

GRACE FOCUS

WWW.FAITHALONE.ORG

JULY & AUGUST 2016

Deacons

SERVANTS OF MERCY

(ACTS 6:1-7)

PLUS Will Every Believer Be Praised? / Shine Your Light, Not Your Religion / Boldness and Unity / Edifying Examples / The Younger Generation Cares / Godliness **AND MORE**

CONTENTS

3 From the Editor

4 Will Every Believer Be Praised?

BY BOB WILKIN

**8 Boldness and Unity
(Acts 4:23-37)**

BY ZANE C. HODGES

**14 Shine Your Light,
Not Your Religion**

BY BILL FIESS

**18 Edifying Examples
(Nehemiah 3)**

BY KEN YATES

22 The Younger Generation Cares!

BY KAYLA PESCE

25 The Bookstore

31 The Mailbag

**32 Deacons: Servants of Mercy
(Acts 6:1-7)**

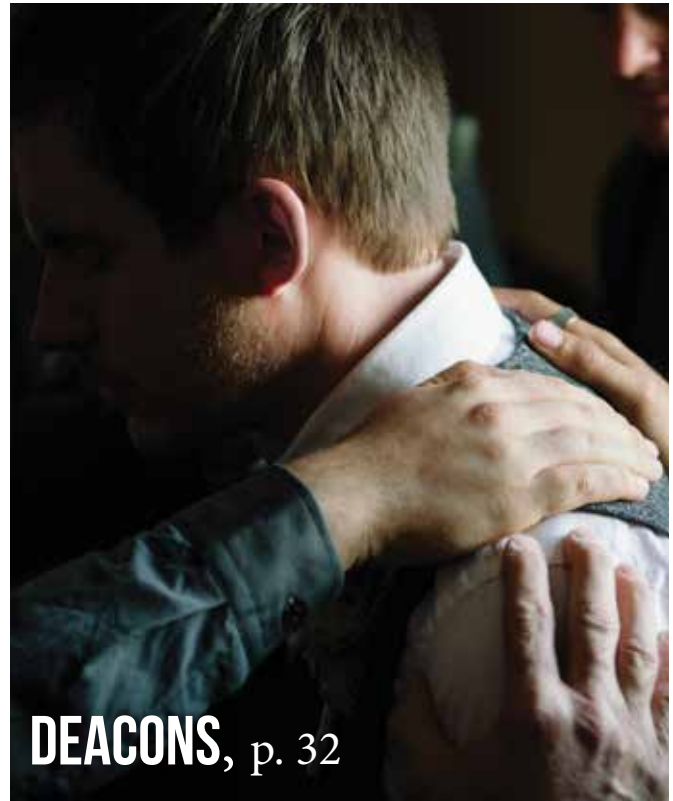
BY SHAWN LAZAR

39 The Building Block of Godliness

BY JOE LOMBARDI

45 Q&A

BY STAFF



GRACE IN FOCUS

Volume 31, Number 4

© 2016, by Grace
Evangelical Society

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Robert N. Wilkin, Ph.D.

EDITOR AND DESIGN

Shawn C. Lazar

OFFICE MANAGER

Bethany Taylor

CIRCULATION

Mark "Fisticuffs" Gray

GRACE IN FOCUS is a free, bimonthly magazine about the gospel, assurance, and related issues. For your free U.S. subscription sign up on our website or send your name and address to **P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202**. If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to offset the costs of printing and postage, it would be greatly appreciated.



Address changes? Comments? Prayer requests? Testimonies?

Send them to ges@faithalone.org. Theological questions? Send them to questions@faithalone.org. Or write to *Grace in Focus*, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202.

FROM THE EDITOR

“Don’t you people believe in doing good works?” I get asked that a lot because, as readers of this magazine know well, the Free Grace movement strongly believes that the only condition of salvation is faith in Jesus.

We preach that eternal life is a free gift, given simply on the basis of believing in Jesus for it.

Works are not necessary in any way, shape, or form.

We can get so adamant about that message that it sometimes leaves people confused, especially if they’ve been taught salvation by works their whole lives.

Most people in Christendom have been taught that good works are absolutely necessary for salvation, either to *earn* it or to *keep* it. And even many churches that officially believe in justification by faith apart from works, actually drill it into their parishioners the belief that you need good works to *prove* that you’ve really believed. No works, no faith, they say.

So when people hear the Free Grace message, they assume we’re against good works and that we favor giving people a license to sin. They make that assumption because, apparently, they can’t imagine what else good works might be good for.

Let me be clear: the Free Grace movement believes in doing good works.

