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- The Warning Passages in Hebrews (Part 2)
- He Offers a Yoke of Rest: A Gospel of Doubt (Chapter 10)
- What Is Man That God Cares for Him? (Psalm 8)
- AND MORE!

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By Bob Wilkin

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This may be the last 32 page issue of our magazine. We hope to move to 48 pages beginning with the July-August 2015 issue. We would appreciate your prayers as each time we expand it creates more pressure to get all the material ready on time.

This issue has much to commend it. But then again, I'm biased.


Can we trust New Testament Professors today? That article arose from my reading of a new book by Dr. Craig Blomberg entitled, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* He thinks we can. But he expresses what I believe is a low view of the Bible and of inerrancy, which is the doctrine that the Bible is free from all errors. I am very concerned about what the next generation of pastors will be teaching if they believe what Blomberg and other New Testament professors teach.

Pastor Philippe Sterling has an outstanding article on a key Messianic Psalm: "What Is Man That God Cares for Him (Psalm 8)?"

College Mathematics Professor Bill Fiess finds some great nuggets in the Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:31-46).

Shawn Lazar continues his series on the warning passages in Hebrews, discussing Heb 5:11-6:12, a very crucial and often much misunderstood passage.

We provide you with another excerpt from *A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus*. The tenth chapter concerns Matt 11:28-30 and Jesus' offer of rest for those who take His yoke upon them.

A new contributor, Bob Thomas, offers an insightful article about how those who hold to the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints are sometimes inconsistent when discussing loved ones who have died. 



Trust Issues

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

CAN WE STILL TRUST NEW TESTAMENT PROFESSORS?

BY BOB WILKIN



**“If what Craig Blomberg believes
passes for inerrancy, then inerrancy
no longer has meaning.”**

In his book *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* (CWSBB) New Testament Professor Craig Blomberg (Denver Seminary) says that the Bible is still trustworthy. He says we can still believe the Bible, but only if we learn to distinguish between inspired fiction and inspired history.

If that sounds a bit puzzling to you, good. It should. In *CWSBB* Blomberg criticizes Evangelical scholars whom he considers to be “overly conservative [and] judgmental” (p. 217). He specifically names Drs. Norm Geisler, Robert Thomas, David Farnell, and William Roach.

Why Are Some Evangelicals “Overly Conservative [and] Judgmental”?

What is their problem? Blomberg sees two major flaws in their thinking. First, as mentioned above, they fail to adequately distinguish between what the Bible presents as fictional stories and what it presents as actual history. Second, they apply an anachronistic view of what errors are to the writings of Scripture.

Let’s consider each of those points.

Inspired Fiction Versus Inspired History

First, let’s consider fiction versus history. We all know that the Bible has parables in it. While we might not think of parables as inspired fiction, that is essentially what they are. That is, they are non-historical stories that convey important lessons for us.

Some of the things which Blomberg considers to be fictional stories in Scripture might shock you as coming from someone teaching at a fairly conservative seminary.

According to Blomberg, Jonah was probably a real prophet but the book of Jonah is a parable. Jonah was never swallowed by a large fish. He never went to Nineveh. The whole account is just an inspired short story (pp. 157-60). He favorably cites Old Testament Professor James Bruckner (North Park Theological Seminary) who says that Jonah is “a unique parable about a real prophet” (p. 160).

What about Adam and Eve and the six days of creation? Blomberg believes that “Genesis 2-3 cannot be pure fiction” (p. 154). That is comforting. At least there is some kernel of truth there. Blomberg considers Genesis 1-3 to be fiction with a little bit of history underlying it. In his view there were two people named Adam and Eve. But they were not directly created by God. They were chosen out of a group of humans who lived at that time. The universe was not created in six days. But it was created in some fashion. Blomberg says, “The genre of much of Genesis 1-11 remains a puzzle; historical narrative as the ancients would have recognized it begins in earnest only with the call of Abram in Genesis 12” (p. 154).

Does that mean that there was no universal flood? Blomberg doesn’t directly address that issue, but presumably, in light of his indication that “historical narrative...begins in earnest only with the call of Abram in Genesis 12,” the flood as recorded in Genesis 6-9 is more inspired fiction (though presumably there was really someone named Noah who had three sons).

What about Job? It too is inspired fiction, though there might have been an actual person by that name (pp. 155-57).

Blomberg says the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-21 is a parable, though it is not called a parable by the Lord. The events described never happened. The fact that no other parable lists the specific names

of people (this one mentions both Lazarus and Abraham by name), and that it is not called a parable, should not confuse us. This is inspired fiction (p. 150).

Remember the amazing account in Matthew 27 of departed saints in Jerusalem who rose from their graves when Jesus rose from the dead? Matthew says, “the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matt 27:52b-53). Blomberg says that Matthew

judgment awaited Israel” (Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 553).

Licona went on to wonder “if some or all of the phenomena at Jesus’ death are poetic devices, we may rightly ask whether Jesus’ resurrection is not more of the same” (p. 553). He goes on to suggest that the answer is no. Jesus really rose from the dead. However, if one adopts the views of Blomberg and other New Testament scholars like him, it would seem that just about anything reported in the Bible might be considered inspired fiction.

fiction created by the Gospel writers to express their faith in Jesus.

Blomberg would have us believe that the New Testament authors had a very low view of reporting history. Hence, Matthew can include a resurrection that might never have actually occurred (Matt 27:52b-53; see p. 174-78). John can report that Jesus cleansed the temple at the start of his ministry (John 2:13-20), when in fact, according to most New Testament scholars today, He only cleansed the temple once, at the end of His ministry.¹

Blomberg and his non-anachro-

“Blomberg would have us believe that the New Testament authors had a very low view of reporting history.”

included this account because of “the desire to maintain that Jesus’s [sic] bodily resurrection from the dead guarantees the coming bodily resurrection of *all* God’s people from throughout human history” (p. 174, emphasis his). He then continues, “But does that mean that Matthew 27:52b-53 must reflect simple history? Or could the text, too, narrate symbolically what Paul phrases more prosaically [in 1 Cor 15:20]?” (pp. 174-75). In his view it is not “simple history.” His point seems to be that this never happened, but that Matthew included it to show that all will rise one day. He even defends a scholar named Michael Licona (Houston Baptist University) who wrote concerning Matt 27:52b-53: “It seems best to regard this difficult text in Matthew as a poetic device added to communicate that the Son of God had died and that impending

How Do We Decide What Would Be an Error in the Bible?

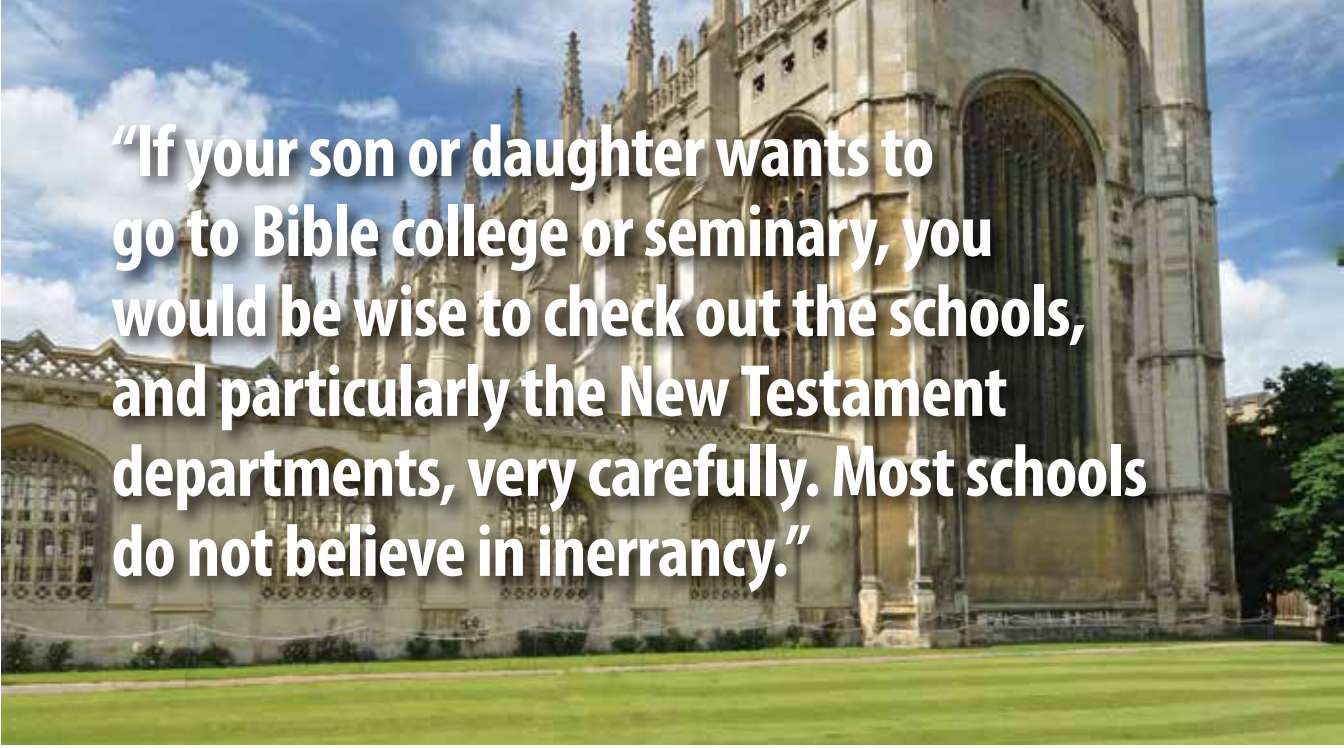
Second, let’s now consider Blomberg’s other contention. He believes that overly conservative Christians are too narrow in what they consider errors in the Bible.

