

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2015

THE RANGE OF INERRANCY

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

PLUS When the Holy Spirit Came / Have You Heard a Confusing Gospel? / Words
of Life in John 6 / My Testimony / World Missions / The Battlefield **AND MORE**

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

With this issue we enter winter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The end of the year is typically slower than the rest of the year. People take vacation time. There are trips to see family. Lots of big meals. Lots of gift giving.

For believers in Jesus Christ the end of the year is a time to reflect on and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior. Theologians call this *the incarnation*, God taking on human flesh.

If Jesus had not become Man, there could be no redemption. Only a sinless Man could redeem sinful men. Thus God the Son, the Second member of the Trinity, was miraculously conceived, grew in His virgin mother's womb, and was born in a stable in the prophesied city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

It is hard for us to grasp how difficult this would have been for the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says it this way: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

Have you ever been to a really poor country like Haiti, Burundi, Afghanistan, Myanmar (Burma), Malawi, the Central African Republic, Nepal, or Bangladesh? Imagine that Bill Gates could become a baby again and could choose to be born in Burundi to poor parents. He had enjoyed the best the United States had to offer for a long time. Now he was living in abject poverty.

But that illustration is far off, isn't it? The Lord Jesus Christ had lived forever, not just sixty years, and He had lived not in the U.S., but in heaven. He experienced no pain at all. None. He experienced unending joy and peace and fulfillment. No rejection.

Then when He came to earth He didn't merely live among poor people. He experienced pain, rejection, mocking, beatings, and ultimately death on the cross. He did all this for us. And He knew it was coming. His entire ministry was pointed to Calvary, starting with His first miracle when He told His mother, "*My hour has not yet come*" (John 2:4). He repeated this point to his brothers who were not yet believers at that point: "*My time has not yet come*" (John 7:6, 8).



Christmas and Calvary

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

The Apostle John likewise said, "Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because *His hour had not yet come*" (John 7:30) and "These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for *His hour had not yet come*" (John 8:20).

The night of His betrayal, the night before His crucifixion, the Lord announced to His disciples, "*The hour has come* for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). In His High Priestly prayer He said, "Father, *the hour has come*; glorify Your Son so that the Son may glorify You" (John 17:1).

The cross is part of the incarnation. Indeed, the cross is the main reason why God became a Man.

Let's remember our wonderful Savior this Christmas season. Keep Christ in *Christmas*.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bob Wilkin". The script is fluid and cursive.





The Range of Inerrancy

Corrections and Clarifications

By Bob Wilkin

Misrepresenting Views Blomberg Considers Possible As Though They Were His Own

In the May/June issue of *Grace in Focus Magazine* I reviewed a book by Dr. Craig Blomberg, *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* After the article appeared, I was very sorry to learn that I had misrepresented Blomberg. I made it seem that he personally held to the interpretations of particular passages that he merely presented as possible (and consistent with inerrancy).

My apologies to Blomberg for this serious error.

In his chapter, “Aren’t Several Narrative Genres of the Bible Unhistorical?” Blomberg spends thirty pages discussing various historical narratives and favorably quoting views which I mistakenly thought were his own views as well. However, in one paragraph in the conclusion he gives hints as to his own views on these issues.

Here is that paragraph in the conclusion:

By nature I am skeptical of any proposals that seem to have eluded all readers until the last couple of centuries. Where I learn that there were ancient debates over certain issues, I am more open to considering alternative interpretations. I have deliberately not taken a stand myself on any of the problems as I discussed them in this chapter. Because readers seem invariably curious, I will happily disclose where I come down at the moment, given the varying amounts of study I have devoted to each. I would support an old-earth creationism and a literary-framework approach to Genesis 1. I lean in the direction of Kidner’s approach to Genesis 2-3 but am open to other proposals. I suspect that Jonah really intended to recount a miracle that really did happen, but with Job I gravitate more toward Longman’s mediating approach. Despite the overwhelming consensus against it, I still find the arguments for the unity of Isaiah under a single primary author, even if lightly redacted later, more persuasive (or at least less problematic) than most do. I remain pretty much baffled by Daniel 11; it is the issue I have researched by far the least. My inherent conservatism inclines me in the direction of taking it as genuine predictive prophecy, but I listen respectfully to those who argue for other interpretations and continue to mull them over. I reject Gundry’s approach to Matthew

as highly unlikely. I have yet to be persuaded by Licona's initial views of Matthew 27:51-53 but would love to see additional comparative research undertaken. I think good cases can still be mounted for the traditional ascriptions of authorship of the New Testament Epistles, allowing for perhaps some posthumous editing of 2 Peter. I refuse ever to be suckered back into the view of my young adult years, when I actually believed that the end times would play out as Hal Lindsey claimed they would (*Can We Still Trust the Bible?* p. 177).

Blomberg here indicates that when he was citing various views in the chapter *he was not expressing his agreement that the views are correct*. What he was expressing is that the views are discussable and that these views fall within what he considers to be the range of inerrancy.¹

Clarification

At one point in the article, after having cited material from Blomberg, I mentioned that he spoke of “such evangelical stalwarts” as Bock, Carson, and Keener, who agree with him. I then wrote the following:

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.

Dr. Darrell Bock contacted me after the article and objected to this statement and what it implied about his views and those of the other professors at Dallas Seminary. He objected to the implication that the men I cited believed

there was nothing at all historical about the Biblical accounts.

My apology to Bock and the DTS faculty for leaving some readers with the mistaken impression that I was saying they considered the creation account, the worldwide flood, Jonah, and Job as *pure fiction*. I should have been clearer. What I meant, as I shall now explain, is that they do not consider all of these accounts to be *literal history*. Like most New Testament scholars, Bock and most

“What I meant is that they do not consider all of these accounts to be *literal history*.

Like most New Testament scholars, Bock and most DTS professors believe that much of that is poetic history.”

DTS professors believe that much of that is *poetic history*.

I've had multiple cordial conversations with Bock and we've exchanged many emails about this issue. These conversations have led me to make several clarifications and corrections.

First, Bock indicated that when discussing inerrancy, we should think about passages in terms of three things a person believes about it:

1. what he considers to be *true*,
2. what he considers to be *discussible*, and

3. what he considers to be *heresy* (i.e., outside the edges of inerrancy).

I believe that is a helpful clarification. As I said before, I made the mistake of confusing what Blomberg believed to be true (category 1) with what he considered discussable (category 2), and for that I apologize.

Second, I made it seem that when interpreting the Bible there were only two choices: something is either history or it's fiction. I did not intend that. I realize that there are genres of Scripture like poetry and apocalyptic that have figurative language that nonetheless conveys history (past or future). However, I did not make that clear.

Bock calls what I failed to make clear *the excluded middle*. He points out that passages like Genesis 1-3 can be read in three ways: as *literal history*, as *poetic history*, or *poetic fiction*. This is also a helpful clarification.

To read Genesis 1-3 as *literal history* means that Adam and Eve were historical persons created in precisely the way described by the text. This is my view. However, my view is not mainstream today. Most Evangelical scholars today hold to option two, that Genesis 1-3 is poetic history.

Reading Genesis 1-3 as *poetic history* means that Adam and Eve were historical persons but the story of their creation and fall is told using poetic (i.e., figurative) language. There has to be a “kernel of truth” (so Blomberg). How much is figurative and symbolic is up for debate.

For example, D. A. Carson says,

I hold that the Genesis account is a mixed genre that feels like history and really



does give us *some historical particulars* [emphasis added]. At the same time, however, it is full of demonstrable symbolism. Sorting out what is symbolic and what is not is very difficult (*The God Who Is There*, p. 15).

Likewise, Craig Keener wrote,

Apart from some Israelite parables, nowhere else in the Bible do we read anything like this: a talking serpent convinces Man and Wife to pluck a fruit that is Knowledge. Not surprisingly, many biblical scholars, *including evangelical biblical scholars*, suspect *some figurative language here* [emphasis added]. Modern questions aside, is it possible that this way of reading the narrative is closer to how it was meant to be read? (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/craig-s-keener/is-young-earth-creationism-biblical_b_1578004.html).

As Keener himself confirmed, “many biblical scholars” hold this view. From my discussions with Bock, this also appears to be the majority position at Dallas Seminary and within the Evangelical Theological Society.

I consider the poetic history view of Genesis 1-3 to be inconsistent with inerrancy. In other words, I do not consider this view to be in the *discussable* category. I realize that the majority of Evangelical scholars either hold this view themselves or consider it within the boundaries of inerrancy. So I know that I am the one who is out of step. However, I happen to be convinced that I am right!

Reading Genesis 1-3 as *poetic fiction* means there was no literal Adam and Eve and the whole creation account is a fictional story meant to teach us theological lessons. I consider this view heresy and totally outside the bounds of

inerrancy. Most Evangelical scholars, including Bock, Blomberg, Carson, and Keener, would agree with me on this evaluation that taking Genesis 1-3 as poetic fiction is outside the edge of inerrancy.

I Stand By What I Said

As I read Blomberg’s book *Can We Trust the Bible?* I was struck by how broadly he defined inerrancy. I suggested in my review that most New Testament scholars today, even those who claim to believe in inerrancy, consider the events of Genesis 1-3 as well as Jonah and Job to be historical only in a limited sense.

I see no reason to retract that claim.

In fact, the quotes from Carson and Keener, cited above, and my conversations with Bock, only confirm that *most* Evangelical scholars hold to viewing Genesis 1-3 as poetic history and *almost all* think

that taking much of Genesis 1-3 as poetic and figurative is a view that is at least discussable within inerrancy.

In his book *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* Blomberg said:

If Farnell, Thomas, and Geisler and Roach were to be consistent and chastise every Old or New Testament commentator whose views match those they demonize, they would scarcely find a biblical scholar left in the Evangelical Theological Society who would pass muster in their eyes (*Can We Still Believe the Bible?* p. 142).

A page later he reiterates his point:

But it cannot be stressed strongly enough that the Thomases and Geislers of the world do not speak for the vast majority of evangelicals and inerrantists around the globe” (*Can We Still Believe the Bible?* p. 143).

I agree with Blomberg on this point. Farnell, Thomas, Geisler, Roach, and I are in the minority, probably *the extreme minority* among Evangelical scholars. “The vast majority of evangelicals and inerrantists around the globe” agree with Blomberg, Bock, Carson, and Keener.

Of course, the issue I was raising was not based on a poll of New Testament scholars. I was warning about what I consider to be a dangerous view that dominates the ranks of those who affirm inerrancy.

I am convinced that “the vast majority of evangelicals and inerrantists around the globe” are seriously mistaken and their range of inerrancy is too broad. I believe the broad view of inerrancy is not

consistent with what the Scriptures teach (cf. Matt 4:4; John 14:26; 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16; Titus 1:2; 2 Pet 1:21).²

I think the prevailing view of inerrancy today represents a dangerous downgrading of the doctrine, one that seriously undermines Biblical authority. The meaning of inerrancy has changed so much for so many that—in my understanding of the word—

“I think the prevailing view of inerrancy today represents a dangerous downgrading of the doctrine, one that seriously undermines Biblical authority.”

the term *inerrancy* no longer is meaningful.

Most New Testament scholars think their broader view of inerrancy is a very good thing. They think it is essential to help theological students continue to walk with Christ. The President-Elect of the Evangelical Theological Society, Dr. Dan Wallace, has written:

I tell my students every year... that it is imperative that they pursue truth rather than their presuppositions. And they need to have a doctrinal taxonomy that distinguishes core beliefs from peripheral beliefs. When they place *more peripheral doctrines such as inerrancy and verbal inspiration* [emphasis added] at the core, then when belief in these doctrines starts to erode, it creates a domino

effect: One falls down, they all fall down. It strikes me that something like this may be what happened to Bart Ehrman... If our starting point is embracing propositional truths about the nature of scripture rather than personally embracing Jesus Christ as our Lord and King,³ we'll be on that slippery slope, and we'll take a lot of folks down with us (<https://bible.org/article/gospel-according-bart>).