Jesus calls every believer to live for Him, to serve Him, and to be His disciple. We are called to a life of faithfulness. But faithfulness is not a condition of eternal salvation.

This issue of *Grace in Focus* highlights some of the ways the Free Grace movement understands good works.

Bob Wilkin writes about what it takes to receive Jesus’ praise at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Zane Hodges explains the amazing sense of community that existed among the early believers in Acts, and the practical ways they showed their love for one another.

Bill Fiess explores some of the issues related to doing good works in public, rather than in private.

Ken Yates shows how Israel’s coordinated efforts to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls are an example to us in building the Church.




What Are Good Works Good For?

Shawn Lazar, **EDITOR**

Joe Lombardi tells us why godliness is so important for the Christian life.

And I have an article explaining how the need for deacons grew out of the early Christian community’s desire to love and care for their most vulnerable members.

I think you’ll find in these pages confirmation that the Free Grace movement believes in good works. Free Grace is not a license to sin. On the contrary, it’s the liberation to live a godly life free from the fears that accompany salvation by works religion. We do good works, not to earn our salvation, but out of gratitude to God, and because our neighbors actually need our help. 

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "S. Lazar".

Will *Every* Believer Be Praised?

(1 Corinthians 4:5)¹

“Most think that if we confess our sins, then our bad deeds and hidden motives will not be brought up at the Bema. While our sins will not be considered as sins, all our deeds, both good and bad, will be considered.”

By Bob Wilkin

I attended a conference where a main session speaker said that the statement by Paul, “then each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Cor 4:5), shows that every believer will have some good works and will receive at least some praise at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Bema).

I’ve heard that claim on many occasions, both by Free Grace and Lordship Salvation advocates.

Free Grace people sometimes use 1 Cor 4:5 to counter the charge that we believe some believers will perform absolutely zero good works in this life.² They find in this verse proof that all believers will do something worthy of praise, even those who fail to persevere in faith or good works.

Lordship Salvation proponents use this verse to show much more. They suggest that only those who persevere to the end of their lives will be praised by Jesus. Hence if all believers will be praised, then all believers necessarily endure in faith and good works until the end of their lives.

Though I believe both of these views have some aspects of the truth in them, neither is entirely correct.

The Context Is the Bema

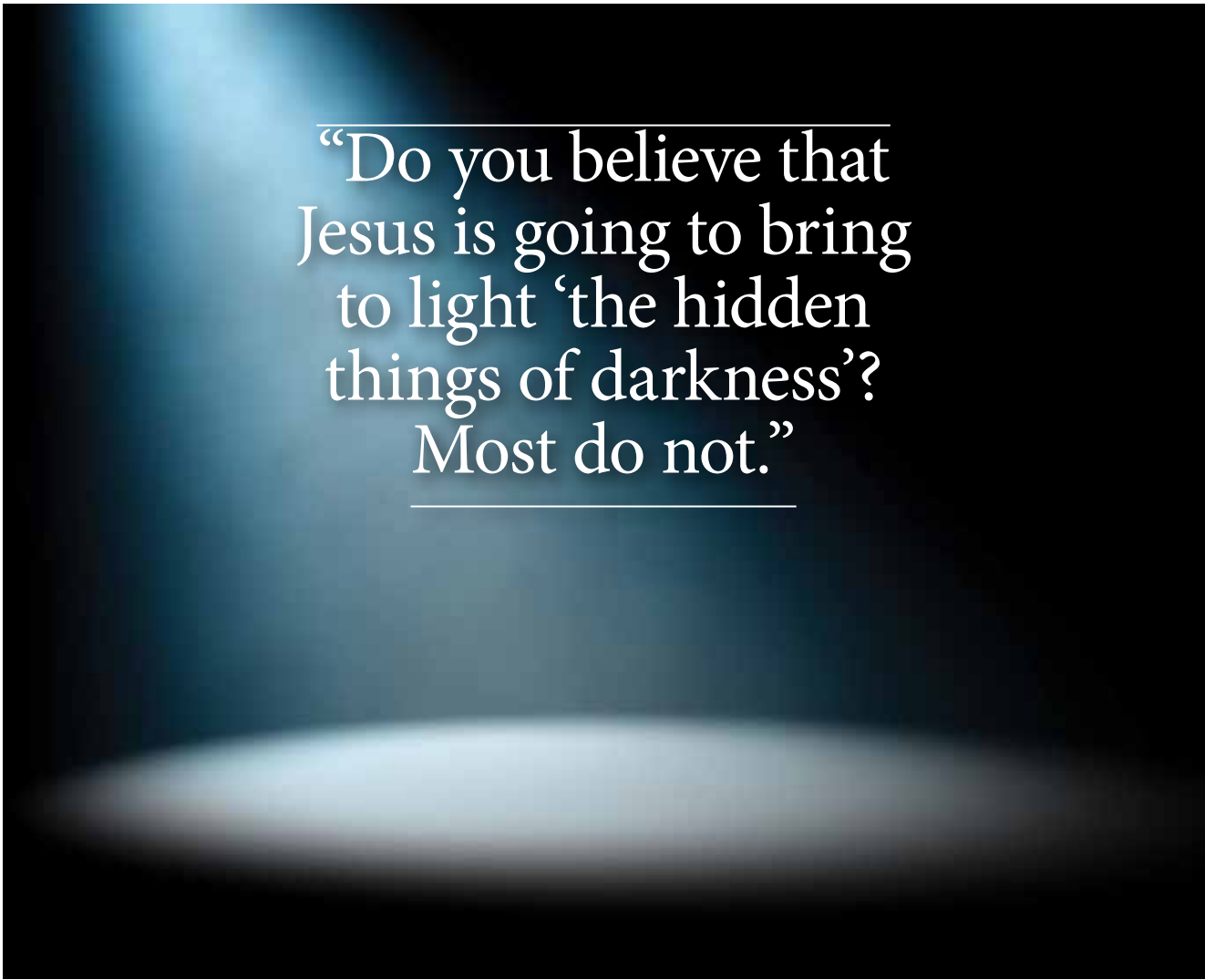
Paul begins in vv 1-2 to speak of Christian stewardship and the requirement that we be found faithful. Then in v 3 Paul says he considers it “a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court [Greek: *hemera* = day].” Paul is alluding to the day of Jesus Christ, that is, the Bema.