Blomberg writes:

Sadly, some extremely conservative Christians continue to insist on following their modern understandings of what should or should not constitute errors in the Bible and censure fellow inerrantists whose views are less anachronistic (p. 10).

What he is saying is that there are errors in the Bible *based on our modern understanding of the reporting of history*. However, Blomberg says that the people of the first century didn’t view historical reporting as we do. They felt it was not an error to present miracle stories as history, when in fact they were

nistic, and not-overly-conservative New Testament colleagues like Bock and Harris (Dallas Theological Seminary) believe that at Jesus’ baptism the Father did not say, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” as Matthew reports (Matt 3:17). Instead, He supposedly only said, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 11:11; Luke 3:21-22).² If anyone suggests He said both, one to Jesus and one to John the Baptist and the crowd, then he is called “ultraconservative” (pp. 176, 214) and “far right” (p. 120). Surely Matthew’s readers knew not to think that the Gospel writers reported what was actually said or done. According to Blomberg, the Gospel writers made things up but that’s OK because they viewed the reporting of history much differently than we do today.



“If your son or daughter wants to go to Bible college or seminary, you would be wise to check out the schools, and particularly the New Testament departments, very carefully. Most schools do not believe in inerrancy.”

Did Jesus really walk on water, feed the 5,000, heal the sick, and raise the dead? I thought He did. But after reading Blomberg, maybe I should wonder if some or all of those events might be inspired fiction designed to teach me important truths, but not to tell me what was actually said and done.

Inerrancy Is Now a Very Fuzzy Concept

Where do we draw the line? Ah, that is the beauty of the Christian faith and academic freedom. You can draw the line anywhere you want and still teach at leading Evangelical seminaries and Bible colleges. As long as you can affirm there are no errors in the Bible, it doesn't matter what you mean by that.

Can we still trust New Testament Professors? No, we cannot trust most New Testament Professors. At most leading Evangelical seminaries those who teach the New Testament hold Blomberg's views.

He mentions some of his friends who are New Testament scholars and who, like him, have been criticized for supposedly abandoning inerrancy. Blomberg speaks of “such evangelical stalwarts as Darrell Bock [Dallas Theological Seminary], D. A. Carson [Trinity Evangelical Divinity School], and Craig Keener [Asbury Theological Seminary]” (CWSBB, p. 120).

So, if you believe that Adam and Eve, Noah's flood, Jonah, Job, and the creation account are all meant to be history, get your head out of the sand.

I was at Dallas Theological Seminary from 1978 through 1985. I received both my Th.M. and Ph.D. degrees there in New Testament studies. Back then we were taught that inerrancy meant that the Bible had no errors in it based on our current view of what constitutes errors. Today the term *inerrancy*, for most of the New Testament faculty, is essentially meaningless at most leading conservative schools,

including Dallas Theological Seminary.³ Almost anything in the Bible could be made up. That includes the creation account, the universal flood, and even the very words of Jesus.

I am grieved that the views expressed by Blomberg are now widely accepted and are even considered conservative. If what he believes passes for inerrancy, then inerrancy no longer has meaning.

We Can No Longer Trust New Testament Professors

If your son or daughter wants to go to Bible college or seminary, you would be wise to check out the schools, and particularly the New Testament departments, very carefully. Most schools do not believe in inerrancy.

If you think that there are no errors in the Bible based on the highest standard of what an error is, then you can't trust New Testament Professors today.

The Southern Baptist Convention turned the tide when those denying inerrancy were seeking to take it over. They even rid their flagship seminary, Southern Seminary in Louisville, of all the Professors who did not believe in inerrancy.

Some of the faculty at Biola and Talbot Theological Seminary left to teach at The Master's College and The Master's Seminary. While I do not agree with the Lordship Salvation stance of the President of those schools, I am pleased by their high regard for the inerrancy of Scripture. Drs. Robert Thomas and F. David Farnell, both New Testament Professors there for many years, are among those highly criticized by Blomberg as being "overly conservative [and] judgmental."

If it could happen for the SBC and some seminaries, it can happen elsewhere. But until it does, I will not be sending students or any financial donations to any school which fails to teach a high view of inerrancy. If enough of us withdraw our support, the schools will make changes. As Blomberg says, if the schools determine that their faculty no longer agree with their doctrinal statement, then many professors

will freely move on to other less-conservative schools and some will be fired (p. 120).

Why This Has Direct Relevance to the Promise of Life

If Jonah never really was in a fish for three days, then why did Jesus say, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt 12:40)?


The Lord Jesus also considered the following to be actual history: the creation account (Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6; 13:19) the universal flood (Matt 24:38-39; Luke 17:27), the burning bush (Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37), and the manna in the wilderness (John 6:49, 58).

If I cannot believe that what the Lord said about Jonah, the creation account, and the flood is true, then it is hard to see how I can be sure that what He said about everlasting life is true. The promise of John 3:16 hinges on the trustworthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Word of God.

The Lord (Matt 5:18), Paul (2 Tim 3:16), and Peter (2 Pet 1:19-21) all

taught that the Bible is without error, that it is God-breathed.


While belief in inerrancy is not a condition of everlasting life, that belief surely moves a person in the direction of believing the promise of life. The one who does not believe in inerrancy must somehow become convinced that John 3:16 is true even if other parts of Scripture are not.

Call me overly conservative and judgmental if you wish, but I am convinced that any seeming discrepancies in the Bible are not actual discrepancies, whether I can explain everything or not. God does not err. Therefore, neither does His Word. 

Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

1. Blomberg does not discuss this incident specifically.
2. See, note 3. Bock and Harris specifically say that the Father did not say, "This is My beloved Son." Blomberg does not mention this incident.
3. For more on DTS and inerrancy see the DTS Cultural Engagement Chapel on "Discrepancies in the Gospels" by Drs. Darrell Bock and Hall Harris: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C651fVKKehg>. Also see, "Toward a Narrow View of Ipssisima Vox" available at <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2001i/wilkin.html>.