For most Evangelical scholars today inerrancy is not a core belief. It is a “peripheral belief.” Wallace thinks that failing to recognize that leads people to fall away from the Christian faith, as Bart Ehrman did.

I share the concern about falling away from the faith. I just happen to believe that it's the broad view of inerrancy that is causing people to fall away. How many students have gone to conservative Evangelical schools believing that Genesis 1-3 and Jonah and Job are all literal history and not some sort of poetic history, only to be told that they are badly mistaken? And how many of those students begin to doubt the accuracy of God's Word? I fear that there are many who fall away from the faith due to being taught a broad view of inerrancy.

Of course, we cannot prove via anecdotal evidence whether the broad view or the narrow view of inerrancy leads people astray. It is the Scriptures which tell us which view is correct and which is not. That is my concern. Let's go to the Scriptures to find out what the Scriptures say about inerrancy. That is my appeal.

There are many topics to address here. My position needs defending. My conversations with Darrell

Bock and others have helped clarify issues for me. I hope to have more fruitful discussions in the future. I plan on addressing inerrancy in greater detail in a future book.

Rest assured, however, that the central issue on which I will write will continue to be the promise of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Jesus (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35; 11:26). I am committed to keeping *grace in focus*. I have chosen to discuss an issue like inerrancy because it is clearly and directly *related* to the promise of everlasting life. If I know that God's Word is absolutely true and contains no errors in it, then it is easier for me to believe the amazing promise of John 3:16.

If you are a New Testament scholar who holds the prevailing broad view of inerrancy, I hope this clarification accurately reflects your views. I do not doubt your compassion, commitment, or zeal. I realize you affirm belief in inerrancy. But since I do not consider your affirmation to be based on a reasonable understanding of what inerrancy actually is, I raise the concern. I hope you will be Bereans and evaluate my concerns Biblically (Acts 17:11). After all, we both affirm that God's Word is true. ■

Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

1. Blomberg's expressions of his own views fall short of statements of what he believes is true. Instead he says things like "I suspect that...", "I gravitate more toward...", "I still find the arguments...more persuasive...", "My inherent conservatism inclines me...", and "I think good cases can be mounted..." These are statements of probability, not certainty. Of course, within a historiographical approach, most scholars today rarely if ever speak of being sure. Things are couched in terms of probability and likelihood.

2. I also believe the broad view of inerrancy is inconsistent with the teaching at

Dallas Seminary while I was there (1978-1985). Not only do I not recall a single professor advocating a poetic/figurative view of Genesis 1-11, Jonah, or Job, there are three pamphlets put out by DTS between 1965 and 1976 that reinforce my memory. See Donald K. Campbell's, *We Believe in Literal Interpretation* (1974); Charles C. Ryrie's, *We Believe in Creation* (1976); and John F. Walvoord's, *We Believe the Bible* (1965).

3. Wallace's comments about whether one starts by embracing propositional truth versus starting by personally embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and King represent a false dichotomy. One can only embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and King by believing those propositions in Scripture which report what He said and did. One cannot existentially encounter Jesus apart from the Word of God. To attempt to start with an experience rather than with God's Word is to undercut the absolutely vital nature of the Word of God in our lives. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

WHAT DOES YOUR PASTOR BELIEVE?

In 1987, 10,000 clergy were asked if they believed the Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God in faith, history, and secular matters.

- 95% of Episcopalians,
- 87% of Methodists,
- 82% of Presbyterians,
- 77% of American Lutherans, and
- 67% of American Baptists...

...said **"NO."**¹



1. See <http://www.religioustolerance.org/inerran4.htm>

The Building Block of

virtue

We are living in a world that is becoming increasingly notorious for its moral decadence. As a culture we have become “de-moralized” in the most literal sense of that word. The English historian and philosopher Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) said that we are the first generation of man to try to build a society without a moral reference point. Similarly, Dave Breese wrote,

Our society, with its drastic degeneration, has moved to the place where it has no use for virtue. The support systems that were an aid to virtue have disintegrated, giving

way to a society that is essentially subversive to moral goodness. The world has devised a thousand means to produce moral destruction in the lives of its individuals. This generation is being pressed upon with more opportunities to sin at a younger age and in increasingly clever ways.

In this gross and insensate world, the maiden of virtue is being daily throttled by the ogre of vice. What's more, this brutalization is being done to the cheers, applause, promotion and sponsorship of a major segment of our population. The masses of earth that formerly could be called by the name humanity is now changing fast. People are becoming brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed.

In a thousand ways we see this. In

True

By Joe Lombardi

our time we have seen statesmanship become politics, music become noise, enthusiasm become cynicism, love become sex, and sex become sodomy (*Living For Eternity* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1988], p. 54).

Yes, we are living in a world that is becoming increasingly notorious for its moral decadence. But I would suggest to you today that in the midst of all of this moral badness, the followers of Jesus Christ are called to be a people who will become increasingly known for their moral goodness.

I say that based on what I read in many places in God's Word, including 2 Pet 1:2-22, the passage that serves as

the foundational text for this particular series of articles titled "Christians Under Construction."

In the first two articles we have already determined that there is a sense in which every Christian is a person *in* construction as well as *under* construction.

Every *believer* is a *builder*.

The Apostle Peter specifies seven building blocks that are to be used in the framing and fashioning of Christians in and under construction: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.

In this article I will examine the character trait of virtue.

Virtue Defined

The word translated “virtue” in the KJV, NKJV, MEV, ESV, and RSV is rendered “goodness” in the NIV, HCSB, and the RSV. In other versions you will find it translated by such words as “moral excellence” (NASB, NLT, WEB, CEB), “excellence of character” (LEB), “excellence” (NET), or “moral character” (ISV).

In the original language the word is the Greek term *aretē*—which is best defined as “intrinsic eminence,” “eminent endowment,” or “excellence of person.” It is derived from a root verb that literally means “to fit together.” It was used in extra-biblical Greek to describe the qualities of a fine work horse, or the special intellectual capacity and physical capability of the ideal man living in the first century Greco-Roman world. Eventually, the term was used to refer to proper behavior. Thus, it really does refer to virtue or moral excellence.

This particular word may be found about a half dozen times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, or LXX), always used in reference to the praiseworthy deeds of God. For example, Isa 43:21 quotes God as saying, “This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.” In other words, God wants His people to proclaim that He is good; that He is morally excellent and always does what is right. In fact, Peter alludes to this text when he writes in his first letter, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). We

are to declare His moral excellence in word and deed. And we are reminded in 2 Pet 1:3 that we have been called “by His own glory (*doxa*) and virtue (*aretē*).”

In Phil 4:8 Paul admonished that “if anything is excellent (*aretē*) or praiseworthy think about such things.”

If we are going to be effective and productive for the Lord then we need to build upon the foundation of our faith a super-structure of Godly character, beginning with the building block of *virtue/moral excellence*.

Now that we know how that building block of virtue is *defined*, we also need to know how it is *obtained*.

We are reminded in the context (2 Pet 1:3-4), that everything we need for life and godliness is available to us *from* Him, through our knowledge *of* Him. So, essentially, what we need to do is to turn *to* Him in dependence *on* Him. We have the heavenly resource of His Divine power and His precious promises at our disposal.

I would like to suggest five Biblical, practical ways in which you can put the heavenly resources of His Divine power and precious promises to work in your life, so that you, too, might become morally excellent.

Pray for Virtue

First, you need to *pray*.

That step should be so basic and obvious, yet so many believers tend to overlook it.

If you want to be morally excellent, then the place to begin is to pray a prayer of *consecration*. For example, you might pray in the words of a great old hymn, “Take

my life, and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to Thee.”

With respect to consecration I am suggesting, first, that you must *present* yourself to Him regularly and repeatedly and *submit* your will to His (Rom 12:1-2).

What is His will for your life with respect to this building block of moral excellence? It is clearly revealed in His Word. When it comes to moral purity there is no question or confusion regarding His will. I don’t think it can be stated any more clearly than it is with these words from Paul’s first letter to the believers in Thessalonica:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit (1 Thess 4:3-8 NKJV).

To be sure, today’s culture is floundering in a sea of moral relativity and confusion. In his 1932 book about the art of bull-fighting titled *Death in the Afternoon*, Ernest Hemingway wrote, “what is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.”

By contrast, the English author G. K. Chesterton once said that

“morality, like art, consists in drawing the line somewhere.”

The truth of the matter is that, for us, God is the One who draws the line. For believers in Jesus, who are desiring a “rich welcome” into the everlasting kingdom (2 Pet 1:11), the bottom line is that if God says that something is wrong, then it is wrong, no matter how right it feels. If God says that it is bad, then it is bad, whether or not it makes you feel good.

If you want to be morally excellent, then what you need to do regularly¹ is to *pray* a prayer of consecration in which you present yourself to Him, and in which you submit your will to His—no matter how you feel!

Purge Unwholesome Thoughts

Second, you must *purge* unwholesome thoughts, feelings and actions from your life. In other words, you need to “clean up your act.”

One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 101. It expresses in both negative and positive terms what I would call the creed of the man [and/or woman] who would build moral excellence into his/her life. If Paul *warns*, “But each one should be careful *how* he builds” (1 Cor 3:10), then it is David who *explains* at least in part, just what that entails.

I will sing of mercy and justice;
To You, O Lord, I will sing praises.

I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me?

I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me (Ps 101:1-3).

I think it is not just important, but imperative, that all believers be so resolved. Here, in the words of the English poet, Alexander Pope, is a good reason why:

Vice is a monster of such hideous mien

As to be hated needs but to be seen

But seen too oft, familiar with her face

We first endure, then pity, then embrace

The tragic truth of the matter is, that when it comes to vice, I am afraid that too many of us, in the words of an old Broadway song, “have grown accustomed to her face.”

Dr. Joseph Stowell, former president of Moody Bible Institute, writes,

Increasingly, the society in which we live celebrates sex in terms of a redefined function. In our society, sex is both entertainment and recreation... (and) it is to be enjoyed without restraint.

Increasingly, our congregations have less and less sensitivity to the purpose and practice of sanctified sex and are becoming increasingly vulnerable to moral laxity... Christians have become increasingly numb to this societal invasion of the sanctity of sex. Captured by soap operas we end up rooting for someone to have an illicit affair, or we blandly entertain ourselves with nudity on the silver screen, as though these things were in the proper parameters of legitimate permission in our lives. Music lyrics from pop to country to rock entertain us with seductive and suggestive notions about sexuality. MTV celebrates sensuality without boundaries, and magazine covers invite readers to peruse their pages to

CAN YOUR CHURCH HOST A REGIONAL GRACE CONFERENCE?

