). Their giving will result in an increase in righteousness. God will also give them the grace to do every good work. In the context, the things they will reap include thanksgiving and glory to God (9:8-13). The harvest, then, includes things pertaining to this present life.

However, the NT is also clear that Christian service will result in a reaping at the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers. On that day, believers will be rewarded for how they have served the Lord and others. One of the major contributions of grace theology is distinguishing between eternal salvation and rewards. The first is free. The second requires work. Both are only possible by the grace of God.

Conclusion


These two chapters in 2 Corinthians teaches a great deal about Christian good works. By using the example of Christian financial giving Paul shows us that good works are not automatic. But the privilege of obedience to Christ and serving others are examples of God’s grace in our lives. We can be motivated to do good works by observing others or even being an example for others to emulate. In our obedience and service we are following Christ’s example. Responding to the grace God gives us to serve is a display of the grace He demonstrated in providing for our eternal salvation. Such obedience results in a harvest of rewards both here and in eternity.

This passage teaches us that our induction into Christian life was by God’s grace and that our service is a result of God’s grace as well. However, we must always keep the two distinct. The believer has received eternal life by grace through faith. He or she can never lose that life. Eternal salvation is just that—eternal.

However, we can spurn the grace God gives us to serve Him and others. We can deny ourselves the grace God gives us to be like Christ. But make no mistake, God is gracious in giving us the opportunities to serve Him and others.

That grace did not stop at our eternal salvation.

One of my favorite hymns, *He Giveth More Grace* by Annie Flint, speaks of God’s great grace. Even though the hymn specifically addresses how God gives His children grace when they experience affliction, the words of the chorus also apply to the grace God gives us to serve Him. It summarizes what Paul teaches about Christian works in 2 Corinthians 8-9:

His love has not limits.
His grace has not measure.
His power no boundary
known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches
in Jesus, He giveth, and giveth,
and giveth again. 



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FACING TRIALS BIBLICALLY

By Phil Congdon

I once delivered a message entitled “Shepherding the Flock in Trying Times.” I alerted Christians to the religious persecution coming to America, identifying where those attacks are coming from. My goal was to prepare believers for a time when standing for moral truth will be grounds for being ostracized or punished. When those times come, may God find us to be followers who will “serve God rather than men,” and who will faithfully “speak the truth in love.”

Someone wrote me a response. He pointed out that in NT times, persecution was a common lot for Christians (Acts 5:40ff; Phil 1:29; 1 Pet 4:12ff), and that they were exhorted to see it as an opportunity for spiritual growth (Rom 8:16f; 2 Cor 1:3-5; Phil 3:7-11; Jas 1:2-4). He cited 2 Tim 3:12: “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” The writer added, “The early church faced trials much greater than those you see coming for us, and the Scriptures speak with crystal clarity to what our attitude and response to those trials should be.”

I wish to concur with these comments. Persecution was prevalent both in NT times, and indeed on through the first centuries as Christianity spread throughout the world. Jean-Léon Gérôme’s famous painting “The Christian Martyrs’ Last Prayer” is a poignant reminder of the price many early believers paid for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Persecution is still widespread today. According to The Ethics and Religious Liberty Foundation, more Christians were martyred in the 20th century than in the previous nineteen centuries combined. Voice of the Martyrs tracks the lives of persecuted Christians around the world, an estimated 200 million today.

In almost every case of persecution, we see Christians responding with spiritual strength and standing for truth in the face of trials. There is a lesson here for those of us in America who have known little or no persecution to this point in our nation’s history. As those who oppose God and His truth increase their influence in the halls of power in our country, let us be found to be walking so closely with the Lord that we are prepared to pay the price in honoring God, especially when doing so results in personal trials.

Do Not Seek Martyrdom

But while we should be prepared for persecution, we are never instructed to *seek* it. It is a sad part of the history of the early church that some Christians mistook biblical teaching to suggest that persecution was a *good thing*. In fact, this became so entrenched that some early Christians sought out and welcomed martyrdom.

Mark it well: *Scripture never teaches us to seek persecution*. This is “spiritual masochism,” and is contrary to everything the NT says.



We are not to antagonize those in the world so they persecute us! We are to associate with them (1 Cor 5:9-10), be wise in our dealings with them – making the most of opportunities to witness (Col 4:5), and to live our lives as an example of godliness to unbelievers (1 Thess 4:11-12). In fact, a godly man is one who has a “good reputation with those outside the church” (1 Tim 3:7).

Do Not Be Passive

This does not mean that we should passively stand by while others do evil. Just as we would intervene to stop someone assaulting a stranger or abusing a child, so too we must intervene if ruling authorities pursue policies that take innocent life (abortion), or rob children of having a dad and a mom (homosexual marriage). We stand for Biblical truth, and when we are persecuted for doing so, we face it with the strength which God supplies. But we *must* continue to stand for truth.

Facing trials Biblically, therefore, means not seeking them, but being prepared to face them if that is the price for standing for truth.

This is where Christians in America increasingly find themselves today.

Our religious freedoms are under attack. Those who stand for truth are facing persecution both socially and politically. Should we passively stand by while these freedoms erode, and we increasingly face religious persecution? Of course not! We do not seek trials, but we are prepared to face them if we must.

Disturbing Trends

In a recent blog, I cited a lengthy portion of a speech by Eric Metaxas, author of the New York Times #1 bestseller *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. Metaxas, a scholar, student of history, and a Christian, states that on the issue of religious freedom, he sees “disturbing parallels between what was happening in Germany in the Thirties [the rise of Hitler and Nazism] and America today.” If these trends continue, we will face a loss of our religious freedoms. But while we can, let us seek to stop the increase of evil!

For example, he writes that the requirement in the new health care law that we must pay for abortions,

“has nothing to do with contraceptives and everything to do with Religious Freedom...”

The push for homosexual marriage, he writes, “has been framed as an issue of expanding a supposed right to marry whomever one chooses, which it is not. It’s about Religious Freedom.”

If we lose our religious freedoms, I pray that we will respond to inevitable persecution with grace and strength. But let us never *invite* that persecution!


Refuse to Stand By

Two centuries ago, William Wilberforce refused to passively stand by while evil increased. He confronted slavery in a day when social and political authorities said slavery was right, and to abolish it was crazy. He stood up to the forces of evil in his day, and by God’s grace, changed the course of history. Today, the oldest

predominantly African-American private university in America, Wilberforce University, bears his name (es. 1856).

In the last century, Bonhoeffer and other Christians led the opposition to Hitler. They confronted Nazism when social and political authorities said killing Jews was right. They faced trials Biblically. Bonhoeffer was murdered by the Nazis, but his testimony resounds

today. He would not be silenced. We must not be silent either. He called the church to be the church, and to stand for what is right. We can do no less today.