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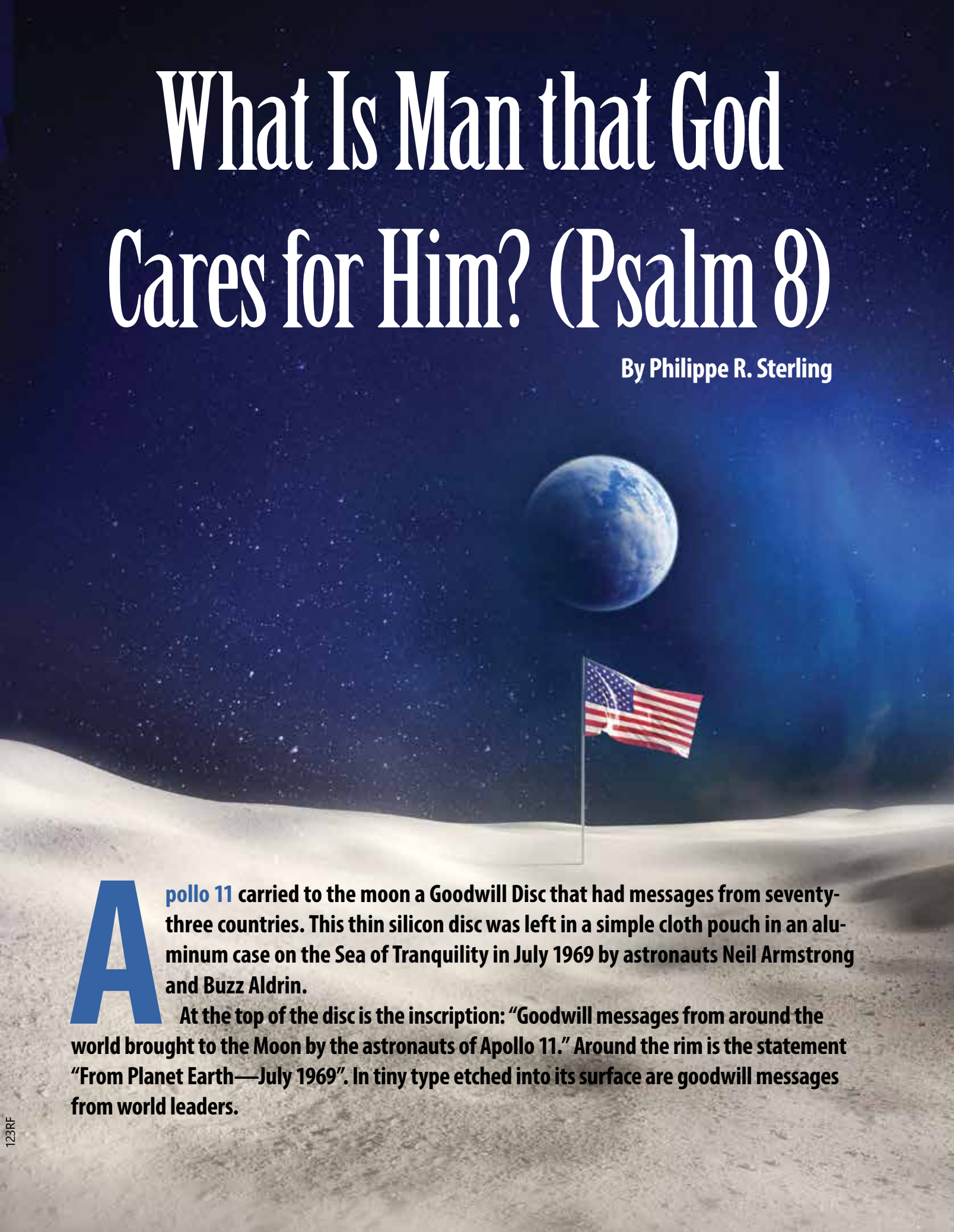


"The foundation of our assurance lies not in what God is doing within us by the gift of regeneration, but rather in the promise of what God freely gives to us in Jesus Christ. Doubt and uncertainty cannot help but arise when we bring our works into consideration to found our assurance."

~Randall C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 1993). p. 210.

What Is Man that God Cares for Him? (Psalm 8)

By Philippe R. Sterling



Apollo 11 carried to the moon a Goodwill Disc that had messages from seventy-three countries. This thin silicon disc was left in a simple cloth pouch in an aluminum case on the Sea of Tranquility in July 1969 by astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin.

At the top of the disc is the inscription: "Goodwill messages from around the world brought to the Moon by the astronauts of Apollo 11." Around the rim is the statement "From Planet Earth—July 1969". In tiny type etched into its surface are goodwill messages from world leaders.

The Vatican submitted a message that incorporated a text from the Bible. If you could have made the decision of a part of the Bible to send up to the moon, which would you have chosen? The Vatican submitted the text of Psalm 8, making it the first Biblical text to reach the moon.

This Psalm of David begins and ends with the same phrase, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth” (ESV). It frames the content of the Psalm in the praise of the majesty of God. The Psalm asks a penetrating question, “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (ESV). The question occurs essentially in the middle of the Psalm. When we observe what leads up to the asking of the question and what follows from it, we notice that the Psalm has a particular (i.e., chiasmic)¹ structure:

- A God’s Majestic Name (v 1a)
- B God’s Dominion (vv 1b-2)
- C Central Question:
What Is Man? (vv 3-4)
- B’ Man’s Dominion (vv 5-8)
- A’ God’s Majestic Name (v 9)

God’s Majestic Name (8:1a)

The first part of verse 1 is the introductory refrain, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” It is a note of praise to the Lord of Creation. God’s majestic name is His revealed character which is exalted above all Creation. God displays His majestic name in the greatness of creation and in His grace towards man.

God’s Dominion (8:1b-2)

“You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger” (ESV).

David marveled that God uses strength from infants to silence his enemies. The idea is that God uses the weakest to confound the strong (see 1 Cor 1:27). God used

“The rhetorical question of Psalm 8:4 emphasizes that man is an insignificant creature in the universe. Yet God cares for him immensely. It amazed David that the Lord of the universe even thinks about man.”

the young David to defeat Goliath (1 Sam 17). The birth of the baby Jesus brings salvation to the world (Luke 2:1-38).

Central Question: What Is Man? (8:3-4)

King David first observed the great work of Creation, and then was amazed that weak finite man should have responsibility over it:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set

in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (ESV).

The sun’s blinding light usually blots out anything else we might see in the heavens during the day, but at night, we are amazed by the display of beauty from the moon, stars, planets, and galaxies. God spoke the worlds into existence, but David pictured Creation as coming from God’s fingers, the work of a Master Sculptor. What we know today about the size of the universe makes the earth and its inhabitants look even more insignificant than they appeared in David’s day.

An explorer by the name of William Beebe was a good friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. Sometimes when he visited the President at Sagamore Hill, the two men would go outdoors at night to see who could first locate the Andromeda galaxy. Then, as they gazed at the tiny smudge of distant starlight, one of them would recite,

“That is the spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It’s as large as our Milky Way. It is one of 100 million galaxies. It is 750,000 light years away. It consists of 100 billion suns, each larger than our sun.”

Then Roosevelt would grin and say, “Now I think we are small enough! Let’s go to bed.”

What is a human being that God is mindful of him? How do we define humanity? This question has exercised the minds of men to our times.

Mark Twain published a book with the title *What Is Man?* in 1906. It is a dialogue between a Young Man and an Old Man regarding the nature of man. The Old Man asserts that the human being is merely a machine, and nothing more. The

Young Man objects, and asks him to furnish his reasons for his position. Twain appears to uphold the view of the Old Man.

Isaac Asimov wrote a short story entitled "...That Thou Art Mindful of Him." Two robots debate the subject of what is man and conclude that they as robots are a superior form of being that should usurp the authority of their makers.

Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a sermon soon after his ordination entitled "What Is Man?" based on Psalm 8. He stated, "Although there is widespread agreement in asking the question, there is fantastic disagreement in answering it." "There are some people," he continues, "that believe man is little more than an animal and there are those who would lift man almost to the position of a God. There are then those who would combine the truths of both and see within man a strange dualism, something of a dichotomy."

The Old Testament Scriptures pose the question "What is man?" twice. Most of us know of David's reflections in Psalm 8. We rarely remember Job 7:17-18, "What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment?" (ESV). Both David and Job pondered why God, having such greater power and majesty, should take interest in the human race.

The rhetorical question of Ps 8:4 emphasizes that man is an insignificant creature in the universe. Yet God cares for him immensely. It amazed David that the Lord of the universe even thinks about man.

Man's Dominion (8:5-8)

God created man as His representative on earth. Picking up on the theme he began to raise in Ps 8:1b-2, David expresses amazement that God would exalt weak, finite man to such a place of honor and dominion:

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas (Ps 8:5-8 ESV).

Instead of humans being "a little higher than animals," as evolutionists believe, we are actually "a little lower than God." We are co-regents of Creation with God!

David reflected on man's position as God's representative in His Creation. After God made Adam and Eve, He commanded them to have dominion over all the earth (Gen 1:28). All living creatures were to be under them. But because of sin that dominion has never been fully realized.

Hebrews 2:6-8 quotes Psalm 8 to contrast man's failure with his exalted destiny. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45); all things will be subjected to Him when He comes to fulfill the Father's intended plans for the Creation. Jesus has regained the dominion for us and will one day share it with us when He reigns in His kingdom.

God's Majestic Name (8:9)

Verse 9 is the concluding refrain, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" The psalm closes with the same expression of praise for God's majestic name with which it began (Ps 8:1a). God has displayed His majestic name in His care and design for man.

Psalm 8 has clear Messianic implications. Several passages in the New Testament reference these implications.

Matthew 21:16. Jesus uses the Septuagint version of Ps 8:2 to defend the children praising him as the Son of David.

1 Corinthians 15:27-28. Paul quotes Ps 8:6. Jesus' dominion goes beyond the "sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field." He also has dominion over all the earth and eventually all will bow to Him.

Hebrews 2:6-8. The writer of Hebrews takes the entire psalm to a Messianic level. The ultimate

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fulfillment of this psalm is about Jesus, crowned by God to overcome the enemy on our behalf. Though he is divine, the Son of Man took on flesh, was made a little lower than the angels, and was granted dominion over all of God's works.