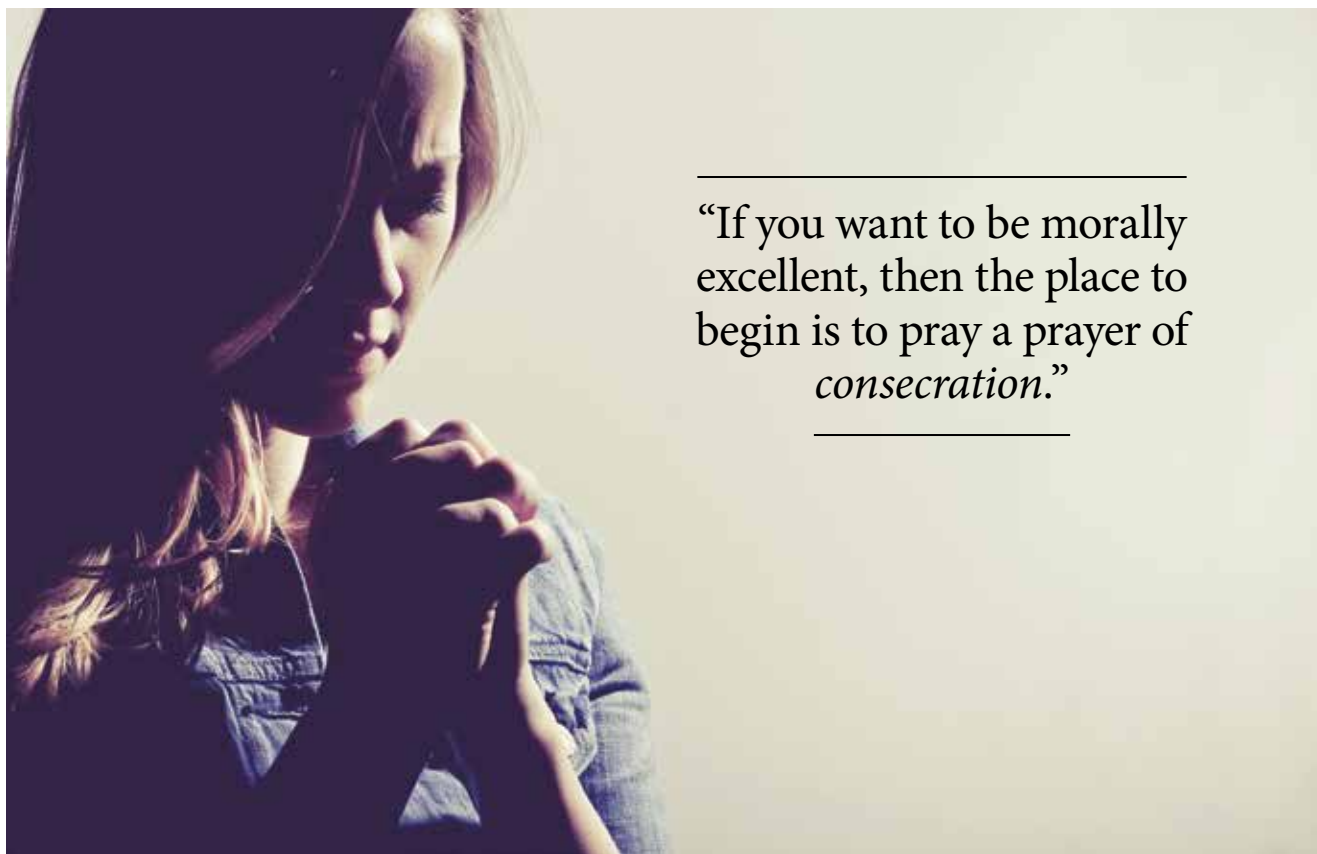
IN A CULTURE dominated by the message of salvation by works, people are hungry for God's Free Grace. They want to learn about the promise of eternal life and eternal rewards.

Other Free Grace believers feel burned out. Many people don't have a grace church near them. They need the encouragement of meeting like-minded believers.

Many people find encouragement by attending GES's national conference. But not everyone can afford to go. What can be done?

Please consider hosting a weekend regional conference in your local church. A GES speaker could fly in, and in cooperation with church leaders, teach a Saturday to Sunday seminar on grace-related topics. It would not only build up your local body, but draw in believers from around your region.

For more information please email bethany@faithalone.org



LIGHTSTOCK

“If you want to be morally excellent, then the place to begin is to pray a prayer of *consecration*.”

learn how to enhance their sex lives from a distinctly pagan point of view (*Shepherding the Church*, p. 198).

It is in such a cultural context that believers are called to make a difference. May God give us the courage to say resolutely and absolutely, “I will set before my eyes no vile thing” (Ps 101:3), and to pray just as urgently and fervently, “Turn my eyes away from worthless things” (Ps 119:37).

We must determine to *purge* from our lives any material possession and/or even personal relation that will hinder our progress in becoming morally excellent. I like the way Paul states this truth in Rom 13:11-14,

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The

night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

But, some may ask, “How do we do that?”

Peter would say, “It is by depending on the Divine resources that are found in His precious promises!” And Paul explains in 2 Tim 3:16-17 that the inscripturated Word of God is useful, not just for teaching and training, but also for rebuking and correcting (i.e., for purging, if and when it is necessary).

Pursue Wholesome Thoughts

Third, you must *pursue* wholesome thoughts, feelings, words and deeds in your life. In his letter to the Philippian congregation, Paul said it like this,

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things (Phil 4:8).

In other words, feed your mind only that which is good!

Another way to do that is to surround yourself with godly people to whom you will make yourself accountable. I suspect that is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to

Timothy, “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22). If you are serious about pursuing moral excellence, then the value of having one or two or more people, to whom you are willing to be held accountable, is probably inestimable.

Remember God Is With You

Fourth, *remember* that God is always with you. Don’t ever forget that. And because He is always with you, then you can never be without Him.

In Psalm 139 the songwriter, singer, and shepherd of Israel asks rhetorically, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Ps 139:7).

The answer? Nowhere! Because, He is everywhere! And because He is with you wherever you go, He sees whatever you do! Indeed, “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13).

You and I need to keep that thought in mind the next time we are tempted to sin. Don’t forget that even those sins we think are done in secret are not hidden from Him: “...Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num 32:23).

Prepare for Difficulty

Fifth, and finally, *prepare* for some difficult times!

This sinful world is no friend of grace, and it is becoming increasingly impatient with and intolerant of those of us who are—especially those of us who would pursue moral excellence.

It’s been said that one man’s trash is another man’s treasure. You need to know that if you make every effort to add to your faith this building block of moral excellence, then it won’t be long before you will discover that much of what the world treasures is really trash, and just about everything you treasure as a believer will be trashed by the world.

I believe that if you really want to be morally excellent, then besides praying, purging, pursuing and

“I submit to you that in the midst of all of this moral decadence, the followers of Jesus Christ are to be a people who will become increasingly known for their moral goodness and for doing the best things in the worst times.”

remembering, you need to be preparing for difficult times. I don’t think the situation is going to get any better before Jesus returns.

Not of the World


We are living in a world that is becoming increasingly notorious for its moral decadence. But we are *in* the world, not *of* the world!

So, what in the world are we coming to?

Well, it seems quite clear to me that we are coming to the end of

the world (as we now know it). And if that is true, then it means that we are fast approaching the day when all believers will stand at last before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

I don’t know about you—but, I don’t want to lose what I have. Honestly, I don’t want you to lose it, either. What I want for my fellow believers is that you live in such a way today that you will actually *add* to what you will receive.

According to 2 Pet 1:11, in order to receive a rich welcome into Christ’s kingdom you need to make every effort to add to the foundation of your faith in Jesus Christ this first building block of virtue. I submit to you that in the midst of all of this moral decadence, the followers of Jesus Christ are to be a people who will become increasingly known for their moral goodness and for doing the best things in the worst times. 

Joe Lombardi is a pastor without charge in Lincoln, NE.

1. Many have quipped that the problem with a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1) is that it keeps getting off the altar. That is why we need ongoing consecration.

Scare Quotes!

“The New Testament clearly teaches that bare faith cannot save, and that works are necessary for final justification or final salvation.”

~Thomas R. Schreiner

Professor of New Testament Interpretation

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

From Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), p. 191.

Thanksgiving... With Tears

By Phil Congdon

“For we do not grieve as those without hope”
(1 Thess 4:13).

Thanksgiving is a wonderful holiday, not just for turkey dinners and a day off work, but because it is an annual reminder — often overlooked but ever-present — that we have much to be thankful for. The one we are thankful to, of course, is God. Our culture largely ignores it, but it whispers in our hearts: Thank you, Lord, for Your bountiful goodness to us!

Last year, the real significance of God’s “unspeakable gift” to us was driven home for me in an unexpected way, a way that was mixed with tears. Glenn Easterly, a godly man and close friend, was suddenly taken home to be with His Lord. A few months later, my mother, a uniquely loving and godly woman, stepped across that threshold between time and eternity and into the arms of her Lord. And then, on the day before Thanksgiving, a dear sister in Christ, René Broughton, slipped from this life, to her eternal reward.

In each of these events, my tears have flowed and my thanks were given. It seems almost schizophrenic to be saying “Thank you” to God, and weeping at the same time, but it’s not. In fact, if I were not able to say “Thank you,” I don’t think I could weep. Deep inside our souls, we yearn for that eternity which God made us for. In this life, we’re stuck in time and space...and sin. Paul wrote that we “groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of the body” (Rom 8:23).

If not for God’s gift of eternal life (John 4:10; Eph 2:8-9), I wouldn’t weep in the face of death; I’d be in terror of it. But Thanksgiving, with its reminder of a God Who is good and Who gives, reminds me through my tears that those who believed in Jesus and who we have bid “Farewell” to in this life, are with their Savior and no longer bound by this life’s




limitations. I’m not sad because *I won’t* see them again, but because *I will!* And I can hardly wait.

In 1 Thess 4:1, Paul reminded Christians that we “are not as those who have no hope.” In Rom 8:24-25, Paul speaks of hope again:

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

I love that. In the face of death, I am not *hopeless*. In fact, I am *hopeful*! I wait eagerly for what absence from the “body of this death” (Rom 7:24) will mean. I just can’t “see” it yet.

This year, Thanksgiving on this side of the veil is seasoned with tears, because I miss those who have gone on, and look forward to being with Christ, and being reunited with them.

Tears...tears of sadness, silver-lined with hope. That’s my Thanksgiving this year. And when your life journey leads you through the valley of the shadow of death, may it be yours, too. 

Phil Congdon is the Pastor of New Braunfels (TX) Bible Church. Phil grew up in a large family (he has a dozen brothers and sisters) and he and his wife Jenny have a large family as well.

An Incorruptible Crown

(1 Corinthians 9:14-27)¹

By H. A. Ironside



The Divine Competition

In 1 Cor 9:24 Paul has been speaking of service, of his own call to preach the gospel, and of the importance of faithfully fulfilling his ministry. Then he uses the striking illustration of these closing verses:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain (1 Cor 9:24).

It is not eternal salvation of which he speaks. We do not obtain the gift of God—eternal life—by diligence or by “running.”

It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy (Rom 9:16).

We are, as Christians, running a race. We are contending in the arena. And for the victors there are fairer crowns than ever were bestowed on the winners in the Olympic Games or on the battle-fields of earth. Let us then see to it that we so run that we may obtain the reward.

In the next verse he goes on to remind them that “every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” The youth who would win the race is careful to subdue his natural appetites, to “train down” to the proper weight, to hold himself in check lest by

self-indulgence on any line he unfit himself for the contest.

Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible (1 Cor 9:25).

In a few hours the laurel wreath will fade or the metallic circle tarnish and corrode. We are striving for an imperishable prize, a crown that is incorruptible.

All believers who die will be raised in the first resurrection to incorruptibility (as 1 Corinthians 15 assures us), but the incorruptible crown is the prize for faithfully running the Christian race. It is the Master's "Well done!" at the end of the course.

Seeking the Lord's Approval

With such a reward in view, what an incentive do I have for holy living—for self-denying devotion to Christ. Into this Paul himself fully entered. He says:

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway² (1 Cor 9:26-27).


This last word is the negative form of the word that means "approved." It means therefore "disapproved," or "rejected."

The apostle covets above all else the Lord's approval. He would receive the victor's incorruptible wreath at the hands of Him who once wore the crown of thorns. With this in view he will not permit the body to be master. He will hold its tendencies in check that he may not by any possibility bring dishonor on his Lord's

name through any carnal indulgence, and so miss His approbation at last.

How many a one has preached to others who has been set aside as a servant and—in some instances—proves utterly unworthy even to bear the name of Christian because he has not held his body under but has given way to fleshly lusts and passions which war against the soul.

To preach well is but to increase one's condemnation³ if one does not live well. Like the clean beasts of old, mouth and foot must agree, speech and walk must both be according to godliness, if one would win the crown.

The race may seem long, and the way rough and difficult, but the reward is sure for him who keeps his eye on Christ and follows on in the footprints He has left on the wilderness road. To save one's life is to lose it. To lose it now for His name's sake is to keep it unto life eternal, and thus to win the incorruptible crown. 

H. A. Ironside (1876-1951) was a Canadian-American Bible teacher and former pastor of Moody Church, affectionately known as the "Archbishop of Fundamentalism."