Most of us in America don’t know what it is like to live without religious freedom. Today, religious freedom is under attack. While we have it, let’s seek to preserve it. If we lose it, let’s be prepared to suffer for Christ’s sake. That’s facing trials Biblically. 

“Facing trials Biblically, therefore, means not seeking them, but being prepared to face them if that is the price for standing for truth.”



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

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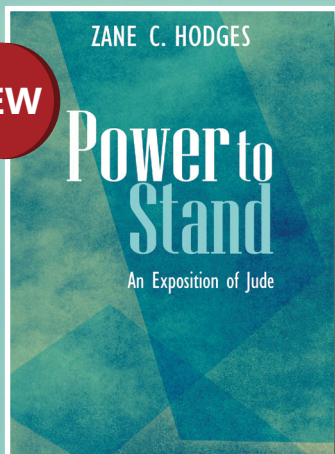
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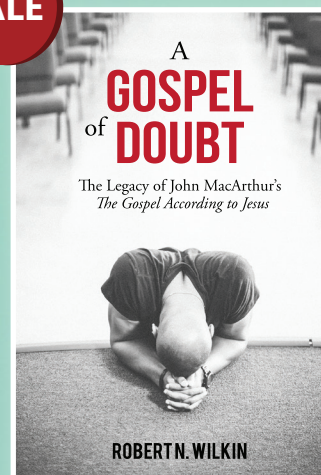
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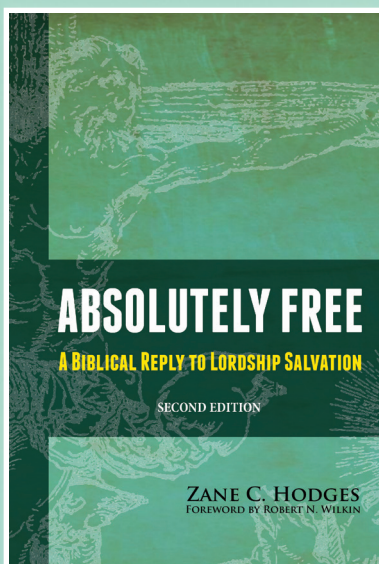
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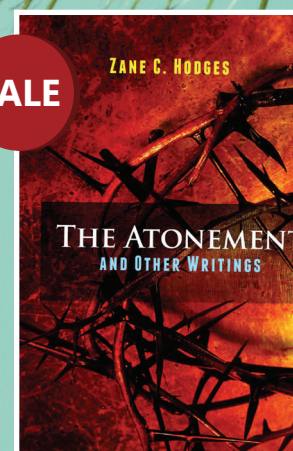
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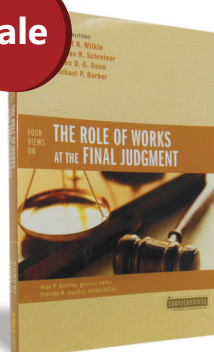
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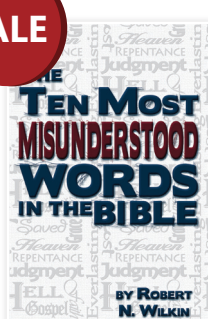
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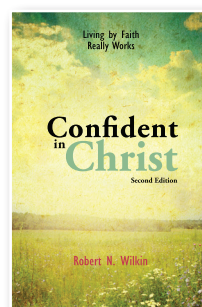


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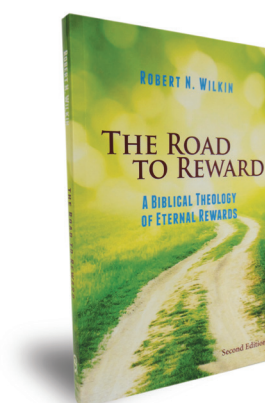
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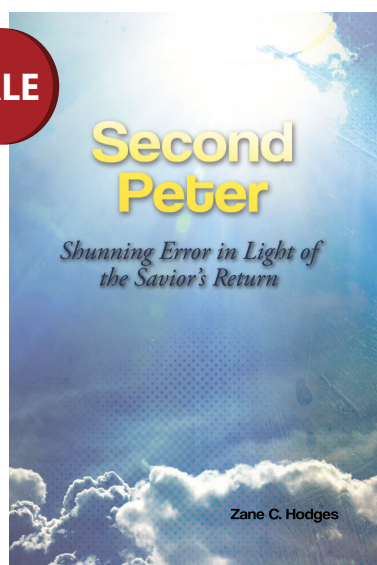
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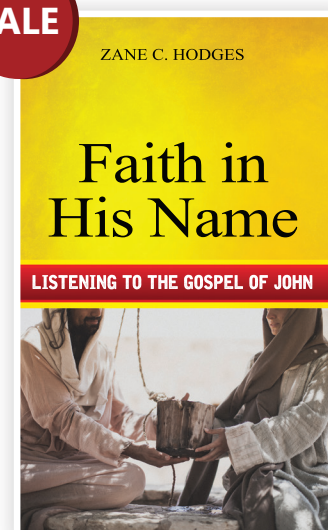
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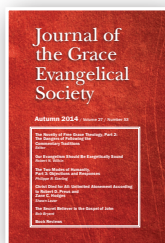
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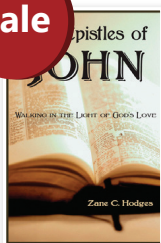
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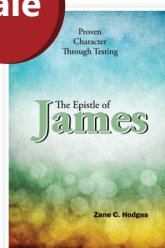


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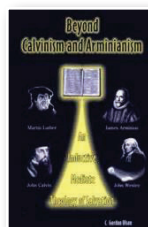


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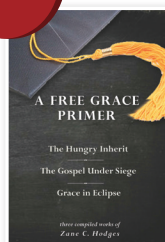
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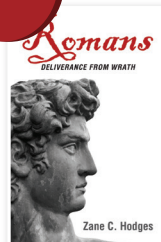
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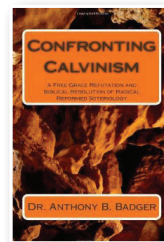


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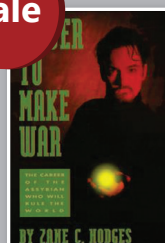
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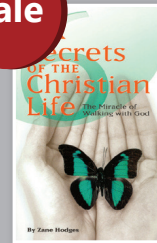
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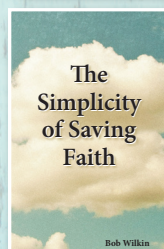
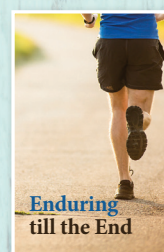
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It Began with a Seed

By D. L. Starkey

I was brought up in the Church of Christ since I was two weeks old.

I was a full-time paid preacher there for over twenty years.