Jesus is the Christ who promises eternal life to all who simply believe in Him for it. The Apostle John gave this purpose statement for his book in John 20:30-31,

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (ESV).

Jesus is the Christ who is now preparing faithful believers to reign with Him in the world to come (Heb 2:5-13). Psalm 8:4 poses the important question: "What is man

that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" Is man only a highly developed animal as Darwin taught? Is he merely a biological machine, and nothing more?

Psalm 8 declares that God created man as His vice-regent to have dominion over all creation! Jesus the Christ has regained that dominion and will share it with all believers who are faithful to Him (see Rom 5:12-21; 2 Tim 2:8-13). Are you preparing to reign?² If we are faithful to Christ in this life, we will reign with Him in the world to come (Luke 19:16-26; 2 Tim 2:12). As Jesus promised, the "overcomer" will rule over the nations with Him (Rev 2:26). 

Philippe R. Sterling is the pastor of Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship in Lewisville, TX. He has a Th.M. from Dallas Seminary.

1. Editor's note: A chiastic structure is one where the ideas stated in the first half of a section are repeated in reverse order in the second half. The center of a chiasm may be repeated, but not in this case. The structure of Psalm 8 is AB-C-B'A'. Other chiasms might be AB-CC'-B'A'. In some cases there is no center point per se, as in ABB'A'. It is difficult to know whether the human author intentionally wrote with a chiastic structure in mind. However, in the case of Hebrew poetry it is much more likely (than in prose) and it is extremely likely in the case of Psalm 8.

2. Dr. Earl Radmacher liked to say, "Today is training time for reigning time."



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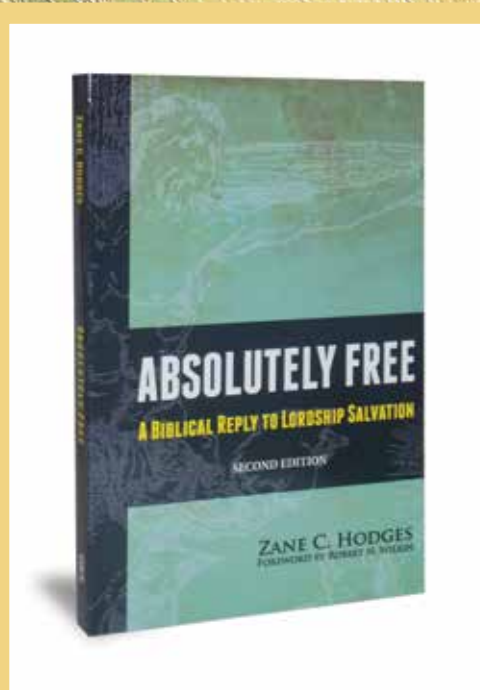
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Zane C. Hodges

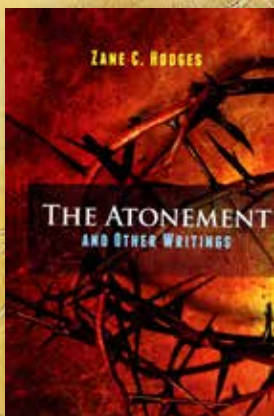
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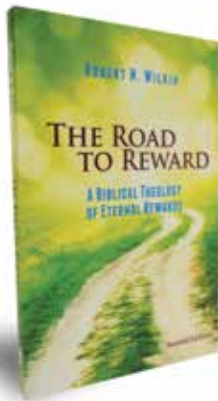
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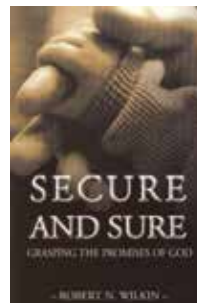
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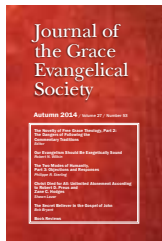
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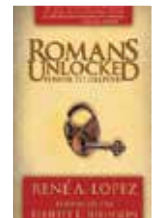


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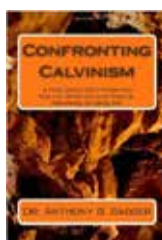


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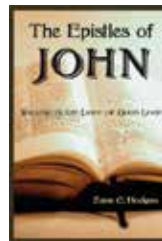


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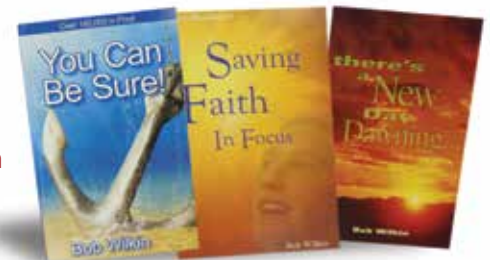
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Unbelievers Will Expect to Justify Themselves by Works (Matthew 25:41-46)

By Bill Fiess

In the September-October 2013 issue of *Grace in Focus*, Bob Wilkin argued that in Matt 7:21-23 unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment will call Jesus “Lord” and will point to their works in an effort to justify themselves before Him. They will point to works they did in Jesus’ name (e.g., prophesying, casting out demons, doing many wonders) as the reason why they deserve to enter the kingdom.

It occurred to me that unbelievers also called Jesus “Lord” and also pointed to their works at the Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats mentioned in Matt 25:31-46. Verses 41-46 are especially relevant:

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

“Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt 25:41-46).

Of course in Matt 25:41-46 they are attempting to dispute Jesus’ claim that they failed to do works for Him. Unlike Matt 7:21-23, they are not asserting directly what they did do. But they are essentially doing the same thing, for they are denying that they failed to do good deeds when the opportunity arose. And they clearly are hoping that their good works are sufficient to grant them entrance to Jesus’ kingdom.



123RF

Calling Jesus “Lord” is not enough to get into His kingdom. Neither is doing good works. The only way to gain access to Jesus’ kingdom is by believing in Him.

Why then did Jesus point to the good works of the sheep and the lack of good works of the goats at this judgment? The answer is found in the start of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matt 24:13 the Lord said, “he who endures to the end shall be saved.” In verse 22, the only other use of the word *save* in the Sermon, the issue is surviving the seven years of the Tribulation: “And unless those days [i.e., the Tribulation] were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake [i.e., Israel’s sake] those days will be shortened.” Only those who endure in their walks with Christ will survive the Tribulation. Unfaithful believers will die before the end. Some unbelievers, however, will survive.

Thus when the Lord speaks with Gentile survivors, He is on solid ground to say that those who failed to love the Jewish people in the Tribulation show they never believed in Him for everlasting life.

This is not the judgment that determines their eternal destiny. Revelation 20:11-15 shows that all the unregenerate of all time will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. Hence this judgment is merely their arraignment. The evidence is sufficient to hold them until their trial, which will occur after the Millennium. ■

Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia.



THE WARNING PASSAGES IN HEBREWS (PART 2)



By Shawn Lazar

When a 22-year old decides to change jobs it normally doesn't make the news. But when you're in the Army, and you're in the middle of Afghanistan, you don't get to quit without consequences.

In June 2009, then PFC Bowe Bergdahl was captured by the Taliban under questionable circumstances. He was later released in 2014 as part of a prisoner exchange for five Taliban members. However, the trade proved to be politically unpopular and there was an uproar. Rumors spread that now Sergeant Bergdahl was a traitor who abandoned his unit. On March 25, 2015, the U.S. Army charged him with desertion. If he's found guilty, Bergdahl could face several serious consequences including a dishonorable discharge, reduction in rank, forfeiture of the pay he was owed while captured (over \$300,000), and five years in prison.

Some decisions can't be taken back, no matter how much you may want to.

In Heb 5:11–6:12, the Hebrews were about to make an irrevocable decision.

In a previous article I explored the first two warning passages in Hebrews.¹ I won't repeat the conclusions I came to except to briefly say the letter was written to Jewish believers who were drifting back into Judaism and the author of Hebrews wrote to remind them of Christ's superiority over the Mosaic system. He warned them that apostatizing would mean losing the blessings of being the Lord's companions (co-rulers) in the Messianic kingdom and of enjoying the Millennial rest (which refers to sharing in Messiah's reign in His kingdom). The first two warning passages cannot be understood apart from the Messianic kingdom. That is also true of Heb 5:11–6:12.

The Order of Melchizedek

If you wrote out a list of Biblical truths that were necessary to grow spiritually, what would it include? Justification by faith? Substitutionary atonement?

Eternal rewards? The divinity of Christ? Regeneration? Repentance? Loving your neighbor?

Would you mention anything about Melchizedek?

Probably not.

But the author of Hebrews did. The third warning is preceded by the doctrine that Jesus was both the Messianic King (cf. Ps 2:7) and a high priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:10; cf. Ps 110:4).