1. This originally appeared in a booklet called *Salvation and Reward* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1930), pp. 1-2.

2. Editor's note: The KJV translation here is unfortunate as it can be seen to imply loss of everlasting life, which is impossible. As Ironside goes on to say, the word *adokimos* means *disapproved*. The believer who fails to persevere will not be approved to reign with Christ.

3. Editor's note: Clearly Ironside is not speaking of *eternal condemnation* here. He is talking about *disapproval* at the Judgment Seat of Christ as the context of this remark makes clear.



Have You Heard a Confusing Gospel?

"I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

~ Robert McCloskey

By Shawn Lazar

Did you understand the gospel the first time you heard it? I sure didn't. I was in church sporadically for at least five years before it ever clicked for me.

I don't know why I didn't understand it right away. Was it because I wasn't spiritually ready to hear it? Was it because no one ever explained it to me in a way that I could understand? Did the preachers use vague "Christianese" that left me in a mental fog? Or was I confused for so long because I only ever heard a confusing gospel message?

Maybe that's your problem too. If you doubt your salvation, it could be because you have only ever heard a confusing gospel message.

Here's an example of what I mean.

Muddled Mystical Missionaries

A young missionary who wanted to raise money recently met with a pastor friend of mine. He didn't know her and she didn't know the church, so they met to discuss what she believed about the gospel and how she would share it with others.

It didn't go well.

"Well, I was raised in a Christian family," she began. "And although I was baptized at summer camp, I only gave my life to Christ five years ago. That's when the Lord really touched my heart. I just felt His special presence, which was so amazing. Now I have a passion to reach the lost with the gospel. I believe the Lord wants me in the mission field."

"So you know you are saved because you gave your life to Christ five years ago?" the pastor said. "And you had some sort of spiritual encounter?"

"Yes! It was so amazing," she said.

"And how do you share the good news with unbelievers? What's the message you tell them?"

"I tell them about Jesus being the Son of God, how He died on the cross for sin, so if anyone who receives Him into their hearts will go to heaven."

"I see," the pastor said. "I'm sorry, but we can't support you."

"What?" The missionary was shocked. "Why not???"

"Because that's not what we believe."

"It isn't? Isn't this a Bible church? Aren't you Evangelicals?"

"Yes. But here's the problem. What you just shared is very confusing. It's not a clear saving message. We only support missionaries who share the gospel clearly."

We'll return to that conversation in a moment. But for now, did *you* notice anything unclear with what the missionary said?

If you were an unbeliever hearing about Christianity for the first time, would you think that her message was clear?

How about some other popular "evangelistic" phrases?

"If you want to be saved, you need to ask Jesus into your heart."

"If you want to know the Lord, then won't you come forward today?"

"You can go to heaven, if you just say this Sinner's Prayer."

"If you want to be saved you need to believe in Jesus with your heart, not just your head."

"It isn't enough to just *mentally* believe in Him, you also have to *trust* Him!"

Haven't we all *heard* altar calls like this? Maybe you've even *shared* one of those messages with an unbeliever? Do you think they're clear?

I don't.

Think Like a Baby

Having two toddlers has made me very self-aware of how I explain the things of God to them. It's so easy for them to misunderstand. You have to be extremely clear and simple.

So imagine if you told a little child that in order to be saved, they had to *ask Jesus into their hearts*.

How would they understand that?

She would think that Jesus must be very small to fit inside a heart. Or He might be like Santa Clause, able to magically slide down very narrow places.

She would probably wonder what it felt like to have Jesus in there. After all, it would feel like *something*, wouldn't it? But what? She wouldn't be sure.

If she *didn't* feel anything, she might wonder if she did something wrong. Or, she might ask Jesus to come

into her heart again and again and again, just to be sure.

If she *did* feel something, but later lost that feeling, she would wonder if she had done something to upset Jesus to make Him leave. She might wonder why Jesus didn't love her like the other kids in church.

And then, after years of seeking an experience but never having a consistent one, after years of deviating between faith and doubt and never being sure if Jesus was really in her heart, the grown up child might give up on Christianity altogether. All because she never heard, understood, or believed a clear gospel message.

The Reason Why It Is Confusing

So back to the conversation with the missionary.

Why did the pastor say her message was unclear?

Compare her message to one from Jesus' own ministry.

The Lord was having a conversation with a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus about how to be born again. Nicodemus didn't know the truth about how to have eternal life. So Jesus told him:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

So simple. So clear. So powerful.

If you *believe* in Jesus, you *have everlasting life*, and won't ever *perish*.

It's that simple.

Now can you see why the missionary's message was unclear?

She didn't explain any of the essential elements of the message of life!

First, she didn't explain what we are supposed to do: *believe* in Jesus.

Second, she didn't explain what we are believing in Jesus for: *everlasting life*.

Third, she didn't explain when we get eternal life: *believers have it as a present possession*.

Fourth, she didn't explain that what we get is permanent: *believers shall never perish*.

The young missionary missed every single one of those points. She didn't make any of the elements of the promise of life clear in her testimony or in her evangelistic message.

"If no one ever made it clear to you where you're going, or how to get there, how would you know if you've arrived?"

Yes, she spoke about *giving her life to Christ* and *receiving Jesus into your heart*. But that's not at all the same as telling people to *believe* in Him.

Yes, she wanted to tell people that Jesus is the Son of God. That's good. But you can believe *that* and also believe in *salvation by works*.

She spoke about going to heaven. That's good. Believers *will* go to heaven (for a while...until the Millennium and the New Earth). But you can believe *that* and deny (or not know) that everlasting life is both a present possession that it can never be lost

She wanted the lost to feel Jesus' special presence. The Christian life should be one of joy and abundance. But someone could have fuzzy feelings about Jesus and think their eternal relationship with God depends on doing religious works, instead of believing in Him.


What the missionary said wasn't necessarily wrong, but it wasn't clearly true. And it definitely wasn't evangelistic. In fact, it left out all the essential elements of an evangelistic message.

Jesus Is Our Model

When we don't share a clear gospel message, using plain English, the result can be disastrous. Generations of Christians are left confused about the only condition for eternal salvation. And since they never know what the condition is, they can't believe it, or be sure if they've ever met it. Instead of certainty, what they get is anxiety and doubts.

If no one ever made it clear to you where you're going, or how to get there, how would you know if you've arrived? Obviously, you wouldn't!

Eternity is no different. The lost need clear directions. So do doubting Christians.

Is that why you doubt your salvation? Have you believed the clear message of life? Will you believe it now? 

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society.

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Why the Emphasis on “Father” in John’s Gospel?

By Bill Fiess


The first member of the Trinity is referred to as *the Father* throughout the New Testament. However, while we might expect the usages to be fairly uniform from book to book, they are not. There are less than ten uses in most of the books of the New Testament.

Luke and 1 John have over 25 uses each.

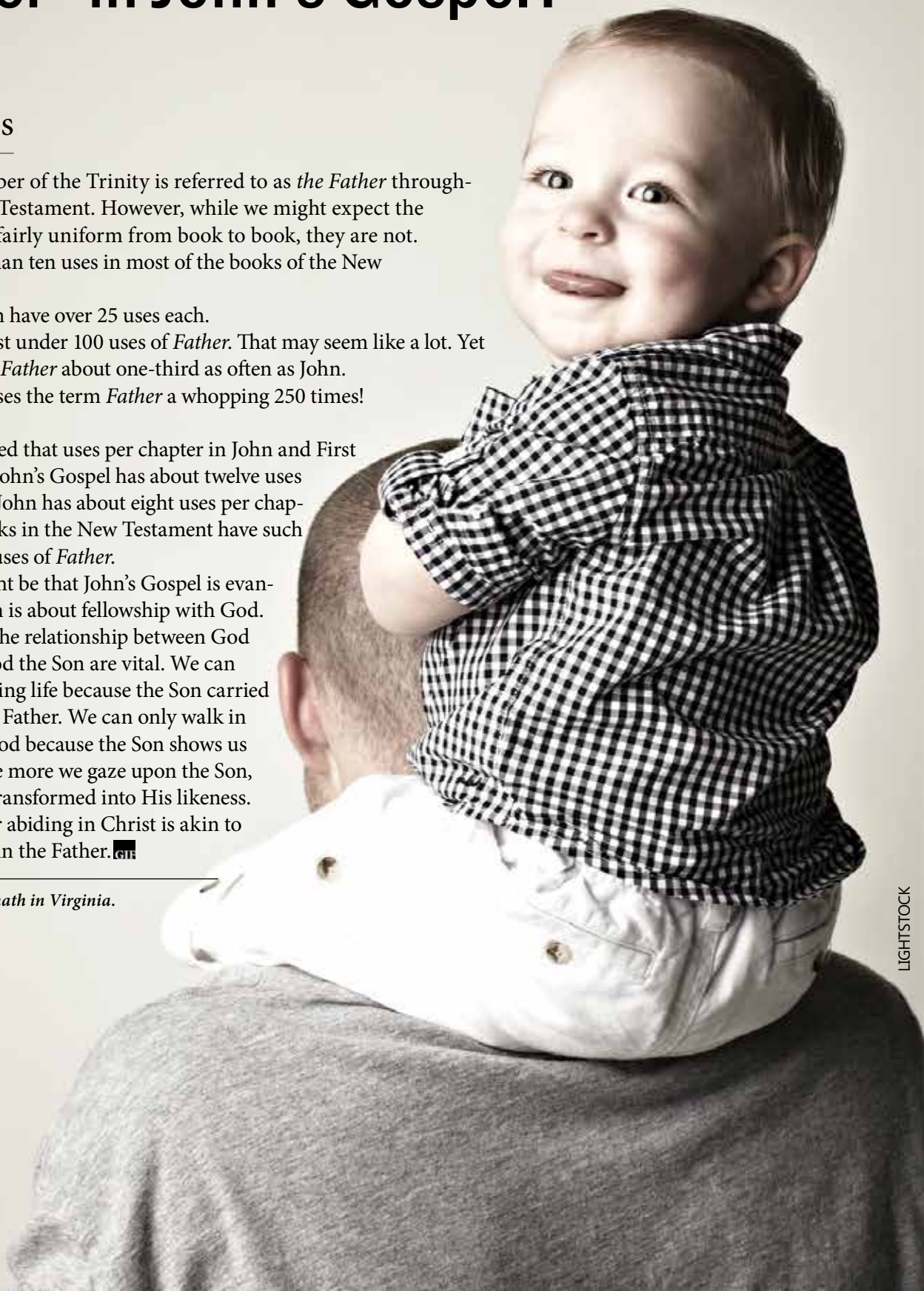
Matthew has just under 100 uses of *Father*. That may seem like a lot. Yet Matthew uses *the Father* about one-third as often as John.

John’s Gospel uses the term *Father* a whopping 250 times! Why?

It should be noted that uses per chapter in John and First John are similar. John’s Gospel has about twelve uses per chapter. First John has about eight uses per chapter. No other books in the New Testament have such high per chapter uses of *Father*.

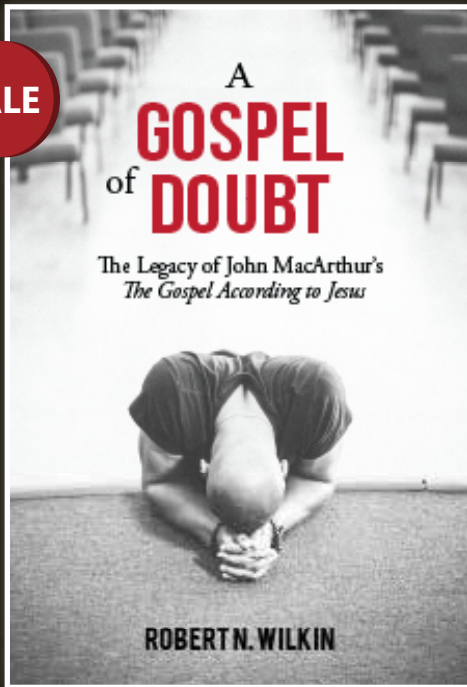
The reason might be that John’s Gospel is evangelistic and 1 John is about fellowship with God. For both themes the relationship between God the Father and God the Son are vital. We can only have everlasting life because the Son carried out the will of the Father. We can only walk in fellowship with God because the Son shows us the Father and the more we gaze upon the Son, the more we are transformed into His likeness. And of course our abiding in Christ is akin to the Son’s abiding in the Father. 

Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia.



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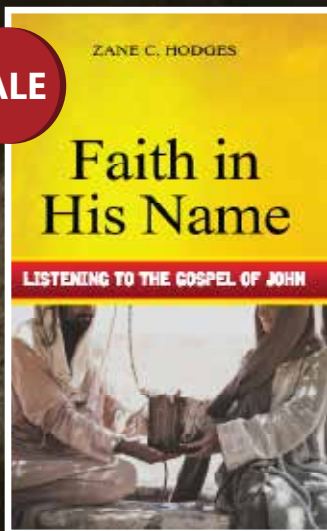
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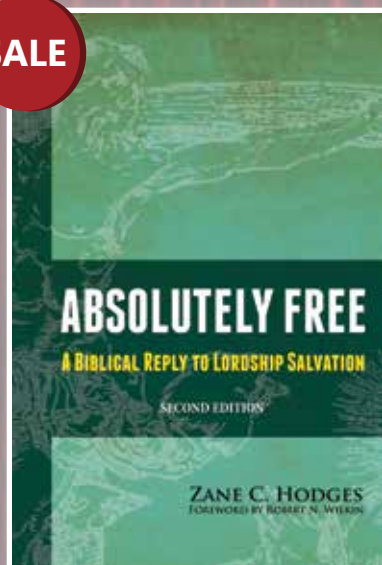
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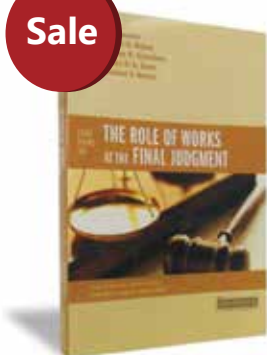
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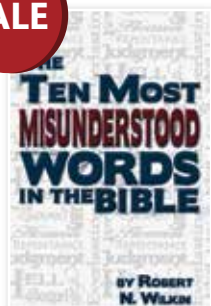
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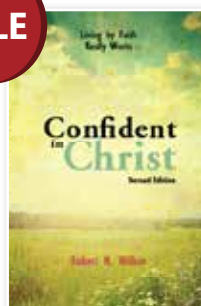
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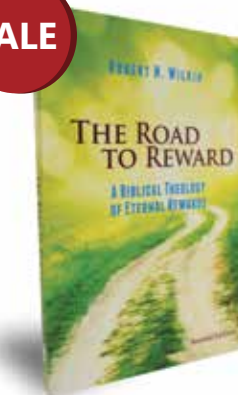
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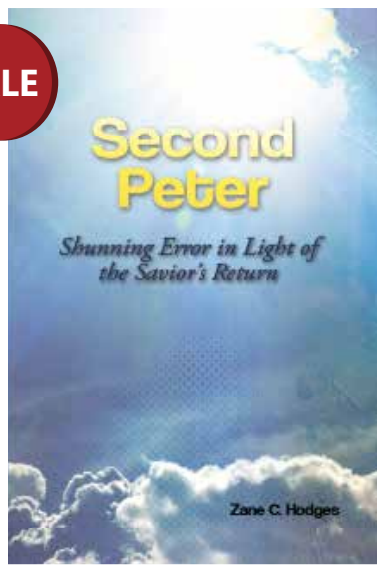
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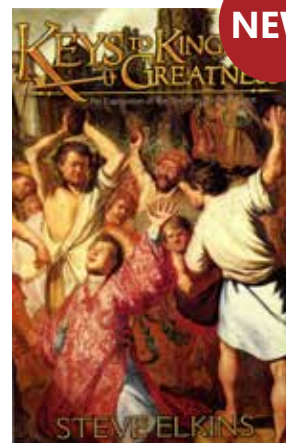
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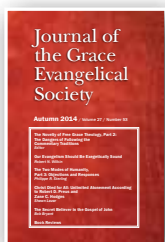
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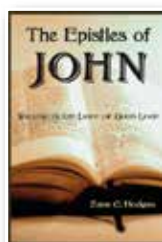
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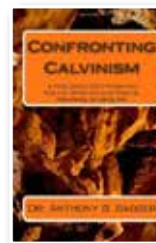
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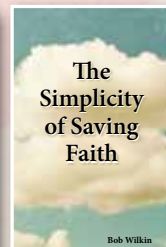
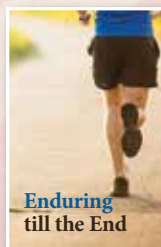
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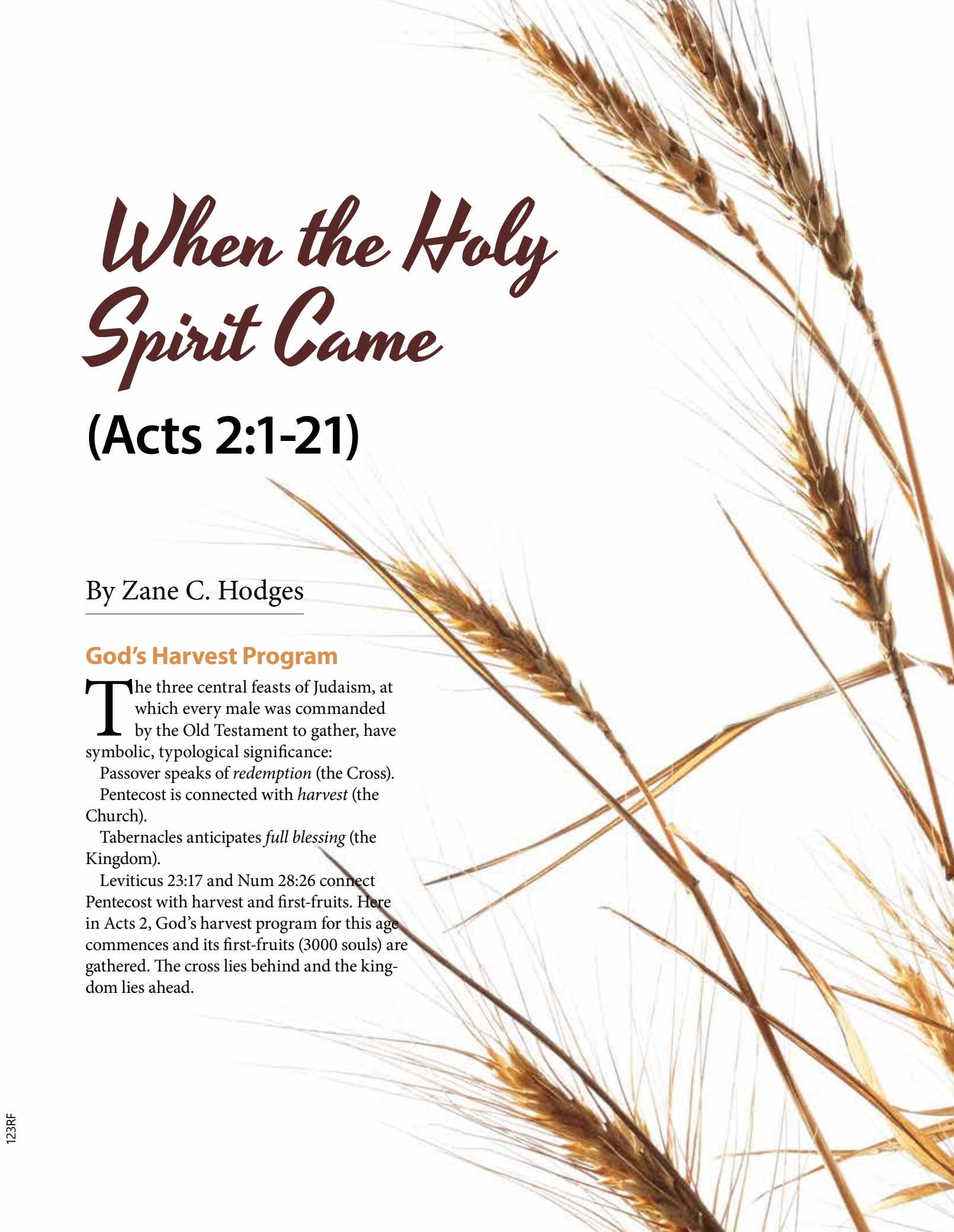
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When the Holy Spirit Came

(Acts 2:1-21)

By Zane C. Hodges

God's Harvest Program

The three central feasts of Judaism, at which every male was commanded by the Old Testament to gather, have symbolic, typological significance:

Passover speaks of *redemption* (the Cross).

Pentecost is connected with *harvest* (the Church).

Tabernacles anticipates *full blessing* (the Kingdom).

Leviticus 23:17 and Num 28:26 connect Pentecost with harvest and first-fruits. Here in Acts 2, God's harvest program for this age commences and its first-fruits (3000 souls) are gathered. The cross lies behind and the kingdom lies ahead.

“Filling is an experience especially to be expected of those who are submerged in the Spirit. Though supernatural and sovereignly bestowed, it nevertheless comes upon prepared vessels.”

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

2:1. They were all with one accord. Unity of heart characterizes those gathered. Thus the Spirit falls upon them to create that permanent unity which is the Church (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4-6). It is as though they had, through prayer and waiting on the Lord, drawn so closely together that God is pleased to make their union an eternal one. Their spiritual unity made natural the fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit. (God may fulfill His promises when we are prepared to receive them.)

2:2. The **wind** is an apt picture of the Spirit, invisible yet known by its effects. We can feel it, even as the Spirit is felt breathing upon our hearts and lives. We can see it bend the trees, even as the Spirit bends stubborn souls to the will of God.

Rushing in this verse is, *pheromonēs*. This verb is used in 2 Pet 1:17-18, 21 for the voice of God and of prophetic inspiration. The symbolism here probably has to do with the outpouring of the prophetic gift (cf. 2:17-18). In the words, **It filled all the house where they were sitting**, we seem to have a plain allusion to the filling of the Spirit (cf. v 4).

2:3. Divided tongues, as of fire. The Spirit imparts tongues that are ablaze with God’s truth (cf. Jer 5:14). Here a reference to the gift of tongues as symbolized by “tongues” of “fire” is manifest in context. Hence I would take *diamerizomenai* (KJV “cloven”) as either middle “dividing (themselves)” or, more likely, passive “being divided.” The visual image described may be that of a flickering flame with its apparently multiple tips. Symbolically the fact of the individuals whose tongues speak more than one language is suggested.

What Was Spoken by Joel

2:4-13. Languages originated in the dispersion of the nations at the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). The Jewish race, exhibiting the same pride and self-will as the nations, was similarly dispersed when Jerusalem, like Babel, was destroyed. Hence they participated

through dispersion in the Gentile confusion of tongues.

The question, “whatever could this mean?” (Acts 2:12) finds its answer in the sign character of the gift of tongues (1 Cor 14:20-22). Tongues were expressly given as a sign to the Jewish people of God’s power and willingness to overcome the effects of their dispersion.

The Jews from the many nations represented here might have been re-gathered according to Old Testament promise had they believed in Jesus as the Messiah. These Jews were ideal representatives of the dispersion, being **devout men** (v 5) and from **every nation under heaven** (v 5). It was an ideal occasion for the presentation of this offer, yet—although 3000 were converted—increasingly the nation rejected God’s offer of grace and re-gathering. Hence, to this day, Israel’s Babel-like dispersion (actually initiated by Babylon) continues and the Jews of the world are still to be found speaking the many tongues of the nations. But, though Israel refused to be gathered, God is gathering others nonetheless (John 11:52).