If you are familiar with the Church of Christ, they can be a very legalistic bunch, and I was no exception.

I preached against all other churches and pretty much believed we were the only ones going to heaven. Of course, we believed that baptism was the point at which we got saved from our sins. And as I'm sure you're probably aware, we also believed it was extremely easy to lose our salvation.

Now I am 65 years of age and have a completely different understanding.

God's Prodding

I held fast to Church of Christ beliefs even though, on numerous occasions, God prodded me to go in a different direction. But I didn't heed His voice.

There was a Baptist church across from mine. The pastor and I would go back and forth on the issues of baptism, faith, grace, etc. But I was unmovable.

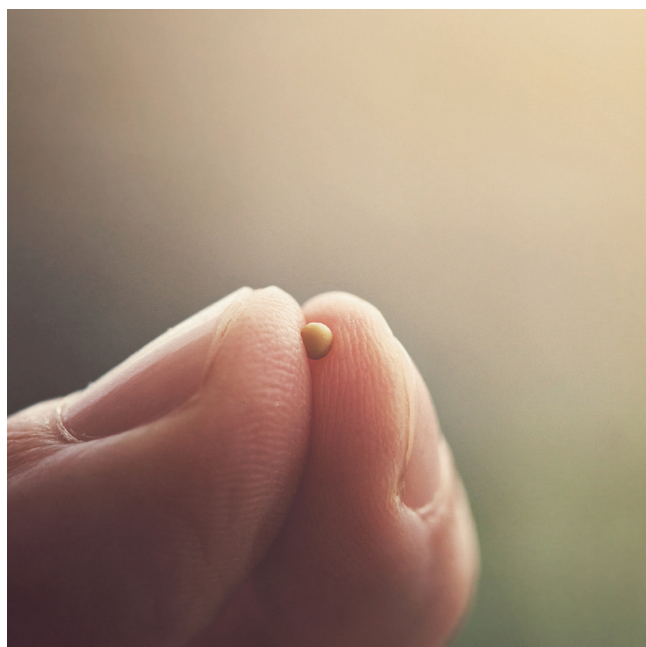
Then one day our second car broke down and He gave me one of his cars—not a loan, but a gift.

I think he was trying to win me over and at the same time illustrate grace. I felt it, but didn't interpret it as such at that time.

But a seed was planted.

Leaving the Ministry

Fast forward to several years later in my ministry. I was caught up in the sin of unfaithfulness and hence left preaching and lost my marriage at the same time. (A side note: Even though my first wife and I never got back together, she forgave me and now my first three children from that marriage are very close to me. She went to be with the Lord in her mid 50s.)



At that point I was a man without a church.

Probably the Church of Christ wouldn't have accepted me back. And I didn't feel comfortable going to a different church. So during those days I had a lot of private prayer time and introspection.

To make a long story short, I got involved in some relationships that went nowhere, and a friend suggested I go for Christian counseling since I had great difficulty in forgiving myself for my sinfulness.

That's what I did.

The Christian counselor had well over 25 years of experience. I saw him weekly for 8 weeks. Often times, I knew what Scripture he was going to share before he shared it.

During that eighth week, toward the beginning of the session he said, "Don, I really admire your Bible knowledge."

I mentally applauded myself.

Then he went on to say, "I think I've figured out how to solve your forgiveness problem."

I remember pushing forward to the edge of my seat in order to not miss his next words.

"After eight weeks of getting to know you, your problem was very easy to figure out. You have a strong relationship with God's Word, but I'm convinced that *you have no relationship with Jesus!*"

I was appalled.

"You do know I was a pastor for over twenty years?"

He replied, "I don't care if you were the Pope for forty years, you don't know the Lord."

I thanked him and then immediately left. I was angry.

But again a seed was planted.

Reassessing Repentance

After I met my second wife, we started attending a Calvary Chapel. I felt comfortable there. I liked that they were going through the Word verse by verse.

One of the neat things about leaving a faith community like the Church of Christ, is that you begin to reassess everything you've ever been taught.

Of course, I knew at this point it wasn't baptism that saves you, it's Jesus. But I realized I hadn't gone far enough.

One of the things that the Church of Christ has in common with Calvary and many other churches is the belief that one must "repent of sins" to be saved. So in that, I felt very comfortable with the crossover. But then I read the entire Gospel of John when I made an interesting discovery. Others had made it before me, but it was a first for me.

I knew that baptism didn't save you and John certainly confirmed that. However, I noticed the absence of "repentance" in John.

That puzzled me.

I know why John wrote his Gospel because he tells us why in John 20:30-31. He wrote it so that unbelievers would "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing [they] may have life in His name." But if John wanted unbelievers to have eternal life, why wouldn't he have mentioned "repentance"? Don't you need to repent to have eternal life?

I targeted this concern in prayer.

I began studying other passages in other NT books that addressed repentance.

It occurred to me that every time I read the word, "repent," or "repentance," I always added "of sins." But why? I realized then that it was because of church tradition.

It suddenly dawned on me that anything that takes away from praising Jesus for our salvation is a false gospel. It's not multiple steps that secures our salvation. It is just one step—faith in Jesus. "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life" (John 3:36). We are not saved by faith plus repentance, or by faith plus anything else. It is all by faith.

I celebrated that new discovery with great joy.

Reassessing Assurance

Then I gathered my mental and spiritual forces to tackle assurance. The Lord kept hammering me with John 5:24.

"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."

I couldn't shake that verse. You will "not face judgment, you have already passed from death to life." That was amazing!

Jesus used past tense knowing full well that we would sin again tomorrow and the rest of our lives. Believers won't come into judgment, even for future sins.

That verse became my banner and battle cry.


All of a sudden other passages began to fall into place. I realized that Jesus promised that believers

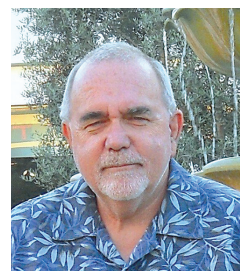
are eternally secure. You can't lose your salvation!

More to Tell

There is a lot more to that story but I spared you even greater details. Bless you if you made it to the end of it. My desire is to see people released from the sin burden they carry. Plus, I want them to give Jesus the proper glory that He deserves.

I pray that more folks will break free from their bondage and that the true gospel be preached.

It took me a long time to get it. But as I learned, you're never too old when you keep your mind and heart open to the Lord's leading. 



*D. L. Starkey holds DMin and MMin degrees and has written two books, *Grief's Untold Stories* and *Heaven's Lockbox: Finding Eternal**

Security in an Insecure World. He is starting a church plant in Hemet, CA.



WAYNE GRUDEM ON GENUINE FAITH

BY SHAWN LAZAR

Wayne Grudem is one of the best-known Evangelical theologians writing today. His *Systematic Theology* has sold over 400,000 copies. It's a model for making academic theology accessible and often the first systematic theology I consult from my library.