In other words, Jesus had a right to both the throne and the altar.

We know a great deal about the Messianic kingship. Unfortunately, we do not know very much about the Melchizedekian priesthood.

Abraham met a priest-king named Melchizedek whose priesthood was prior to and completely distinct from the one given to Aaron (Gen 14:18-20; cf. Ps 110:4). Since Jesus was of Judah (not of Levi or Aaron), He didn't qualify as a Levitical priest. So how could the author of Hebrews say that Jesus was a high priest? The answer is that He was called to the royal Melchizedekian priesthood.²

What is that? Who was Melchizedek? Where did he come from? How did he become king? Where did he get his priesthood? What kind of priesthood was it?

The author of Hebrews wanted to tell them all about it. **We have a great deal to say about this**, he wrote. However, it was **difficult to explain** (5:11a HCSB). There was something about the Melchizedekian priesthood the Hebrews needed to learn about in order to mature spiritually (see Hebrews 7). However, the Hebrews weren't ready because they had **become dull of hearing** (5:11b). Another translation says, "you have become *too lazy to understand*" (emphasis added, HCSB).

They were dull. Lazy. They wouldn't listen. Their love for the Word had grown cold. They were no longer interested in learning.

They weren't always that way.

The author said they had **become** dull. Why? Maybe they stopped listening because of the social pressures

from their unbelieving Jewish family. Or maybe it was due to the persecution they were facing. Whatever the reason, the Hebrew believers were in arrested development. They needed to move from babyhood to become teachers. So the author challenged them to **press on to maturity...And this we will do if God permits** (6:1, 3). It was a challenge and a warning. They could only grow with God's help. But the way they were headed—back into Judaism—suggested that, instead of permitting them to mature, God might have to take a very different course of action.

The Danger of Not Maturing

If the Hebrews did not press on to maturity, if, instead, they continued slipping back into Judaism, they needed to be aware of the irrevocable consequences that would follow.

As believers, they had enjoyed God's blessings. The Hebrews were **enlightened**, meaning they understood and believed the message of life (e.g., John 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; Eph 2:8-9). They had **tasted the heavenly gift**, an experience just as real as when Jesus "tasted" death for all humanity (2:9). They had become **partakers of the Holy Spirit**, having a vital relationship with Him. They had **tasted the good word of God**, with its living power to convict and transform (4:12). And they had also **tasted the powers of the age to come**, a common term for the Messianic kingdom.

However, being regenerate did not make them immune from falling away. Just think of Moses and Aaron and the first generation of Israelites. Many of them were believers. But they still rebelled

against God and paid the penalty for it.

Similarly, the author warned the Hebrews that if they **fall away**, it would be **impossible...to renew them again to repentance** (Heb 6:6a).

Why would it be impossible to *renew them again to repentance*? What does that mean?

Reading Heb 12:17 shows us the answer. There we read about what happened to Esau after he sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew:

You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. *It was too late for repentance*, even though he begged with bitter tears (Heb 12:17 NLT, emphasis added).

Esau made a bad deal, but the deed was done. It was too late for him to repent. His decision was irrevocable. His blessing was gone forever and he had to live with the consequences.

That is how we should understand Heb 6:4-6.

If the Hebrews fell away, they couldn't be renewed to repentance. It would be too late to avoid the consequences of their decision. There would be no turning back, no chance for renewal, no way to recover the blessings they forfeited, and no way to avoid the judgment (temporal and Judgment Seat of Christ) to come.³ As the author later warned, if the Hebrews did not persevere in the faith, they would lose the reward that should have been theirs, and that God promised to give:

So do not throw away your confidence; *it will be richly rewarded*. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, *you will receive what he has promised* (10:35-36 NLT, emphasis added).

When Judgment Is Inevitable

If the Hebrews fell away, they would be liable to judgment. Period. The author used an agricultural analogy to illustrate the consequences of apostasy:

For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned (Heb 6:7-8).

The **earth** is the believer. That much is clear. However, people see the words **cursed** and **burned** and immediately think of hell (or the lake of fire), as if the Hebrews might lose their salvation and be eternally lost.

That can't be.

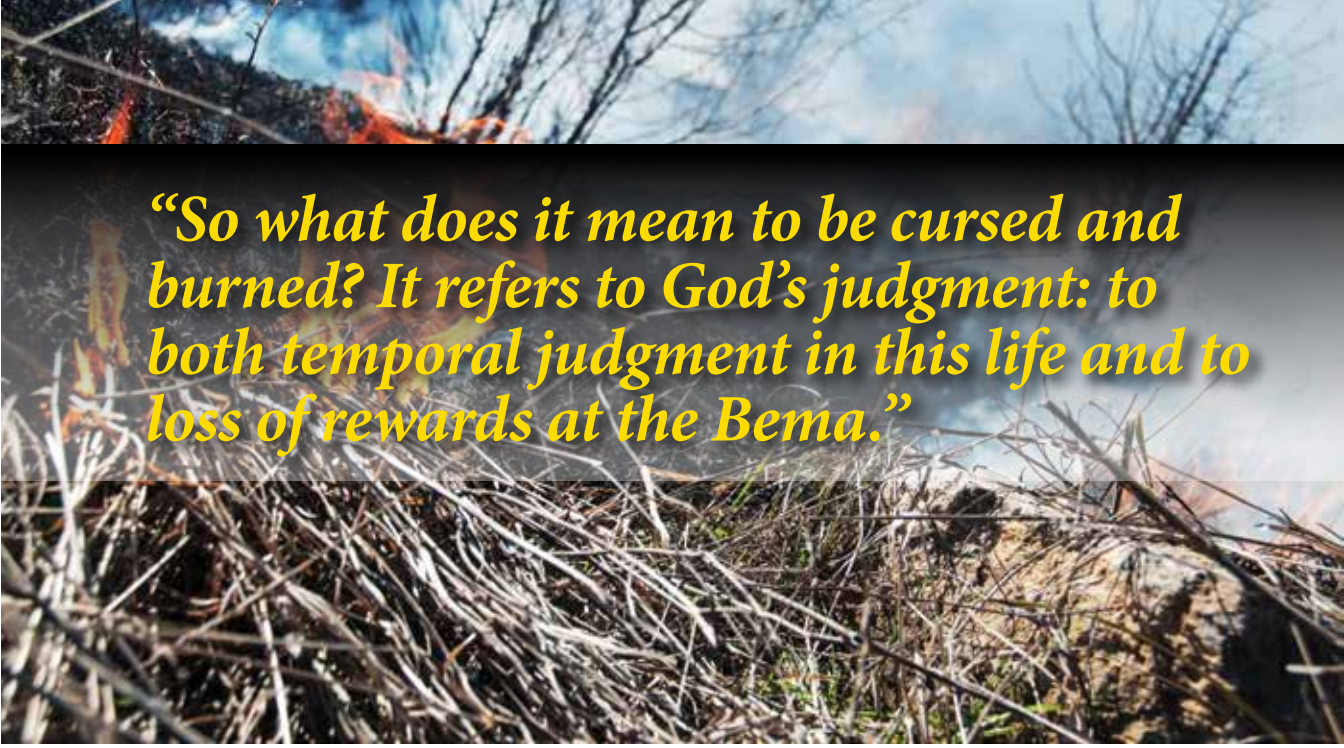
Everlasting life is something that God gives apart from works. He will not later take it away because we haven't worked enough.

Jesus said that believers will *never perish* (John 3:16) and that *no one* can snatch them out of His or the Father's hands (John 10:28-29). Never. No one. Believers are eternally secure.

So what does it mean to be *cursed* and *burned*? It refers to God's judgment in this life and at the Bema.

The agricultural analogy should remind us of the warning Paul (who many think authored Hebrews) gave to the Corinthians about gaining and losing eternal rewards:

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be *revealed with fire*, and *the fire will test the quality of each person's*



“So what does it mean to be cursed and burned? It refers to God’s judgment: to both temporal judgment in this life and to loss of rewards at the Bema.”

work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is *burned up*, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Cor 3:12-15, emphasis added).

The author of Hebrews suggested that believers can be good land that produces fruit and **receives blessing from God** (i.e., gains eternal rewards) or bad land that produces thorns and gets **rejected and burned** (i.e., loses eternal rewards). Likewise, Paul warned the Corinthians that believers could also produce two types of works: good works that would be rewarded and bad works that would be rejected and burned up.⁴

The language of having our works burned is not necessarily a reference to eternal punishment in the lake of fire, but to losing rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.⁵

God’s Temporal Judgment

However, the image of burning the land may also refer to a future temporal judgment the Hebrews would experience if they apostatized.

The Old Testament often portrayed God’s temporal judgment on Israel as a burning fire.