Modern claims to the gift of tongues lack evidence that the gift is being used for its stated purpose as a sign to Israel (1 Cor 14:20-22).

Though the baptism of the Spirit evidently occurs here, it is not specifically mentioned. None of the phenomena are synonymous with it. (Nor need these be repeated when a soul is so baptized. If it is wrong to insist that one being baptized with the Holy Spirit hear a noise of wind, or see a tongue of fire, it is also wrong to insist that he must speak in tongues.) The baptism of the Spirit, here as well as in our experience,

is invisible—unseen, unfelt by human sense, totally supernatural. It is important to see that it was so from the first.

Had the special, supernatural events here recorded not taken place, the disciples might never have realized that it was then that the promise of the baptism was fulfilled. They might have been baptized without knowing it. We do not need these signs now, for we believe we have been baptized by the Spirit on the basis of the Word

“We do not these
signs now, for we
believe we have been
baptized by the Spirit
on the basis of the
Word of God.”

of God. These were but the tokens and evidences of the Spirit’s presence. The central message to us of this passage lies, not in the unique and special sign-gift of tongues, but in the power of the Spirit to transform timid men and women into bold witnesses of the Savior.

The special manifestation of the Spirit’s presence here was not the unseen baptism, but Spirit-filled men speaking in languages otherwise unknown to them. This filling seems both here and elsewhere in Luke/Acts to be mainly a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit by which the filled person becomes His mouthpiece (cf. esp., Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17 with 9:20; 13:9).

The filling of the Spirit is distinct from the baptism, yet related. An empty glass submerged (baptized) in water will be filled by it. So

here, although they are waiting for the baptism specifically (cf. Acts 1:5), yet when it comes they are filled (2:4). They were empty of self, open to God, waiting on Him in prayer, united in heart (2:1), and thus ready to be filled. Filling is an experience especially to be expected of those who are submerged in the Spirit. Though supernatural and sovereignly bestowed, it nevertheless comes upon prepared vessels.

Note how Peter has scarcely begun to speak when he begins to pour forth the Scripture. The quoted passage, verses 17-21, is the longest quotation of Old Testament in Acts. Note also verses 25-28 and 30, 31, 34, and 39 for quotations or allusions to the Word. The Apostle is full of the Spirit and hence full of the Word. The experience recorded here finds illustration in John 2:1-11. For 3 1/2 years, and then intensively for 40 days (1:3), our Lord had filled the stone water pots of their hearts with the water of His Word, supplied through His servants the prophets. Now on the day of Pentecost the mysterious miracle occurs and the water of the Word is transformed into the wine of the Spirit. The joys of salvation are partaken of by 3000 on that day. “These men are full of new wine.” Wrong, yet right. They were full of the new wine of the Spirit freshly poured out from heaven (cf. Luke 5:37-39).

Peter Speaks (Acts 2:14-18)

2:14. The only personal reference on Peter’s part from verses 14-36 is in this verse, **hearken to my words**. He dwells not at all upon his personal experience or inner feelings. (He does not even bother

to deny their charge as to himself, saying **These are not drunken** not “I am not” v 15.) He speaks only the Word of God, only of Christ throughout. Preoccupation with our inner experience of the Spirit is not a sign of His influence, but occupation with Christ and His Word is. Moreover, he appeals not at all to the supernatural wind, or the cloven tongues of fire, or any of the other supernatural phenomena; instead he appeals directly to the Word of God (v 16). Spiritual experiences are validated only by the Word.

2:15-16. It was no accident that the Holy Spirit descended in **the third hour of the day** (v 15). For it was the Third Person of the Triune God Who had come to earth. Moreover, this was, in a sense, the *third hour* of Israel’s historic *day*. God’s presence was manifested among His people by means of:

- The Shekinah glory (Old Testament)
- The Incarnation (Gospels)
- The coming of the Spirit (Acts)

Thus successively we have the presence of the Father (cf. Matt 17:5 for the Father’s connection with the cloud of glory), the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The patience of God is revealed in this. The Shekinah glory was driven away by Israel’s sin (cf. Ezekiel), the Son was crucified and yet, here, the Spirit is poured out in the Church as a witness to Israel. It was the third hour of Israel’s day and it was also the last hour of opportunity before the judgment of God (cf. the quoted prophecy of Joel, esp. vv 19, 20). These were the “last days” (v 17). Though 1900 years have passed in the long-suffering of

God, all 1900 have been in character and quality the “last days.” The final stage of history for this age is here.

2:17-18. These verses contain a hint of the broader outreach of the gospel. Note **all flesh** in verse 17, implying Gentiles; and then observe:

- Jews (**your sons; your daughters; your young men; and your old men**)
- Gentiles (**my servants; my handmaidens**)

The *doulos* and *doulas* imply ownership. Thus God is to pour out His Spirit ultimately upon all who belong to Him. (Christians all are bondslaves and bondmaidens of the Lord, bought out of sin’s slave market, 1 Cor 6:19-20).

Note that by the Spirit Peter adds to the quotation the word, **My** which is not found in Joel, yet it is true to Joel; for “the servants” and “the handmaids” of Joel 2:29 are such as belong to God. The original prophecy leaves scope for both those who were servants *socially* and those who were servants *spiritually*. Often in the early Church converts were both. A religion of slaves some might call it.

Note that the concept of **all flesh** is amplified by the fact that the Spirit is poured out without distinction of:

- Gender: your sons and your daughters.
- Age: your young men and your old men
- Station: servants and handmaidens

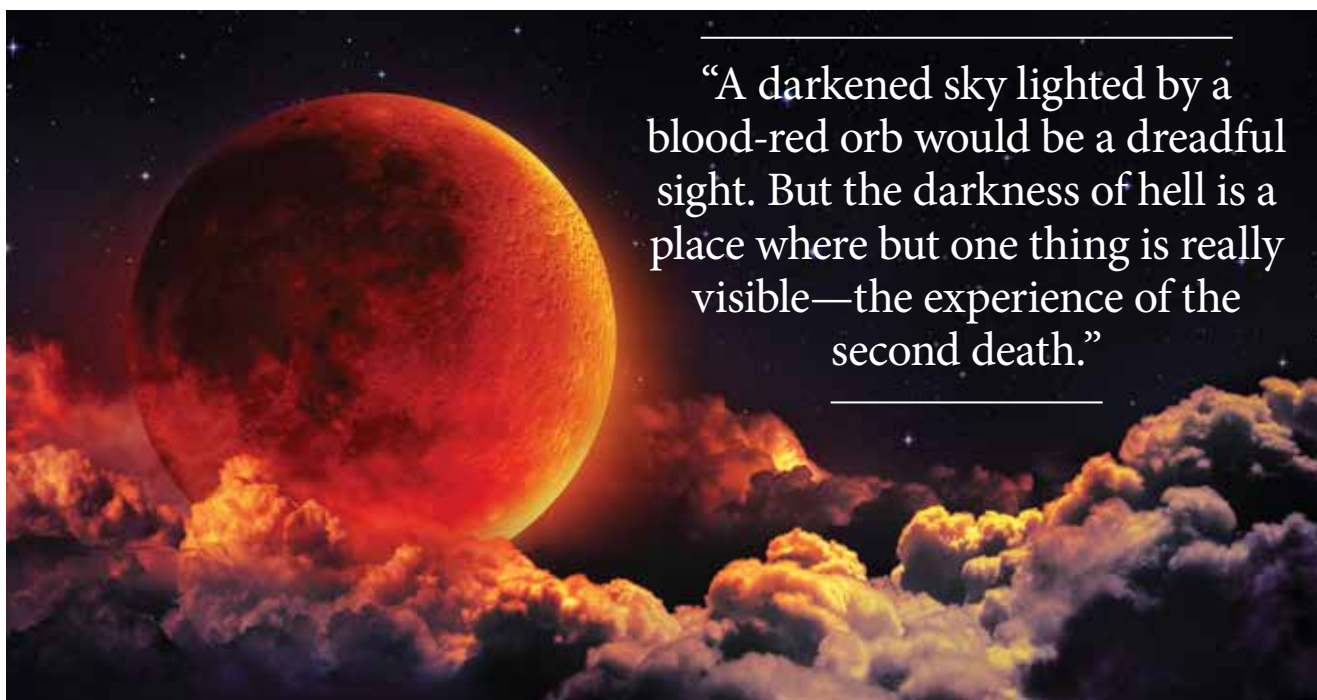
Observe the distinction between young men and old men in terms of **visions** and **dreams**. A vision may be seen when we are awake.

Dreams come when we are asleep. In old age men tend to rest and sleep more, young men are vigorous and active. Thus the two terms suggest a basic difference in temperament. Dreams, moreover, spring out of our experience, being constructed out of various components of things we have seen, heard, felt, etc. The old man tends to know God’s will in terms of past experience, while the young man tends to know it in terms of a “vision” of what can be done for God and what God can do. The Christian Church needs the vision of its young men, tempered by the caution and experience of its old men. (Dreams in the Bible are often warnings. Hence they are naturally linked to the caution born of experience.)

The Spirit’s coming is inseparable from witness (cf. Acts 1:8, Acts 2:4 and John 15:26-27). Note that witness is His effect upon the sons and daughters (**shall prophesy**, v 17), upon servants and handmaidens (**and they shall prophesy**—a phrase added by Peter, v 18). Note also that the prophecy divides naturally into a threefold division, each of which contains two groups:

- Sons and daughters
- Young men and old men
- Servants and handmaidens

The numbers 2 and 3 together are significant of witness. “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established” (Deut 19:15). Note that we have, in these divisions, two or three witnesses. The sons and daughters and the servants and handmaidens are specifically said to bear witness in prophesying. But we may infer that the old men and young men will do the same; for they are most



“A darkened sky lighted by a blood-red orb would be a dreadful sight. But the darkness of hell is a place where but one thing is really visible—the experience of the second death.”

likely to tell forth what they have seen in visions and dreams. If the Spirit came to bear witness, and He indwells us, it is most natural that we should become witnesses. Witness was the first evident effect of His coming in Acts 2.

2:19-20. Witness brings responsibility to men and portends judgment to those who reject it. Thus the prophecy of Joel moves from the thought of testimony through an outpoured Spirit, to that of the judgment of the day of the Lord in these verses. The fearful signs here given will announce the imminent arrival of the Lord in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (cf. 2 Thess 1:7-9).

It is therefore clear that these signs announce the everlasting doom of those yet unsaved. Hence they may be viewed as symbolic of eternal judgment. Note:

1. **Blood**—symbol of death; the first step to eternal doom (Heb 9:27).
2. **Fire**—symbol of divine punishment; clearly turning our minds to hell, the lake of fire.
3. **Vapor of smoke**—symbol of torment (cf. Rev 14:11). Fire without smoke is not burning anything. Smoke signals that fire is affecting something which therefore is feeling its intensity and effect. Thus smoke fittingly suggests the effect of eternal fire upon those who are in it, i.e., tormenting them (cf. Luke 16:23-24).
4. **The sun shall be turned into darkness**—symbol of the “blackness of darkness forever.” Hell is the place where men who have turned their backs on the Light of the World will suffer the agony of an eternal night.

5. **And the moon into blood**—second reference to blood; symbol of death, hence a symbol of the “second death.” A darkened sky lighted by a blood-red orb would be a dreadful sight. But the darkness of hell is a place where but one thing is really visible—the experience of the second death. (If we could see souls in hell, we would indeed see them conscious and existing. For whereas the first death is an experience producing unconsciousness, the second death is a conscious experience of death. But whereas they exist, there is nothing worth existing for, whereas they are conscious, there is nothing worth being conscious of. To such a sight one might well respond, “these exist, but do not live.” For there is nothing here that deserves the name of life. This is the second death.)

Blood, fire, vapor of smoke are doubtless signs **in the earth beneath** and represent the *physical* side of eternal judgment. The moon and sun are signs **in heaven above** and represent the *spiritual* side of eternal judgment.