When Grudem speaks, people listen, including me.

That's why I'm grateful he wrote a critique of Free Grace theology. As the saying goes, there's no such thing as bad press. If Grudem's critique brings more attention to Free Grace views, then I'm glad for it.

He made at least two presentations on Free Grace theology: a shorter one given at his church ("The Historic Protestant Viewpoint and the Free Grace Viewpoint on Conversion"); and a longer one presented at the Evangelical Theological Society in 2014 ("Salvation without Repentance from Sin? A Critique of the 'Free Grace' Gospel").

This article will address the longer presentation, specifically, Grudem's definition of "genuine faith."

I argue his definition is harmful, because it makes it virtually impossible for anyone to know for sure whether they believe in Jesus and are saved.

Grudem's Complaint

The main point of Grudem's longer critique was to show the Free Grace doctrine of "faith alone" is different from the Reformation doctrine of "faith alone." He believes the difference centers on the meaning of the term "alone."

The Reformers meant that faith is "alone" in the sense of being the only thing that counts in justification (pp. 3, 5), and not in the sense that faith is never accompanied by other things (like repentance, obedience, and love, etc).

By contrast, Free Gracers supposedly believe faith is "alone" in the sense of never being accompanied by other things:

So I ask Free Grace advocates: where in the entire history of mainstream evangelical Protestantism since the Reformation, did you ever find the idea that 'justification by faith alone' means 'faith that is not accompanied by repentance or good works'? It is not there (p. 5).

The better question might be, "Where in the history of the Free Grace movement has anyone taught that faith is never accompanied by other things?"²

In any case, Grudem's argument is that the only faith that justifies is one accompanied by a great many things. And that runs Grudem into some serious problems.

Of Accompaniments and Components

On first glance, you would think Grudem believes in salvation by faith apart from works. But dig a little deeper and you'll see the opposite is true.

Grudem distinguishes between what "accompanies" faith and the "components" of faith.

Grudem assures us that even though faith is accompanied by many other things, faith itself "is the only thing that God responds to with the act of justification" (p. 5), and "nothing else counts" but faith (p. 5). Faith is "accompanied by other things," but "God does not count those other things as any part of the means of obtaining justification" (p. 6).

This is good. Very good. Faith is the only thing that counts and there is no other means of obtaining justification.

We can agree on that...if only Grudem really believed it!

Sadly, what Grudem offers with his right hand, he immediately takes back with his left. He *begins* by drawing a strong distinction between faith and the things that accompany it, but he *ends* by suggesting at least some of these accompaniments are actually components of faith. That subtle transition is apparent in his discussion of repentance.

On the one hand, Grudem says that faith is always accompanied by repentance (pp. 6-7). But later on he

says that "repentance from sins is a *component* of truly turning to Christ in faith for salvation from sin" (p. 8, emphasis added).

So long as something is merely an *accompaniment* to faith, Grudem could technically claim he believed in justification by faith alone. That is, he could technically claim that, while he believed that faith is always accompanied by other things (like repentance),

we aren't justified because of those other things. (But even then, I think I would have grounds to question whether Grudem really believes in justification by faith alone. After all, if you can't be justified by faith apart from other things, then logically, that implies those accompaniments are part of the condition of justification.)

However, if Grudem says that something is a *component* of faith, then he cannot claim to believe in justification by faith apart from those other things, because those other things are now part of what it means to believe. Hence, if the components of faith include works, then despite his claims to the contrary, Grudem would not believe in justification by faith apart from works, even in a technical sense.

Do you see why?

If not, imagine Grudem was talking about circumcision instead of repentance.

Imagine if he adamantly denied teaching we were justified by faith *plus* circumcision, but insisted that circumcision was a *component* of genuine faith. In other words, if you really believed, you'd be circumcised. I hope you see that's a distinction without a

"Everything [Grudem] thinks is a component of faith necessarily becomes part of the condition of salvation."

difference, because circumcision would be part of the condition of salvation either way.

And that's the fundamental problem with Grudem's definition of "genuine faith." Everything he thinks is a component of faith necessarily becomes part of the condition of salvation. If, for example, he thinks a *work* is a component of faith, then he necessarily believes that work is a condition of salvation.

So the question is, does Grudem ever make works a component of genuine faith?

The Big List

Grudem hints there are several components of genuine faith besides mental assent and repentance (e.g., "heartfelt trust," p. 18). Unfortunately, he stops short of giving us a comprehensive list of what those might be.

That's quite surprising.

If he believes our eternal destiny depends on having these components, shouldn't Grudem tell us what they are? Shouldn't they be part of an evangelistic presentation? I would certainly want to know!

I searched Grudem's paper for hints of what these other components might be and came up with a list of 30 different possibilities. Let me emphasize that these are just possibilities. Grudem doesn't explicitly identify these as "components," but if you look up the references, I'm sure you'll agree that is the impression. Here is the list:

- Repentance from sin (p. 7)
- A sincere commitment to turn from sin (p. 8)
- Turning to Christ (p. 8)
- Heart commitment (p. 8)
- Coming into God's presence (p. 9)
- Crying out as Isaiah did (p. 9)
- Seeking forgiveness (p. 9)
- Deep, heartfelt sorrow for sin (p. 9)
- Resolving to turn from sin (p. 9)
- Giving up all our possessions (p. 9)
- Giving half of our goods to the poor (p. 9)
- Repaying fourfold the things we steal (p. 9)
- Regretting past conduct (p. 11)
- Abiding in Jesus (p. 13)
- Mental assent (p. 18)
- Coming before the person of Christ (p. 18)
- Trusting (p. 18)
- Trusting in the person of Christ (p. 18)
- Having a personal encounter (p. 18)

- Coming into Christ's presence (p. 18)
- Realizing Christ is your God (p. 18)
- Realizing He is King and Lord forever (p. 18)
- Believing in His omnipotence (p. 18)
- Believing in His omniscience (p. 18)
- Believing He is the eternal creator and sustainer of the universe (p. 18)
- Believing He is infinitely holy (p. 18)
- Not clinging to sin (p. 18)
- Having interpersonal interaction with Christ (p. 19)
- Believing with your heart (not just mental assent) (p. 21)
- Believing with deepest emotions (p. 21)
- Believing with deepest conviction (p. 21)

As you can see this is a very long list. And I'm not sure it's comprehensive. There may be more components Grudem hasn't mentioned. For example, Grudem says saving faith does not include things like:

- Absolute, total commitment of life (p. 12)
- Obedience—although true faith results in obedience (p. 12)

So, even if "absolute" commitment isn't a component of saving faith, would Grudem say that at least *some* commitment is? After all, he denies that anyone who is still clinging to sin has genuine faith (p. 18). If you need to stop clinging to sin, then you need to obey at least a little bit to really believe, don't you?