For example, in Lamentations, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians is described this way:

He has cut off in fierce anger
Every horn of Israel;

He has drawn back His right
hand

From before the enemy.

*He has blazed against Jacob
like a flaming fire*

Devouring all around.

Standing like an enemy, He
has bent His bow;

With His right hand, like an
adversary,

He has slain all who were
pleasing to His eye;

On the tent of the daughter of
Zion,

*He has poured out His fury
like fire* (Lam 2:3-4, emphasis
added).

Despite the fiery imagery, we know that Israel wasn’t condemned to hell. God’s “flaming fire” referred to the temporal destruction of Jerusalem and to Israel’s exile in Babylon.

Similarly, Jesus warned Jerusalem about their impending destruction through a parable:

“But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and *burned up their city*” (Matt 22:7, emphasis added).

Burning the city did not refer to eternal condemnation in the lake of fire. It was a warning about God’s temporal judgment against Jerusalem, which came to pass when the Romans destroyed the city in AD 70.

So when the author of Hebrews warned that God’s “fiery indignation...will devour the adversaries’



(Heb 10:27), that “God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29), and that if they returned to Judaism, their **end** was **to be burned**, he was warning the Hebrews that God would severely punish them for their apostasy, just as He did to Israel, up to, and including, physical death.

The author may even have been warning them specifically about God’s judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the possibility these Hebrews would share in it. If they rejected Christ and returned to Judaism it would be as if **they were crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace** (6:6b). If they rejected Christ and chose to side with unbelieving Israel, they would share Israel’s punishment for rejecting and crucifying the Messiah. As Zane Hodges commented, “Their apostasy would be like stepping back over the line again and once more expressing solidarity with their compatriots who wanted Jesus put on the cross.”⁶ As such, the Hebrews became liable to temporal judgment with the rest of the nation.

Conclusion

Hebrews 5:11–6:12 is not a warning to believers that they may end up in hell. Nor is it a warning to false professors that they may not be saved if they don’t truly believe. This is a warning to Jewish believers in Christ. If they apostatized, and

returned to Judaism, they would be subject to God’s judgment, both in this life and at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Once made, their decision would be irrevocable. They would

**“By returning to
Judaism, the Hebrew
believers were
choosing to side with,
and to be punished
with, unbelieving
Israel.”**

lose their blessings. There would be no chance for renewal. There would be no going back.

Time will tell if Sergeant Bergdahl is found guilty of desertion. Assuming he is, do you think he would make the same choice if he foresaw all the trouble it would get him into?

Do you think a believer would be more eager to grow into maturity if they knew the consequences of falling away from the faith?

If you or someone you know is close to walking away from Christ, will you warn them? They may not realize how much is at stake. **GET**

*Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications
for Grace Evangelical Society.*

1. Shawn Lazar, “The First Two Warning Passages in Hebrews,” *GIF* (March/April 2015).

2. Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972), 96.

3. R. Mark Musser, *Wrath or Rest: Saints in the Hands of an Angry God* (Advantage Books, 2010), 164.

4. Editor’s note: It is possible that the issue in 1 Cor 3:10-15 is not precisely good works versus bad works. Instead the issue might be works with eternal value versus works lacking eternal value. The works represented by wood, hay, and straw may be things that are neither sinful nor eternally valuable. This could include like time spent in leisure activities like golfing, hunting, fishing, attending sporting events, etc. While there may be some work of eternal value accomplished during leisure time, there is surely much which lacks eternal value. However, Shawn’s point stands either way.

5. Jody Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2013), 656.

6. Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1983), 795.



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Ralph and Sam Go to Seminary: Lordship Salvation Is Often Inconsistent When Loved Ones Die

By Bob Thomas



Ralph is a wolf. Sam is a sheepdog. Each episode of the old Looney Tunes cartoon featured Ralph trying to find ways to get past Sam so as to eat the sheep under Sam's protection. Every encounter is laced with violence as Ralph and Sam try to maim or kill each other in their natural roles as mortal enemies.

But the somewhat unique feature of their rivalry is that each episode starts with Ralph and Sam arriving at starting time, punching in on a time clock, exchanging pleasantries, then heading off to work to try to kill each other. Then again at the end of each day the shift whistle blows, they each stop what they're doing, report to the time clock, punch out, and say their pleasant goodbyes for the evening, "Goodnight Ralph, see you tomorrow... Goodnight Sam, say hi to the wife for me..."

In other words, their roles as mortal enemies were only on display during working hours and weren't their real nature.

Day Job Theology

I had an experience at Dallas Theological Seminary in the early 90s that brings this cartoon to mind and made me wonder if everyone who promoted the Reformed/Lordship theological positions really

believed in their positions or if it was more like their "day job" to promote a particular position.

When I started attending DTS in the late 1980s the Lordship Salvation debate was nearing its peak. John MacArthur had just released *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1988). It was largely in response to Zane Hodges's *The Gospel under Siege*.

For the most part the DTS seminary community seemed to side with the MacArthur/Lordship position, usually arguing that it aligned better with Reformed theology's concept of perseverance of the saints, which among other things said that since faith itself was a gift, one could never lose that faith, and if one ever did lose their faith (i.e., if one committed apostasy), it proved conclusively that the faith was never real in the first place.

That was the popular position at DTS at the time.

I really liked and appreciated one of my professors at DTS. However, he and I held different views of the doctrine of salvation. He fully embraced Lordship Salvation and the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. He promoted that view in class as often as context allowed.

But then one day he mentioned that his father had died as an unbeliever, but that it gave him some comfort to consider that perhaps at some point during his father's earlier life he may have heard and believed the gospel.

That shocked me. This sounded like after-hours theology, not the kind of thing a Calvinist professor says in class! It certainly didn't coincide with the official day job theology we heard in class every time the topic came up.

I would never press him on the contradiction publicly over such a sensitive issue, so I made an appointment to discuss this privately where I brought the contradiction to his attention.

In our private meeting I restated what I heard him say about his father in order to confirm that I understood him correctly. Then I summarized his view of apostasy and perseverance. He agreed that my understandings were correct on both points.

Logically one would suspect that after confirming both those points he would see the contradiction between them without me needing to press further. But if he did see it, he never let on.

So I reasoned with him that if apostasy (loss of faith) proves one never had faith, and if his dad died a non-believer, then the only consistent conclusion would have to be that his dad never had faith and died unregenerate.

I don't remember his exact reply, but I distinctly remember leaving the meeting feeling like he didn't have an answer and didn't want to delve more deeply into it. I caught him in a clear contradiction.

But, then the whistle blew, and we punched our time clocks, wished each other well, and went our separate ways.

We Should Be Consistent

I suppose to some it could have been seen as somewhat cold on my part to try to use this contradiction to

disprove his theological position, but I don't see it that way.

Either it is true that any degree of apostasy is possible in a believer without jeopardizing his eternal salvation (or necessarily disproving the reality of his faith), or it is false, and if one dies an unbeliever he is condemned to eternal separation from God (as the Reformed/Lordship position maintains).

One cannot have it both ways... believe the Lordship/Reformed position in class where he'll maintain his "in crowd" status, but when it's convenient and when it provides emotional comfort believe the Free Grace position.

Life isn't a cartoon, and what we profess to believe should be consistent.

At the time of this class my own father was very ill and had not given any indication that he believed in Christ for everlasting life. My situation was much the same as my seminary professor's. My dad never did recover and died a little more than a year later.

Like my seminary professor friend, I did derive comfort from realizing that my dad may have heard and believed the gospel at some previous point in his life.

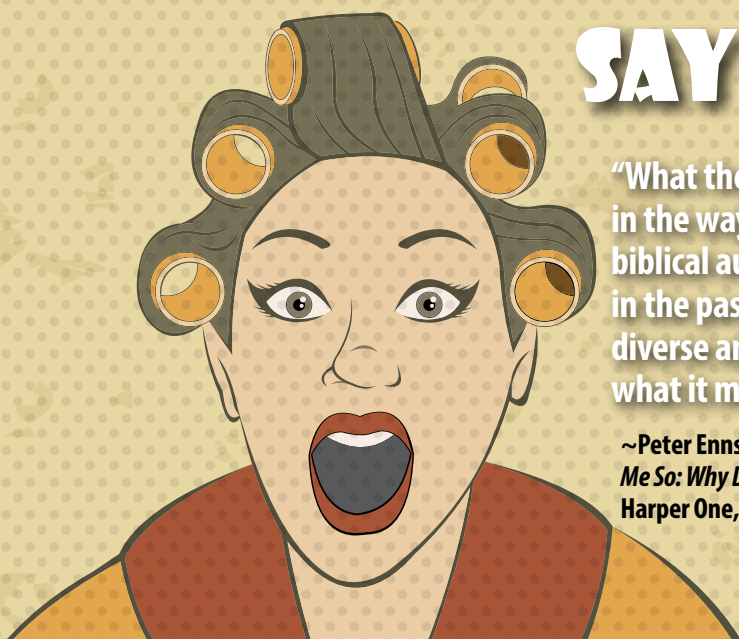
I'm glad I hold to a theology I can believe all the time. 