Calling On His Name

2:21. Calling upon the name of the Lord is distinct from saving faith (Rom 10:12-15). There are five steps revealed in Rom 10:12-15:

1. Sending of preacher (v 15)
2. Preaching (v 15)
3. Hearing (v 14)
4. Believing (v 14)
5. Calling (v 13)

Verse 21 is not to be removed from its context. When the cataclysms of verses 19 and 20 are taking place—the world seeming to be on the verge of destruction—it would be natural to cry out: “Lord save me!” But the unregenerate cannot truly do this. “How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?” (Rom 10:14).


When Paul stood before Festus he “appealed” to Caesar (Acts 25:11), a privilege granted to citizens of Rome, but not to mere provincials. The verb is the same here, *epikalesēai*. Christians became known as those who “called upon” the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 9:14, 21; 1 Cor 1:2). Christians recognized a higher authority than Caesar, and a

greater throne than his. They were citizens of a heavenly city—and just as the Roman citizen appealed over the head of subordinate judges—so Christians appealed over the head of every earthly judge to the Judge of all. Their Lord and Savior sat on the right hand of the majesty on high. (Likewise we, in time of need, can appeal above earthly injustice, or above the circumstances of life—we call on the name of the Lord.) Stephen (Acts 7:59) is the first illustration of this privilege. Condemned and executed by an earthly court, he appealed for acceptance in the presence of a higher Judge. (Is Stephen’s the first soul to go directly to heaven?) Thus “calling on the name of the Lord” is a privilege of those who are already citizens of heaven.

It will be of no avail—as it would have been of no avail to a Roman provincial to appeal to Caesar—for the unregenerate in their hour of need to appeal to God. (Of course God has ever the prerogative to hear, but the unsaved crier has no claim to be heard. No doubt Caesar could have heard a slave’s appeal if he had desired.) In the day predicted by Joel many will no doubt desire deliverance, but the right of appeal will belong alone to those who first have put faith in that name. “How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?”

Hence, Joel 2:32 seems to link the deliverance particularly with

the (believing) remnant. They will be rescued from the catastrophes taking place at that time.

The great privilege of Christianity is the right of the believer in all circumstances to appeal to, call upon, the name of our Lord Jesus to whom all authority in heaven and on earth is given. It is the right of heavenly citizenship. Appeal to Caesar was necessarily a public act. So the concept of “appealing to” or “calling upon” the name of the Lord Jesus appears to be interwoven with the public profession of that name (Acts 9:14, 21 and Rom 10:10-13). Peter’s quotation from Joel’s prophecy sets forth that privilege in its most primitive form. For, at this stage, the Second Coming to establish the kingdom was theoretically possible for that generation (cf. 1:6-7). Thus all of the cataclysms foretold by Joel could have occurred and believers could have “called on the name of the Lord” for deliverance from them. But verse 21 is still true on many levels, quite apart from the Tribulation catastrophes. 

Zane C. Hodges taught Greek and NT Exegesis at Dallas Seminary. He went to be with the Lord in 2008. This is from his forthcoming commentary, The Acts of the Risen Christ.



Words of Life in John 6

By Ken Yates

In John 6:26ff, the Lord has an extended conversation with a large crowd of Jews. Some of the things Jesus says are easy to understand. He says that it is the will of the Father that all who believe in Him may have eternal life and that Jesus will raise the believer up on the last day (6:40). In 6:47 He says that everyone who believes has eternal life. The verb “has” is in the present tense, which means that eternal life is the possession of the believer at the moment of faith. It is not something the believer has to wait for in order to acquire later.

It is clear that in these verses Jesus guarantees eternal life to anybody who believes in Him for it. Such a promise and such words are certainly words of life. They give a life that will never end, and cannot be lost, to anybody who hears and believes them.

However, in this conversation Jesus also says some things that are more difficult to understand. But as the rest of the conversation makes clear, they are also words of life.

Eating the Bread from Heaven

After saying that He is the living bread that came down from heaven, Jesus tells the Jews that in order to have life they must eat His flesh and drink His blood (vv 51-53). The audience finds these words hard to comprehend. They recognize that Jesus cannot literally give His flesh for them to eat (v 52), and in verse 60 they say that what He just said is a “difficult statement.” They wonder who can understand it?





LIGHTSTOCK

While many have seen an allusion to the Lord's Supper in Jesus' words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, this is not likely. When Jesus spoke these words the Lord's Supper had not yet been instituted. It is clear from the passage that the Lord is using the phrases "to eat my flesh" and "to drink my blood" as metaphors for believing the words that He speaks. When one believes Jesus, it is as if they are "eating" Him by taking His words in.

In verse 63, Jesus makes it clear that He does not *literally* mean that one must eat His flesh and drink His blood. It is not the eating of His literal flesh or drinking His literal blood that gives life. Instead, it is the words of Christ that give life. In fact, He says that the literal flesh is of no profit.

In the context, Jesus is speaking about the gift of eternal life. When one believes in the promise of Christ for eternal life, he or she appropriates that gift, in the same way one would eat or drink

something. The Jews who were listening to Jesus took His illustration too literally.

Eating Is Also a Metaphor for Abiding

It is tempting for a believer to look at John 6 and conclude that Jesus' words do not have any ongoing relevance in one's life because they have already appropriated the gift of eternal life. In this sense, he or she has already eaten the flesh of Christ and drunk His blood. The believer has a life that he or she cannot lose. Such a person has already learned that the words of Jesus are indeed life.

However, a closer look at the words of the Lord show they have a double significance. John hints at this by recording the Lord saying those who eat His flesh and drink His blood "abide" in Him (v 56).

For John, the abiding relationship the believer can have with the Lord involves more than simply receiving eternal life as a gift

of God's grace through faith. It involves growing in that life. The believer can experience life in an abundant way (John 10:10).

In the Upper Room, after Judas leaves, Jesus tells the believing disciples that if they love Him and keep His word both the Father and Jesus will make their "abode" with them (14:23). Later, He will tell them that if they "abide" in Him, they will experience answered prayer and bear much fruit (15:7-8).

Abiding in Christ, then, involves loving Him and keeping His words. This is something believers can do. If they do, they will experience eternal life in an abundant way.

John 6 supports this notion. Jesus tells those hearing His words that if they eat His flesh and drink His blood they will abide in Him. But, as we have already seen, eating His flesh and drinking His blood means to believe His words.

Jesus certainly spoke words that involved more than believing in Him for eternal life. He spent three

years teaching the Twelve and often spoke of things that accompany eternal salvation.

The Lord's Teachings Can Be Difficult

In John 6, Jesus speaks to mixed crowd that included unbelievers. The Lord also makes this clear in verse 64 by saying that “some” of the crowd did not believe. Many of these unbelievers quit following Him because His words were hard to understand.

But the crowd also included some believers. John 6 also tells us that the Twelve were a part of those who heard the words of Jesus (v 67). Among the Twelve was Peter, who was clearly a believer.

One can imagine Peter listening to the words of the Lord on this occasion. As is well known, the disciples, including Peter, often had a hard time understanding what the Lord taught them. In verse 67, the Lord asks Peter and the other eleven if they also will quit following Him.

From this verse we see that a believer can find the Lord's teachings so difficult that he or she can choose to quit following Him. Such a decision would involve no longer listening to Him, trying to understand Him, or obeying the things He teaches.

If Peter had been completely up front with the Lord at this time, he no doubt would have said that he did not understand many of the things the Lord was teaching. John does not record if he did so. But John does record two things that Peter said.

First, Peter acknowledged that he and the other eleven had nowhere else to go. Second, Peter

acknowledged that only Jesus had the words of eternal life (v 68).

Since Peter already had eternal life, he didn't mean he would stay with Jesus to obtain salvation from hell. Peter is making a profound statement. The words of Jesus are life. This is true if they are telling an unbeliever to believe in Jesus for eternal life, or if they are telling a believer how to have abundant life.

When a believer reads and studies the words of the Lord, that believer is hearing words that can

“Abiding in Christ involves loving Him and keeping His words. This is something believers can do. If they do, they will experience eternal life in an abundant way.”

produce life. They are a source of life in the sense that when obeyed, they produce an abiding relationship with the Lord, where spiritual fruit is produced.

In verse 63, the Lord did not simply say that His words are life, but that they are also “spirit.” The Spirit of God uses the words of the Lord in the life of the believer to produce Christ likeness. This Spirit-produced obedience produces abundant life. Peter understands that the experience of true life could only be found by following Christ.

Words of Abundant Life

The words of our Lord are life. When a person believes in Him for eternal life they receive that wonderful gift.

However, His words keep giving. After we have believed, we can continue to “eat His flesh” and “drink His blood” because His words are spiritual food.

No doubt, some of His teachings are hard to understand and difficult to “swallow.” But, as we hear and obey through the power of the Spirit, we experience true life.

As believers we never get to the point where there is no more to learn, where there are things in our lives the Lord does not want to transform into His image, and where the Scriptures do not challenge us.

And, no doubt, we will find things that we do not understand or do not want to obey. But, if we will endure and allow these words to accomplish their work, we will find, like Peter, that Jesus' words are the words of eternal life to all who accept them. ■

Ken Yates is GES's East Coast Regional Speaker and Editor of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society.

My Testimony

By Gary Edmonson

Without going into too much detail, I'll just briefly outline my experience in all this.

I grew up with almost no knowledge of Jesus Christ and never once attended any church until I was 17 years old, at which time I attended an evangelistic meeting where I was basically manipulated into walking the aisle. They said that if I did not come forward I was saying no to Jesus. I didn't understand the gospel, but I certainly didn't want to say no to Jesus.

After I went forward, they told me I was saved; but I wasn't even sure what that meant and I certainly didn't have assurance of eternal life. However, I was definitely interested in this person Jesus, so I joined a Baptist church down the road and was baptized.

Lordship Salvation was preached at my church and I soon became very confused. I began reading lots of books, most of which taught some form of Lordship Salvation as well. For about the next 3 years I constantly doubted my salvation and was obsessed with trying to verify that I was truly saved—by my commitment, surrender, obedience, etc.—after all, that's what the word "believe" means in the original Greek, right?

All of this had a devastating effect on every area of my life. My friends and family became extremely concerned about me. After about 3 years of constant obsession and introspection, I finally gave up on making any sense of the Bible, and for the sake of my own sanity, I basically turned away from God and did my own thing for the next twenty years or so. I soon found out that "my own thing" was not very pretty!

From time to time I would feel drawn back and would ask God to give me the answer to the question: What must I do to be saved?



To make a long story short, in 1990 I discovered Zane Hodges, Bob Wilkin, and GES—the answer to my prayers! I began devouring all the GES journals, newsletters, and all of Zane and Bob's books. All my questions were finally being answered and the Bible actually started to make sense!

Now I see the beautiful and glorious simplicity of the saving message that I had sought for so long! There is no way you can believe it and not know that you have eternal life—and this assurance is the indispensable foundation of the Christian life! Without it we can never know and experience the love and grace of God. **GLH**

Gary Edmonson went home to be with the Lord on Saturday, August 22, 2015, after a 19-month long battle with lung cancer. He wrote this testimony in 2009 in a blog post. It is used by permission from his family.



THE BATTLEFIELD

By Brad Daskocil

Throughout history there have been many wars and many different battlefields. For example, World War II was fought across forests, deserts, oceans, and jungles. While the battlefields were different, the enemy was the same.

Over the course of the church's history there have been many different contested issues (battlefields). Today, there is an attack upon the inspiration, inerrancy, sufficiency, and interpretation of Scripture. While Christians should expect these to be attacked by the secular unbelieving world, the fact is, there is an assault on these core doctrines from within the church.

Contend Earnestly for the Faith

In the little epistle of Jude, we are warned, “I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed...”

Jude recognized the problem of false teaching back in the first century.

What is interesting, though, is that he informs us that this attack is from within because “certain men have crept in unnoticed.” The Greek verb suggests a thief slipping or creeping in the side door. Basically Jude is calling these men “creeps!” So there are creeps in the midst of the church seeking to subvert it.