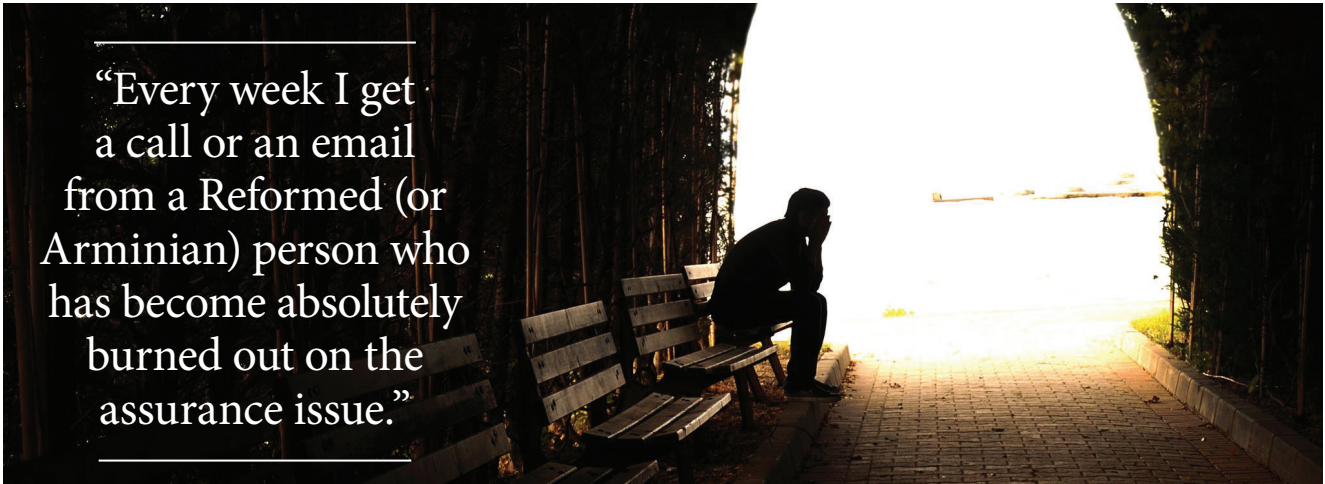
And think of the other work-like components in the list. Genuine faith includes repenting, committing, turning, coming, crying out, seeking, giving, and abiding. Those are not just states of mind. They're activities. They involve changes in behavior. In other words, they're works.

Why Grudem's Definition of Faith Leads to Doubt

Now, I'm sure if Grudem saw my list he would quibble here and there and say I'm making distinctions that don't really exist, or have included things he wouldn't really include as components, or that I've misread him or misunderstood him.

I admit that's all possible.

However, I would also suggest that Grudem's presentation lends itself to those kinds of misunderstandings.



“Every week I get a call or an email from a Reformed (or Arminian) person who has become absolutely burned out on the assurance issue.”

And that’s another devastating problem with his definition of faith. It’s slippery. It’s uncertain. It’s hard to pin down. It’s hard to tell what, exactly, faith is supposed to be or what components it’s supposed to have.

Anyone hearing or reading Grudem’s presentation would walk away completely confused about the condition of eternal life. Yes, they would know it was something called “faith,” but they wouldn’t know what “faith” was or if they had it.

For example, think of how highly subjective and vague most of Grudem’s implied components are, and how many unanswerable questions they raise.

Is the list exhaustive? Were some components left out? If so, what are they?

How many of the components are necessary for saving faith? Can you mix and match? Is having five enough? How about ten? Or do you need all thirty (or more) to have genuine saving faith?

Even if you have most of the components now, how do you know if you’ll have them in the future?

How intensely must you experience these components? For example, how much regret do you have to feel to have genuine faith? How much sorrow? How much resolve? Is there a percentage of intensity? If so, what is that percentage? What if you only feel 49% regret, is that enough for your faith to be genuine?

What if that intensity goes up and down over time—do you gain and lose your salvation?

What if you aren’t a very emotional person to begin with—does God judge the intensity of your regret on a sliding scale?

How can you tell when you’ve entered God’s presence, or if you’ve left it?

How do you know if you’ve stopped clinging to sin—is it a matter of behavior, attitude, a state of mind, or some combination of all three?

As I said, I think these questions are unanswerable. How could you possibly know if you had “genuine faith”?

Grudem recognizes the difficulty.

In a masterful example of understatement, he admits his understanding of faith “makes assurance more complex” and “makes the question of whether a person has genuine faith more complex” (p. 19).

I should say so!

Actually, I would say it makes the question *impossibly* complex! There’s no way anyone holding to this view of faith could ever be sure they believed or were saved.

It’s ironic that Grudem thinks the Free Grace movement commits the category mistake of focusing on assurance of eternal salvation when we should be focusing on having assurance that we’ve genuinely believed (p. 15). It’s ironic, because Grudem is projecting upon us a problem created by his own faulty theology. He’s like a Freudian psychologist insisting we should all be dealing with our “mother issues” because of his own complicated relationship with his mother. Just so, Grudem has created a situation where it is impossible to know if he has really believed, and assumes we should all struggle with the same question.

Actually, Grudem’s charge that we have committed a category error only illustrates why the Free Grace movement has tried so hard to move people away from basing their assurance on the kind of morbid introspection required by Grudem’s theology, to the only proper grounds of assurance, i.e., to Jesus’ promise of everlasting life. Assurance is only found outside of us, in simply believing Christ’s promise “to me,” and not found within us, in some subjective *experience* of believing.

The Joy of Clarity

Every week I get a call or an email from a Reformed (or Arminian) person who has become absolutely burned out on the assurance issue.

They're burned out because when they asked their pastor or friend how to be sure, they were given an answer like Grudem's. They're told to look to see if they have genuine faith. They're told to look for signs in their lives that indicate they have really believed (or have been given special faith from God). They were told to look for the kind of components Grudem mentions.

Did they really make a heart commitment?

Are they really relying on Jesus?

Are they still sinning?

Are their thoughts purer than before?

Did they really feel sorrow?

Have they really resolved to abandon their sins?

Basing their assurance on these types of criteria only leads to more doubt (at least, for conscientious people). Why? Because their lives are inconsistent.

Once they start introspecting, they might see some good, but they also see lots of bad. They might remember having memorable spiritual experiences that encourages them of their salvation, but time passes and they're not so sure anymore. They see they were faithful at times, but not always, and aren't sure if they'll be faithful in the future. In fact, thinking about their future performance brings in even more doubt than before. What if they don't continue believing? What if the "genuine faith" they seem to have now only turns out to be the faith of a so-called "reprobate"?

Instead of leading to assurance, morbid introspection leads to monstrous uncertainty. It leads to conscientious people being filled with doubts and fears of hell. It leads to getting burned out.

Then they hear the message of God's free grace.