Bob Thomas has a Th.M. from Dallas Seminary (1994). He has an online business and does contract software work.

SAY WHAT?

"What the Bible says happened often didn't—at least not in the way the Bible describes it. And sometimes different biblical authors have very different takes on what happened in the past... The biblical writers often disagree, expressing diverse and contradictory points of view about God and what it means to be faithful to him" (p. 25).

~Peter Enns, Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University in *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2014).





He Offers a Yoke of Rest:

**An Excerpt from the Forthcoming
Book, A Gospel of Doubt
(Chapter 10)**

By Bob Wilkin

“The tiny amount of space MacArthur devotes to faith speaks volumes. Faith clearly is not very important to MacArthur.”

Introduction

In chapter 10, MacArthur discusses the Lord’s famous teaching on coming to Him and learning from Him to gain rest (Matt 11:28-30). In the introduction he says, “Jesus’ offer of rest for the weary is a call to conversion. It is a masterpiece of redemptive truth—a synopsis of the gospel according to Jesus” (p.118).

And MacArthur couldn’t be more wrong.

The Yoke of Rest

MacArthur entitles this chapter “He Offers a Yoke of Rest” (p. 116).

In our stress-filled age, nearly everyone wants rest for their souls. We need it. The Lord Jesus gave a very well-known promise about rest when He said:

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30).

What type of rest is the Lord talking about? MacArthur says, “This is an invitation to salvation, not just an appeal for believers to move into a deeper experience of discipleship” (p. 117). Further he says, “It is...a synopsis of the gospel according to Jesus” (p. 118). Then he brings up the essentials, “It outlines *five essential elements of genuine conversion*, all so inextricably linked that it is impossible to eliminate any one of them from the biblical concept of saving faith” (p. 118, emphasis added). Those five essential elements of genuine conversion are the five other subheadings for the chapter: humility, revelation, repentance, faith, and submission.

This is the first and only time in *The Gospel According to Jesus* (hereafter *TGAJ*) that MacArthur indicates that there are “five essential elements of genuine conversion.” Of course, he often speaks of the elements of repentance, faith, confession of sins (not mentioned here), confessing Christ (not mentioned here), submission, obedience (not mentioned here), perseverance (not mentioned here), humility, and revelation, which

would make nine essential elements of conversion. But in no other chapter does he number the conditions of everlasting life.

For MacArthur to say there are “five essential elements of genuine conversion” is especially surprising since just two chapters earlier, in chapter 8, he said, “there is no four- or five-step plan of salvation” (p. 105). Isn’t “five essential elements of genuine conversion” the same idea as a “five-step plan of salvation”? This looks like a contradiction.

But more importantly, where does the Bible list these five elements as conditions for receiving everlasting life? They are not found in the text MacArthur cites, Matt 11:28-30, nor are they found together anywhere in the Bible.¹

Matthew 11:28-30 says nothing about repentance, humility, or revelation, though it certainly speaks of faith as a condition of regeneration (“Come to Me,” compare John 6:35) and of submission as a condition of discipleship (“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me”).

Before we examine MacArthur’s five essential elements for salvation, notice that the Lord mentions *rest* twice (Matt 11:28, 29), and with two different conditions for having rest.

The first *rest*, mentioned in verse 28, is conditioned upon *coming to Jesus*.

Verse 29 speaks of a second rest, conditioned upon *taking up Jesus’ yoke and learning from Him*.

Is coming to Jesus the same as taking up His yoke and learning from Him? That is the position MacArthur advocates. Yet the Biblical text does not support MacArthur’s claim.

In the Fourth Gospel coming to Jesus is a metaphor for believing in Him. The Lord said, “You are not willing to come to Me that you may have [everlasting] life” (John 5:40). A bit later He said, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). Coming to Jesus is believing in Him.

Yet where in John's Gospel or the entire Bible do we find *taking up Jesus' yoke* as a metaphor for believing? A yoke was a wooden implement which had openings for the heads of two oxen to be placed so that they could pull a plow or a cart. *A yoke is a symbol of hard labor*, not a symbol of faith.

In addition, *learning* [*manthanō/mathētēs* in Greek, the noun form being the word translated *disciple(s)* in the New Testament] from Jesus is a discipleship concept. It is not a picture of believing in Him.

The Lord Jesus is saying in Matt 11:28-30 that the first rest, the one for those who come to Him, pictures everlasting life for the believer. The second rest, the one for those who take His yoke and learn from Him, pictures a life of discipleship, which is a life of such fulfillment and joy that it can be said to be rest from the aimlessness and discontentment that characterizes a life without eternal significance.²

Humility

The first of MacArthur's "five essential elements of genuine conversion" is humility. He finds this in a verse that precedes Matt 11:28-30. In verse 25 the Lord says, "You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes." The wise and prudent are "the Pharisees, the rabbis, and the scribes" (p. 118). "Their sin is not their intellect; it is their intellectual pride."

MacArthur continues:

Who can enter into salvation?
Those who, like children, are dependent, not independent.
Those who are humble, not proud.
Those who recognize that they are helpless and empty. Aware that they are nothing, they turn in utter dependency to Christ (p. 119).

Doesn't this statement contradict the main point of *TGAJ* and of this chapter? MacArthur has been arguing that everlasting life is only for those who deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Christ till they die. But why would someone who recognizes that they are "helpless and empty" and "aware that they are nothing" ever presume to save themselves by works? Working for Christ (taking His yoke upon you) is not dependency, humility, and helplessness. It is sweating, working, and helping.³

This section on humility illustrates the inconsistency of MacArthur's position, an inconsistency born of his days before he studied the Puritans in 1980. He often makes comments that make it seem like he believes in salvation by faith alone, but just as quickly contradicts himself and teaches salvation by works.

Revelation

The other four items in MacArthur's list (humility, repentance, faith, and submission) are all conditions placed upon the person who wishes to be born again. Revelation is not that kind of condition, at least in the way it is stated.

Possibly what MacArthur means here is that in order to be born again *a person must be open to Divine revelation* (see his comments on the need to be open on pp. 71, 87, 105, 119).

However, MacArthur does say, "The only people who receive it [personal knowledge of the Father and the Son] are those who are sovereignly chosen" (p. 120), which obviously reflects his commitment to Calvinism and unconditional election.

Only by special revelation from God—that is, only from

Scripture—can a person come to faith. Paul said that in Rom 10:14. However, contra MacArthur, *anyone*, not just the so-called *elect*,⁴ can receive revelation from God through His Word and believe and be born again.

Repentance

MacArthur himself notes, "the word *repentance* is not specifically used here" (p. 121, emphasis his). Yet he says, "that [repentance] is what our Lord is calling for." He says, "'Come to Me' demands a complete turnaround, a full change of direction" (p. 121).

MacArthur makes this claim without providing any support. He does not mention or explain New Testament passages in which the expression *coming to Jesus* occurs. He fails to demonstrate that Jesus' use of the exhortation "Come to Me" in Matt 11:28 or elsewhere is a demand for "a complete turnaround, a full change of direction."

While the English expression *come to Me* is found in many places in the New Testament, the exact Greek expression in Matt 11:28 (*deute pros Me*) is only found here.⁵ Thus we need to look at uses of this same idea using a different but synonymous Greek verb (*erchomai*).

In John 6:35 the Lord said, "He who comes to Me [*ho erchomenos pros Me*] shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." *Coming to Jesus* there is a synonym for believing in Him, not a synonym for repentance (see also John 5:39-40; 6:37, 44, 45, 65). That is, coming to Him in the first half of the verse is synthetically parallel with believing in Him in the second half.

Three texts speak about allowing children to come to Jesus (Matt

19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). They either refer to people of that day literally allowing children to approach and listen to Jesus, or else they refer to allowing children to believe in Him. Either way the Lord meant that children should be evangelized.

If MacArthur could show a text in which *coming to Jesus* refers to repentance, then that might support his interpretation here. But he can't do that, and he doesn't even try to show that. There is no verse anywhere in the Bible which indicates that *coming to Jesus* refers to turning from one's sins.

MacArthur goes on to define *repentance* as "turn[ing] from self and sin to the Savior. This is not an invitation to people to enjoy their sin" (p. 121). So one must turn from his sins and reject his sins and turn to Christ and follow Him in order to be born again. How he gets that from this passage, or from the New Testament concept of *coming to Jesus*, is impossible to see.