Today, the attack of the creeps is upon the inspiration, inerrancy, sufficiency, and interpretation of Scripture. While each of these is slightly different, they all bear on God’s Word.

Let’s look briefly at each one and observe the nature of the attack.

Inspiration Under Fire

Verbal plenary inspiration is the teaching that the Scripture originated with God. God is completely and fully the origin of the Scripture. Second Timothy 3:16 says that “All scripture is God-breathed.” God declared it and it is His message.

How is this teaching under attack?

One example is postmodernism. Bob Wilkin deals with many forms of this in his article “Postmodern Doubts and Theological Education (Part 1).”¹ In his discussion he observes that because postmodern thought denies the existence of absolutes (everything is relative) we logically cannot know whether God exists.

This thinking is a subtle form of denying inspiration. It rejects the idea that God has revealed Himself or that He has spoken. It denies the existence of a coherent message spoken by God. The implications of this are huge. People cannot believe what they do not know to be true!

God wants people to believe Him. No one can have everlasting life apart from belief in Jesus for it. The

writer of Hebrews tells us that no one can please God apart from belief (Heb 11:6).

Inerrancy Under Fire

Inerrancy is the teaching that the Scriptures are without error. All statements and assertions found in Scripture are true and correct. Jesus affirms inerrancy when He said to the Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). It is true; therefore it has no error.

Postmodern proponents openly deny the inerrancy of Scripture. One seminary professor quoted by Wilkin plainly said, “The Bible has errors in it.”

In postmodern thought all truth is relative. Hence, there can be no certainty. For example, one post-

modern theologian says, “We can’t know that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The best we can do is believe.”

Postmodernism has relegated belief to something mystical instead of being persuaded that a proposition is true. It undermines belief and inerrancy at the same time.

Think about the consequences of this in connection with evangelizing.

What are we to say to people? “I am not sure whether I have everlasting life and I can help you be unsure too!” How depressing!

The very gift of everlasting life and its appropriation hinges on the inerrancy of Scripture. We can’t have everlasting life unless and until we believe in Jesus for the everlasting life He promises. Those who encourage doubts, even about whether we can be certain we have everlasting life by faith in Christ’s promise, are doing us no favors. The creeps continue to undermine!

Another stab at inerrancy (whether intentional or not) is found in the Critical Text (CT) of the Greek New Testament.

As many GES readers understand, the CT introduces errors and contradictions into the Bible. Suffice it to say that this attack on inerrancy is subtle and mostly undetected by many unsuspecting people who read their Bibles.²

**“Through the Scriptures
and the indwelling Holy
Spirit every church-age
saint has all that is needed
to live a godly life, one that
is pleasing to the Lord.”**

The Sufficiency of Scripture Under Fire

The sufficiency of Scripture for every Christian to live is also severely under attack. Second Peter 1:3 says, “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him...” God’s power has adequately endowed Christians with all things needed to live a godly life. “All things” are *all things*!

What is suggested here by Peter is that through the Scriptures and the indwelling Holy Spirit every church-age saint has all that is needed to live a godly life, one that is pleasing to the Lord. Once again, we notice that it is impossible to please God apart from belief (Heb 11:6). And Ps 19:7-11 declares the sufficiency of God’s Word to transform a person.

Yet, mystics and proponents of Spiritual Formation, for example, deny this truth. In discussing Spiritual Formation, a Baptist Pastor told me that “God’s Word doesn’t work.” He went on to say that teaching the Bible was inadequate for people to grow spiritually. What is needed are mystical practices so people are enabled to experience God.

Dr. John Coe, a professor at Talbot Seminary, presented a paper at the 2006 Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting. The paper was called, “Spiritual Theology: A Methodology for Bridging the Sanctification Gap.”³ The sanctification gap is the gap between what the Scriptures tell us about sanctification and what we need to know in order to be sanctified. In that paper Coe said, “A Bible-alone approach is inadequate...” By that he did not mean that we need the Bible plus the work of the Spirit of God. He meant that the Bible does not tell us precisely how to be sanctified. To find out how to be sanctified we need what Coe calls the “real life” examples of Christians who learned how to be holy by doing.

These teachers think that God’s Word is not transformative, and they are in Evangelical churches! It makes God’s Word, and believing God’s Word, inconsequential.

Do you see a pattern developing? Each attack undermines belief in God’s Word by claiming it is in some way insufficient. The fact is, these teachers have undermined the belief of some (cf. 2 Tim 2:18).

The Interpretation of Scripture Under Fire


The last leg of the attack is pointed at the interpretation of Scripture. This has many variations. Unfortunately, even many who apply a literal, grammatical, contextual approach waiver because of bias, importing theology or ascribing technical meanings to Biblical words.

Bob Wilkin’s book *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*⁴ is ample evidence of this. I have met numerous people who think the words *save* and *salvation* always refer to going to heaven and not hell.

The term *gospel* has been equally abused to the point where many think it only refers to what one must do to have everlasting life.

These are examples of what I call “Christianese,” jargon that has developed within the church that is unfortunately misleading. Much ink could be devoted to interpretation, but suffice it to say we are charged with rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). We are commanded to interpret the Bible so that we understand exactly what the writer (God) means by what He said. What is the significance of incorrect interpretation? Those who hear might believe the wrong teaching!

Conclusion: Be Bereans

The battlefield has shifted. The attacks today on the Word of God are numerous and pervasive. What are we to do? We are to be Bereans! Like the Bereans of Paul’s day we need to be fair-minded and search the Scriptures to find out whether teachings found in churches today are true (Acts 17:11). 

Brad Doskocil is Chairman of the Board of Directors for Grace Evangelical Society.

1. Bob Wilkin, “Postmodern Doubts and Theological Education (Part 1),” *Grace in Focus* (July/August 2015): 4-9.

2. For more information about this issue, see Wilbur Pickering, “What Difference Does it Make? The Greek Text We Accept Makes a Big Difference,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 2012): 37-65.

3. See the section on Coe’s paper at <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/postmodernism-and-its-impact-upon-theological-education>.

4. Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012).



World Missions and John 3:16

By Jeff Ropp



123RF

“The greatest proof of God’s love is that He would allow His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ to die for the sins of the world.”

I firmly believe that every disciple of Jesus Christ should be concerned about world missions (Matt 28:18-20). When I speak of world missions I am referring to *the sending of authorized believers to people of other faiths to make disciples of Jesus Christ*. John 3:16 gives reasons why we should be involved in world missions.¹ This verse is one of the most familiar verses in all of the Bible. It has been used by God to lead millions of people to Christ. It has sparked revivals around the world and it has motivated families to move to other nations.

A Universal Promise

John 3:16 falls in the middle of a conversation between Jesus and a religious ruler named Nicodemus. Nicodemus thinks that the way to heaven is by living a good life. But Jesus confronts him with the truth that he must be born again by believing in Christ alone for eternal life. It’s not what you do that gets you to heaven, it’s what Christ has already done for you on the cross, and simply believing in Him for everlasting life. Jesus explains further in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Let’s look at the individual parts of this verse which provide six reasons for followers of Christ to be committed to world missions. The first reason is...

1. God loves everyone. Jesus begins with the amazing words, “For God so loved the world.” No one has ever loved to the degree that God has loved. He loved the world. He did not limit His love to one country, culture, or color.

This portion of the verse motivated my family and I to leave our relatives, friends, and home in Des Moines, Iowa, to share God’s love on the other side of the world in the Philippines. Why? Because God loves everyone. He wants to reveal Himself to all nations so they can be in a personal relationship with Him (I Chron 16:23-24). He receives more glory when people from every nation come to know Him.

2. God gave His Son for everyone. Jesus then says, “that He gave His only begotten Son.” World missions is essential because God gave His Son for everyone. God’s love gives sacrificially.

What did He give?

He gave what was most precious to Him—His only begotten Son to die in our place on the cross.

Could you kill your child to save others?

Of course not. Our love is pale compared to God’s love for us.

For example, someone might say to you, “I love you. Here’s my car. I’ll give it to you.” But how do you know that person doesn’t own 20 cars so that giving up one is no sacrifice?

When God says, “I love you. Here’s My perfect and only Son,” that is love. The greatest proof of His love is that He would allow His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ to die for the sins of the world. Jesus not only died for Americans, but also for Asians, Africans, and Australians. His death was for all people everywhere (1 Tim 2:3-6; 1 John 2:2).

3. Jesus’ promise is for everyone. That “whoever” refers to all people on planet earth. World missions is necessary because Jesus’ invitation is for everyone everywhere.

What is Jesus inviting everyone to do?

4. It's as simple as believing. The next phrase, "believes in Him," teaches us that world missions is important because everyone needs such simplicity. Jesus is promising everlasting life to everyone who believes in Him. He did not say whoever does good in the community, or lives an obedient life, or denies himself and follows Me, or confesses his sins, or is baptized, or promises to serve or perseveres in good works. He simply says, "whoever believes."

Too often non-Christians are being instructed to do everything but believe in Jesus Christ alone for everlasting life. Therefore, the world desperately needs to hear such simplicity!

5. The promise is freedom from perishing. When Jesus said, "should not perish," He was referring to the need of all humanity to be rescued. The Bible teaches that all people have sinned (Rom 3:23) and deserve to die forever in the lake of fire (Rom 6:23; Rev 20:15). But Jesus guarantees that when we believe in Him, we shall be rescued from this eternal punishment. God wants all Christians to be involved in the greatest rescue by preaching the gospel of grace to the entire world.

6. The promise is everlasting life. The last phrase in this verse says, "but have everlasting life." Everlasting life is life that lasts forever. It cannot be stolen, lost, or given back. Once a person believes in Jesus, he has everlasting life (compare John 5:24; 6:35, 47; 10:28-29; 11:26). Everlasting life begins when you believe in Him, not when you die or after you die. What could possibly be greater than that?

Do Whatever It Takes

Charles Peace was sentenced to die for being a career criminal in the 19th century. On the morning of his execution, a group of prison officials met at Charles' cell to take him on his final walk to the gallows. Among them was a sleepy prison chaplain whose job it was to prepare the condemned man's soul for the hereafter. But the chaplain didn't say a word

to Charles. He just yawned and mumbled as he read a religious book.

Charles then tapped him on the shoulder and asked him, "What are you reading?"

"*The Consolations of Religion*," the chaplain replied.

Charles asked, "Do you believe what you are reading?"

The chaplain responded, "Well, yes, I guess I do."

Charles stared at the chaplain stunned. Here Charles was going to his death, knowing that his earthly deeds utterly condemned him before the Ultimate Judge, and this chaplain was mouthing words about heaven and hell as if they were a boring chore.

Charles said to the chaplain, "Sir, if I believed what you and the church of God say that you believe, even if England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast, I would walk over it, if need be, on hands and knees and think it worthwhile living, just to save one soul from an eternal hell like that!"

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." If we believe this verse is true, what are we willing to do to place it in the hands and hearts of those who are perishing without Jesus Christ? Are we willing to do whatever it takes for others to believe in Jesus for eternal life? ■

Jeff Ropp and his wife and daughters serve as missionaries in the Philippines.

1. There are many ways to be involved in missions, including becoming a full-time missionary, going on short-term missions trips, giving money for missions, praying, evangelizing international students who are in our country for training, etc.

Mail

By You

The Free Grace community can seem tiny (mostly because it is!), but send us a letter, and we'll publish it so people in your home state can see they're not alone!

"After reading 'Postmodern Doubts (Part 1),' I'm even more convinced that GES should take a serious look at the formation of a Free Grace seminary."

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"I thank God for your ministry. It has opened my eyes to see that free grace is what the Bible teaches."

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"I credit Dr. Wilkin as the first person I heard to clearly and accurately explain how a person gets eternal life. In many ways God used Dr. Wilkin to change my life, for gaining assurance in my eternal destination, to giving me confidence for reading the Bible for myself and not leaning on pastors or teachers exclusively for interpretations." ~T.P., Minnesota 

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