They hear the simple message of John's Gospel, with its repeated emphasis on faith in Christ for everlasting life.

Contrary to what Grudem teaches, faith in Jesus' promise is simple. It's like faith in anything else. You are presented with a proposition—in this case Jesus' promise—and you either believe it is true, or you don't.

For example, do you believe you live in the U.S.: yes or no?

Do you believe you are married: yes or no?

Do you believe you went to college: yes or no?

Do you believe you are reading this magazine: yes or no?

And how do you know if you've believed? It doesn't matter how you feel, how you've acted, if you've had an encounter, if you've felt remorse, and so on.

You either believe it is true, or not.

You know whether you believe something or not immediately. It is self-evident and automatic.

It's the same with Jesus' promise of everlasting life.

Do you believe that Jesus' promise is true for you: yes or no?

If you say "yes," or have ever said "yes," you have everlasting life that can never be lost (John 10:28-29).

If you answer, "no," or if you say, "I believe it is true for *someone*, but I'm not sure if it's true *for me*," I would urge you to read the Gospel of John until you are sure.

Read Jesus' promises out loud (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:26).

Read them a thousand times if you have to.

Faith doesn't come by looking to your emotions, behaviors, or any other subjective feelings, experiences or commitments. Rather, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17).

That's what assurance is based on—not on what you have done, but on what Jesus has promised to do. ■



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. His books, *Chosen to Serve: A Vocational View of Election* and *Zero Pointer: Why I Am Neither Calvinist nor Arminian* are forthcoming.

1. See Grudem's ETS paper here: <http://www.waynegrudem.com/salvation-without-repentance-ets-2014>.

See a response to his shorter paper here: Charles C. Bing, Joseph Dillow, Roger Fankhauser, John Correia, "A Free Grace Alliance Response to Wayne Grudem's 'The Historic Protestant Viewpoint and The Free Grace Viewpoint on Conversion'" at http://www.freegracealliance.com/pdf/Response%20to%20Wayne%20Grudem_06252014fga.pdf. Accessed, April 15, 2016.

2. Grudem might simply be making the point that, unlike many Reformers, most Free Gracers are not theological determinists or monergists. We do not believe God only gives the gift of faith to the predestined few and then causes them to become spiritually mature (so that faith is *always* accompanied by other things). Rather, we believe that faith is a natural ability, that it's defectible, and that spiritual growth is conditional (meaning faith can and should be accompanied by other things, but not always).

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The Building Block of

PERSEVERANCE

(2 Peter 1:6)

By Joe Lombardi

Introuced the series by explaining the Bible makes it clear that every believer is a builder. Every Christian is a person in construction as well as under construction.

In 2 Peter 1:3-11, Peter explains that by our dependence upon Divine heavenly resources (vv 3-4), and by our diligence in the human process (vv 5-7), we are called to build upon the foundation of our faith in Jesus a superstructure of Christian character using the building blocks of virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. The Biblical footing, spiritual flooring and moral framing of this building will enable us to be effective and productive for God (vv 8-9), which will eventually result in His bestowing and our receiving an abundant and extravagant reward (vv 10-11).

In previous articles we have already examined the building blocks of virtue, knowledge and self-control. In this article I want to consider the building block of perseverance.

Perseverance Defined

The word that the apostle Peter used is the Greek term *hupomonēs* (perseverance). The verb form is *hupomenō* (to persevere). The term is a compound word: *hupo* means “under,” and *menō* means “to remain.”

In ancient Greek the word was commonly used in a military context, usually to refer to a soldier who had been severely wounded, but who would bite his lip and grit his teeth and silently and patiently endure the physical pain and emotional strain with which he had been afflicted. It was also used to describe a courageous and tenacious warrior who unwaveringly stood his ground, or a dogged and determined fighter who would roll with the punches and take it on the chin, but who firmly refused to throw in the towel and give up and give in.

Perseverance. This word is found at least forty-eight times in the NT in both its noun and verbal forms. Sometimes it is translated by our English words “patience” and “endurance.” Other times it is rendered “perseverance.” That is because there is both an *active*

and a *passive* aspect of *hypomonē*. On the one hand it means “to endure passively.” But, on the other hand, there are times when it may also mean “to persevere actively.”

Biblical perseverance can be further explained by studying some Biblical examples and spiritual principles of this “building block.”

Three Examples of Perseverance

The Greek word *hypomonē* is liberally sprinkled throughout the epistle of James. In James 1, the name of one OT saint in particular, Job, is singled out and submitted as a laudable example of a man who knew what it meant to persevere.

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the *perseverance* of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful (Jas 5:10-11, emphasis added).

Job was a man who persevered in spite of incredible trouble. He held his ground. Indeed, the word *perseverance* is also found in its various forms at least 14 times in the Greek translation of the OT book of Job.

Paul knew how to persevere as well. For example, he wrote in 2 Corinthians, with reference to his ministry there, “truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all *perseverance*, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:12, emphasis added). The truth of the matter is that ministry is not easy, even for Paul. In fact, it is often accompanied *by*, and only accomplished *with*, much agony.

In 2 Corinthians 6 there is yet another catalog of the kinds of circumstances that are normally part and parcel of the agony of Christian ministry. The one quality that tops the list in v 4 is *patience*: “but in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: and much *patience*...” (2 Cor 6:4, emphasis added).

Finally, in 2 Cor 4:8-9, Paul wrote, “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” Why not?

It is because of what he would write just a few verses later: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

Paul knew that a day was coming when he would stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and be rewarded for that which he had accomplished. He also knew that he needed to persevere in his walk with the Lord and in his work for the Lord, if he would receive an abundant and extravagant reward.

The patriarch Job and the apostle Paul serve as good examples of men who knew how to persevere. But,

of course, the best example ever of perseverance is none other than our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In Heb 12:1-3 we read,

“It is human to
desert one’s post, to
give up and walk out,
to go “AWOL.” But
it is divine to stay up
and put up, to hang
tough and to finish
well, to persevere.”

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him *endured* the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For

consider Him who *endured* such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls (emphasis added).

As Jesus was nailed to that old, rugged, Roman cross, those who stood around Him sneered at Him. They teased and taunted Him. They bantered and badgered Him, saying, “let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him” (Matt 27:42).

It is human to come down, to desert one’s post, to give up and walk out, to go “AWOL.” But it is divine to stay up and put up, to hang tough and to finish well, to persevere. Jesus did.

In Luke 9:51 we read concerning the Lord, “Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He *steadfastly set His face* to go to Jerusalem” (emphasis added). Jesus demonstrated His dogged determination, His unflinching resolution to stay the course and to finish His race. He persevered.

Furthermore, Paul prayed, “Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the *patience* of Christ” (2 Thess 3:5, emphasis added).