Faith

Having identified *coming to Jesus* as repentance, how will MacArthur find faith in this passage?

Amazingly, having just said that the call to "Come to Me" is a call to repentance, he now says,

"Come to Me" is tantamount to saying "Believe in Me." In John 6:35...to come to Jesus is to believe in Him (p. 121).

Apparently it can mean both. How? Because, "Faith is the flip side of repentance" (p. 121).

So here is what MacArthur expects the reader to understand: any time the word *repentance* or a synonym occurs, faith and repentance are both meant. Likewise, any time *faith* or a synonym occurs,

faith and repentance are both meant.

However, there is not a shred of evidence that supports the idea that faith is the flip side of repentance.⁶ Nor does MacArthur try to provide such evidence.

Have you ever seen a coin that was cut in half and then put back together? I have. You can separate the face of the coin from the back of it. You end up not with one coin, but two half coins.

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Well, if the front half of the coin is faith and the back half is repentance, then justification is by faith plus repentance, not by faith alone. You can't have it both ways.

Notice how short this section is in relation to the other sections, especially the section on submission which follows. Nine lines on faith.⁷ Fifty-three lines on submission. Thirty-four lines on repentance.

The tiny amount of space MacArthur devotes to faith speaks volumes. Faith clearly is not very important to MacArthur. If it were, he wouldn't have only given it a handful of lines. Submission and repentance, however, are vital based on the fact that he gives ten times

as much material discussing those issues than he does discussing faith.

Tenney famously called John's Gospel *The Gospel of Belief*. The reason he did so is because the verb *believe* (*pisteuō*) occurs 99 times in John. Over and over again the Lord says that the one who believes in Him has everlasting life, shall not come into judgment, shall never hunger or thirst, shall never die (John 1:12-13; 3:14-18; 5:24; 6:35, 37, 39, 45; 11:16).

Nor was this merely the teaching of the Lord Jesus, although that would be enough since He is, after all, the Lord. But His Apostles followed their Lord and also taught that justification and regeneration are by faith alone. The Apostle Paul famously said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved..." (Acts 16:31). He said that he was "a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him [Jesus] for everlasting life" (1 Tim 1:16). He said that salvation, that is, the new birth (Eph 2:5) is "by grace... through faith... not of works" (Eph 2:8-9). He said three times in one verse that "a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16). Over and over again in Gal 3:6-14 he said that justification is by faith alone.

The Jerusalem Council was a meeting of the early church to settle the issue of whether Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be born again (Acts 15:1) and even in order to be sanctified (Acts 15:5). At that meeting the Apostle Peter, speaking of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:34-48), the first Gentile converts,⁸ said,

"God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the



heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us...purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:7-9).

Peter spoke of faith and believing. He did not mention repentance or submission.

James said that God "brought us forth by the word of truth" (1:18), that is, by believing the message of everlasting life sourced in Jesus Christ. He too did not mention repentance or submission.

I love the old Baptist hymn "Whosoever Surely Meaneth Me." That song is based on John 3:16 and Rev 22:17 (from the KJV). The Lord Jesus said that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV). The issue was and remains belief in Jesus or lack thereof.

Submission

Often an author saves the best for last. That is certainly MacArthur's

view in this chapter. He thinks the key element in the new birth is submission.

The first lines are telling: "Salvation does not end there. Another element of genuine conversion is submission" (p. 122). The word *there* refers back to the preceding section on faith. Thus when he says, "Salvation does not end there" (p. 122) he means *salvation does not end with faith in Christ*. He then adds, "Another element of genuine conversion is submission" (p. 122). That is an amazing statement. Submission (and repentance, pp. 120-21) must be *added* to faith in order for a person to have salvation:

The call to surrender to Jesus' lordship is part and parcel of His invitation to salvation. Those unwilling to take on His yoke cannot enter into the saving rest He offers (p. 122).

MacArthur's discussion of the yoke (pp. 122-23) is very helpful. He

clearly shows that it is an implement for work.

He is also correct that "the imagery [of learning from Jesus]... [is reminiscent of] a pupil who submitted himself to a teacher [and] was said to take the teacher's yoke" (p. 122).

The problem is that MacArthur equates the call to discipleship with the call to everlasting life. For him *following Jesus* is required to be born again as this section and the title of the book's first chapter shows.

Notice that we find no discussion of the difference between coming to Christ and taking His yoke upon us and learning from Him. How anyone could think those two things are identical is hard to fathom, unless, of course, his theology demands it.

In this section on submission MacArthur is teaching works salvation. He is saying we must work

for Christ to be born again. This is Nike evangelism: *Just do it*.

MacArthur says that “the yoke of the law, the yoke of human effort, the yoke of works, and the yoke of sin are all heavy, chafing, galling yokes...The yoke He [Jesus] offers is easy, and the burden He gives is light...” (pp. 122-23). His point seems to be this work is easy. It is not difficult.

Regardless of how hard or easy Jesus’ yoke is, His yoke is a yoke. It is an implement of work.

MacArthur may be hinting at what we see in 1 John 5:3, “His commandments are not burdensome.” True. But they are still commands and effort is still necessary. Work is to be done. The point made by the Lord and the Apostle John is that the born-again person is well fitted to the task of working for Christ because of the power of the Spirit in his life.

MacArthur pictures a form of works salvation that isn’t heavy, chafing, or galling. This is work we can do and enjoy. And if we do, then we will gain everlasting life for the work we’ve done for Christ. This idea that everlasting life is by works—whether easy or difficult—cannot possibly be harmonized with texts like John 3:16; 5:24; 6:28-29; Rom 4:4-5; Gal 2:15-16; Eph 2:8-9; or Titus 3:5.

The only “submission” that is a precursor to faith in Christ is a willingness to do what God says we must do:

[Jesus said,] “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40).

Here is another use of *coming to Jesus*. Again, that expression is a

synonym for believing in Him. The vast majority of Jews were unwilling to believe in Jesus for everlasting life because in their minds that was too easy. That contradicted their tradition, just as justification by faith alone contradicts MacArthur’s theological tradition.

Conclusion

Like Naaman, who initially chafed at the condition of healing that Elisha gave him as being too easy (2 Kings 5:9-13), MacArthur is unwilling to submit to the simple condition of coming to Jesus for the rest that is everlasting life. Hence he gives the reader a harder way of deliverance. Yet since it isn’t God’s way, the gospel according to MacArthur is a message that is not true.

Naaman ended up submitting to the condition God gave him through Elisha for healing (2 Kgs 5:14), a condition that initially offended him. Have you submitted to the only way for everlasting life given by God? That is, have you come to Jesus, have you believed in Him for everlasting life? I hope you have. I hope your assurance is based solely on the promise of God to the believer and not at all on your works. I have written this book so you can be sure that you have everlasting life which can never be lost no matter what. ■

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1. In addition, other than faith in God’s revelation concerning Christ (John 3:16; 5:24), none of the other things which MacArthur says are essential conditions for receiving everlasting life are said to be conditions of the new birth or of justification in the Bible. Even if all five elements were found together, they would need to be listed *as conditions for regeneration or justification*. They are not.

2. It is possible that this second rest (*anapausis*) is the same rest spoken of by the author of Hebrews (using the related word *katapausis* in Heb 3:11, 18; 4:1-11).

3. MacArthur believes that “not of works” in Eph 2:9 refers to works humans do *independent of God’s enablement* (see p. 189). However, Paul does not make that distinction in Eph 2:9 or anywhere. The Lord in John 6:28-29 also ruled out works that people do and He too did not qualify His remarks. Though God gives believers *the power we need to obey Him* so that He might give us eternal rewards, that is not the same as saying that He does the work without our involvement. We must run, fight, and keep (2 Tim 4:6-8).

4. I believed in election *to everlasting life* for 25 years (1980-2005). I no longer do. I’ve come to see that the Scriptures do not teach that. What they teach is election *to service*. For explanation see my book *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*, pp. 182-86.

5. There are two uses of *duete* (from *duerō*) *opiso mou*, *come after Me* (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17). However, coming *after* Jesus is a much different idea than coming *to* Jesus. Indeed *deute opiso mou* is almost always translated as “Follow Me” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, NET, HCSB, ESV, NIV has “Come, follow me”).

6. I wrote my doctoral dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary (New Testament, 1985) on repentance and salvation.

7. Actually five of those nine lines deal with repentance, not faith. Thus he really only has four lines on faith.

8. The Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 may well have been a Jew. However, if he was a Gentile, he is generally considered as an individual, not as a group (though possibly some of his servants came to faith as well). Cornelius came to faith with his family and his household (which would include servants and possibly friends and neighbors who came to hear this important message).

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