Three Spiritual Principles

Job, Paul, and Jesus are three powerful examples of perseverance. However, there are also three spiritual principles by which perseverance may be further explained.

First, there is a sense in which perseverance is dictated by faith.

What I mean by that statement is simply that perseverance is commanded in the Bible. It is demanded of God's people. If you are a follower of Jesus then you have a divine order to persevere. It is not an "elective" in God's school of discipleship. It is an imperative. It is not optional. It is essential.

In his first letter to his young son in the faith and pastoral protégé, Timothy, Paul reminds him that as a man of God he is called to pursue, among other things, *patience*.

Likewise, according to Titus 2:2, the young preacher was admonished by Paul not only to teach the older men to be self-controlled, but also to be "sound in faith, in love, in patience."

Similarly, the author of Hebrews challenged his readers: "For you have need of endurance," and "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb 10:26, 12:1).

This perseverance is dictated by faith—the kind of faith demonstrated by Job when he said, "though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

Second, there is a sense in which perseverance is stimulated by hope. Notice the repeated use of the word "wait" by David in Psalm 25. "Indeed, let no one who *waits* on You be ashamed...On You I *wait* all the day...Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I *wait* for you" (Ps 25:3, 5, 21). David's perseverance was stimulated by hope. David reiterates that same theme in Psalm 37, "Rest in the LORD, and *wait* patiently for Him" (Ps 37:7).

So, when we pray and we sense His immediate answer to be, "not now, but sometime later," or "not this, but something even better," then we can say, "That's okay. I will wait patiently for Him, because my hope is still in Him."

That is precisely what keeps me going. My perseverance is not only dictated by faith, but it is also stimulated by hope.

Third, perseverance is also motivated by love. It emanates from love.

In summary, perseverance, which is probably best defined as a combination of passive endurance and active perseverance, is also further explained by these three principles: *it is dictated by faith, stimulated by hope, and motivated by love*.

Perseverance Obtained

So, how is perseverance obtained? Why do we even need it?

One of the primary reasons why we need it has to do with this place in which we live: the world of man.

According to Rom 8:20, it has been subjected to frustration because of sin. Furthermore, as Paul states in 2 Tim 3:1, "in the last days perilous times will come"—i.e., things are going to get worse. How bad? It is going to be so bad according to 2 Tim 3:12, that

"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Such times are going to demand perseverance.

A second related reason why we need perseverance not only has to do with this place in which we live, but with His purpose for each of our lives. It has to do not only with the world of man, but also with the plan of God.

You see, although we, too, as part of God's original creation have been subjected to frustration because of sin (Rom 3:20), as part of His "new creation" we are predestined for "glorification" because we are His sons (Rom 8:30). In fact, His plan is that we be conformed to the likeness of His Son (Rom 8:29). Glorification is God's ultimate, eternal purpose for His children. But it also includes an intermediate, temporal process of maturation, i.e., "growing pains."

To be sure, there are times when we cry out, "Dear God, why did You let this happen to me?" Well, here is one reason: It is because suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character (Rom 5:4-5), Christ-like character. And that is God's ultimate, eternal purpose and plan for us—that we might be conformed to the likeness of His Son.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, explains it like this, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces *patience*. But let *patience* have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (Jas 1:2-4, emphasis added). Maturity is God's ultimate purpose.

Perseverance is
dictated by faith,
stimulated by hope,
and motivated by
love.

Those are the reasons why we need perseverance. But that leads me to a second question: are there any resources by which we may obtain it?

God Will Provide

I have some good news. It is found in the opening verses of our text for this entire series: 2 Pet 1:2-11. The Apostle Peter wrote, “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3).

Everything? Yes, everything.

Do you need perseverance? God will give it to you. You have at your disposal the heavenly resources of His divine power and these precious promises. You see, He is the source of perseverance Himself. And, by the way, His supply is unlimited. Indeed, in his letter to the saints in Colossae, Paul explained that believers can be “strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience...” (Col 1:11 HCSB).

Therefore, when it comes to perseverance in your walk with the Lord and in your work for the Lord, you can have it, because he most certainly wants to grant it.


And just what are the rewards when you have it? James said, “Indeed we count them blessed who endure” (Jas 5:11). There is blessing for persevering.

Some of those blessings are temporal, affecting the here and now. They are related to our maturity in Christ. Again, it was James who said, “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas 1:4).

Conclusion

Persevere—and you will enjoy the temporal rewards of greater maturity in Christ and a greater ministry for Christ. Please do not forget that in v 8 of our foundational text in 2 Peter 1 we are told that if we possess

this quality of perseverance (along with the six others, of course) in ever-increasing measure, that we will be effective and productive (that is, we will be useful and fruitful) for the Lord. In the words of Jesus in Luke 8:15, it is by “persevering” that we can produce a good crop. So, “let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal 6:9).

Furthermore, the more “fruit” we bear, the greater our reward will be—not just here and now, but also then and there, when we stand at last before the Judgment Seat of Christ. For, you see, some of the blessings of persevering are not only temporal, but they are also eternal! That is one reason why Paul would write, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). 



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



God Ministers Even in the Darkness

By Diane Boring

I've been a believer for many years, and God has always been faithful to show me that His grace truly is sufficient in times of trial.

When I stop and remember how He's always come through for me in each and every trial, I am in awe of Him.

But this last big trial was the greatest of all. And I saw with my own eyes something so amazing that I am even more in awe of God!

An Unexpected Illness

My husband, Dale, became ill soon after he retired from his job as a CRNA (Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist).

He was always a very active person who seldom just sat down. When I saw him just sitting, he was usually reading his Bible or preparing for a class. Usually he was working in the yard, working in his shop, riding his bike, working on a project at church, etc.

Soon after he completely retired he became ill. We didn't know what was wrong. He continued to get worse and worse to the point where he couldn't do any of the activities he always did. It was very hard not knowing what was wrong.

We continued to attend two more annual GES conferences after he was ill, although he wasn't able to attend all the sessions at that last conference, which was 2012.

I had to do the driving which was about 6 1/2 hours each way. Within an hour or so after we got home from the last conference Dale complained of pains in his side and we ended up going to the ER the evening we got back. He had a gall bladder attack and was admitted to the hospital for surgery. Later Dale was diagnosed with Parkinson's and then multiple blood clots in both lungs.



Our darkest days of suffering were still to come, and God was going to show us something so wonderful about Himself that we couldn't have known any other way but to go through it.

God Provides

About three months before he went home to be with the Lord, Dale was getting ready to come back to bed one evening, and I saw him about to fall backwards. I ran and grabbed him before he went all the way over. That was God's provision because I wasn't usually that close to him.

But once his legs went out from under him I didn't have the strength to get him back to bed. Somehow I was able to drag him to the bed (even though I have no memory of how I did that). I ended up calling 911 and Dale was taken by ambulance to the hospital. After a few days they moved him to a rehab center, but I wanted to take care of him at home, and that's what I did. I was his main care giver, but home health nurses came a few times a week to care for some of his medical needs.

God also provided a new friend to take care of Dale for four hours a day, five days a week so that I could get out and do the chores I needed to do. She was truly one of God's mercies to us that are new every morning. It's like she appeared out of nowhere just as we needed her and disappeared immediately after Dale's memorial service. She was God's perfect provision for us and we grew to love her.

Nightly Communion

Those last few months Dale could not get out of bed. It was something he never would have wanted. But God was there for both of us.

In the mornings I would begin with a musical tape. Normally I played the song, "Soon and Very Soon." I would sing along with the tape, smiling and saying to Dale, "This Parkinson's is a temporary affliction, and our future is so bright. We know what's real. God's promises are true!"

He would smile and say, "I like it when you say that."

I needed to remember that for myself as much as he did.

We had arranged for Dale to be in a hospital bed in our bedroom. One night we were both asleep, and sometime in the middle of the night Dale started singing, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, sweetest name I know," and then he stopped.

I lay there quietly, expecting him to fall back asleep, but then he yelled out, "Help me out." He wanted me to sing that song with him. So as we both lay in our beds in the dark in the middle of the night together we sang, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, sweetest name I know. Fills my every longing, keeps me singing as I go!"

Then complete silence again.

Then he started singing the doxology: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," and then he was quiet for a while, and I began to fall back asleep. But it didn't last long. I noticed that Dale was mumbling or talking.

I couldn't make it out. His voice was very soft. I quietly got up and put my ear down close to his mouth to see if I could make out what he was saying. It sounded like he was in a conversation with someone or praying. I wasn't sure. Here are the words and phrases I was able to pick up, "Those are great, great words. Rejoice! Rejoice!"

I would leave his bedside and go into the kitchen and write down what I heard, then come back and see if I could understand more. I realized that he was having sweet communion with his Savior.

Next, I heard these words and quickly went to the kitchen again and wrote them down, "[It's a] great experience to trust You, to know my eternal circumstance is all taken care of."


He continued talking very quietly in his sleep and I went back to bed.

A Ministering Presence

What caused me to be even more in awe of my God was the fact that in Dale's darkest, most suffering days, God was there ministering to his inner man. Dale was having the sweetest communion with the One who loved him and died for him.

God was there just as He promised.

He's there for each one of His children.

He said He would never leave us or forsake us. I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears how God was present with him, and I will forever praise Him for giving me a glimpse of His presence in Dale's deepest, darkest moments. God was there! His mercies truly are new every morning (Lam 3:22-24). 



Diane Boring studied at Calvary Bible College and teaches a women's Bible study. She lives in Siloam Springs, AR.





THE CONTEMPORARY CONFUSION CONCERNING FAITH

By Brad Daskocil

Define Your Terms

A friend of mine is a pastor at a large church in Southern California. He was given the task of preaching a sermon on the meaning of faith. As he was gathering his thoughts about how to approach this sermon, he called me and asked to meet to discuss his task.

At our meeting he described his initial thoughts, approach to the sermon, and the Scriptures he was considering. He asked what I thought and my advice surprised him. I encouraged him to begin by defining the term. I said, "If you ask ten different people what faith is or means, you will receive thirteen different answers!" He did not believe me until he actually asked a number of people the question. His brief experiment confirmed the truth of my statement. Consequently, he began his sermon on faith by defining the term.

The Meaning of Faith

Why is there such confusion in Christendom about the meaning of faith? While there might be numerous answers, what seems apparent is that the term *faith* has been redefined. The common, normal, everyday meaning of faith has been supplanted by Biblical commentators, pastors, and even tradition.

Instead of *faith* being a synonym for *belief* (and the result of believing, the verbal cognate) it has been redefined to include obedience, commitment, surrender, repentance, and perseverance, among other things.

For example, Lordship Salvation proponents, like John MacArthur, have redefined faith to include a concoction of works, which has obscured the true meaning of the term; i.e. being persuaded that something is true.

MacArthur devotes an entire book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, to redefining faith to include things his bias demands. He is not alone in this redefinition.

Why is this important? When a term or a word is redefined, its meaning is changed and its real meaning obscured. As a consequence, you can change outcomes, descriptions, and interpretations that might not otherwise be changed.

We see this in modern culture.

The definition of marriage is currently being redefined. The purpose is to alter the original meaning so that society will accept alternatives to traditional heterosexual marriage and these alternatives will be considered socially accepted and normal.

The Effects of Redefining Faith

So what are the effects of redefining faith in relation to theology?

When a term like *faith* is redefined, theology is changed and it can have seismic effects on how one interprets Scripture. This is seen in the current Free Grace versus Lordship Salvation debate.


As *Grace in Focus* readers are well aware, the free gift of everlasting life is obtained by believing in Jesus Christ for it (e.g., John 3:15-16, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 11:25-27). We know that faith is believing or being persuaded of the truth of something. That is the meaning of the word. For the believer, faith results in everlasting life.

Yet the redefinition of faith has confused and confounded many. It has wreaked havoc on the church leading to many spiritual casualties. How so?

Bad Ideas Have Bad Consequences

Take the Lordship Salvation redefinition which emphasizes commitment, obedience, submission, repentance, and perseverance as an example. To receive everlasting life under this redefinition one would have to repent of all sins, commit his life to serving the Lord, actually obey the Lord for his entire life, and actually persevere in submission to

the Lordship of Christ for his entire life. Who can do any of these perfectly or completely? What happens when one sins? How much commitment, obedience, submission, repentance, and perseverance are necessary? As you can imagine, this redefinition has caused people to lose assurance of whether they have everlasting life, caused hopelessness about their spiritual state, and confusion about Scripture.

As another friend of mine often reminds me, “words mean things!” He is correct. They do! We must be diligent in correctly defining terms and Biblical words so God’s truth will be clear and manifest, instead of confused, obscured, and subject to manipulation. 



Brad Daskocil is Chairman of the Board for Grace Evangelical Society.

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"Thank you for the mugs and especially the Zane Hodges DVD. As one who has wasted much looking to his own works for evidence of salvation, your ministry continues to redeem me from the confusion of much unbiblical doctrine. It's a pleasure to help you to free others." ~R.R., Lead, SD




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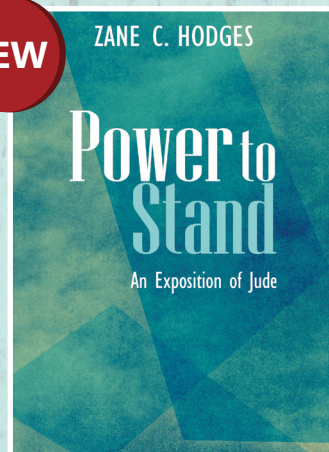
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