This is brought out in vv 4-5. Paul knows that the one who will judge him is the Lord, and this judgment will not occur “until the Lord comes.”

Space doesn’t permit a discussion of the Bema as *the day of the Lord Jesus*. I invite the reader to study all uses of this expression (1 Cor 1:8; 3:13; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8; 1 John 4:17. See also Heb 10:25).³

Believers Are in View

Both views mentioned above are correct in that born-again people are in view. Paul begins this discussion by telling people to “consider us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Clearly the apostle Paul and his coworkers were born again. This whole discussion concerns the future judgment



“Do you believe that
Jesus is going to bring
to light ‘the hidden
things of darkness’?
Most do not.”

123RF

of all servants of Christ. That includes all church-age believers. (Of course, all OT believers will be judged as well. However, this passage concerns church-age believers specifically.)

Comprehensive Judgment Is Pictured

Both views tend to ignore or minimize the words in v 5 which precede “then each one’s praise will come from God.” I believe this is done because the clear meaning of the passed-over words is so sobering that we tend to either ignore them or explain them away.

Paul said that when the Lord comes He “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels [or motives] of the hearts.” This is the contextual key to understanding Paul’s point.

Do you believe that Jesus is going to bring to light “the hidden things of darkness”?

Most do not.

Most think that if we confess our sins, then our bad deeds and hidden motives will not be brought up at the Bema. While our sins will not be considered as sins, all our deeds, both good and bad, will be considered. Compare 2 Cor 5:10 where Paul says that we will all be recompensed at the Bema for the things done in the body, “whether good or bad” (cf. Matt 16:27).

Paul is saying that all our deeds and motives will be examined at this judgment. If so, would this not have a sobering impact on the way we approach our days? If we think that only our good deeds and motives will be evaluated, then we have little or no need to fear shame or rebuke. Yet other texts make it clear that both shame (1 John 2:28) and rebuke (Luke 19:20-26) are very real possibilities. The only way rebuke and shame can be received at the Bema is if bad deeds and hidden motives are evaluated.

The Expression “Each One’s Praise” Doesn’t Mean All Believers Will Be Praised

An erroneous assumption is made when people read of “each one’s praise.” It is read as though it said, “each believer will be praised.”

The phrase “each one’s praise” could either refer to 1) each believer’s praise, or 2) each *faithful* believer’s praise. In context, the latter is surely meant. Paul does not envision unfaithful stewards as being praised by Jesus! He specifically says in v 2 that “it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” Required for what? Faithfulness is required to please the Lord and thus to receive His praise.

Not Even All Persevering Believers Will Be Praised

I confess that until a few years ago I thought that all persevering believers would be praised by Jesus. After all, Paul says, “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12). I assumed, logically, that all who endured and would thus be future rulers with Christ would be praised. But I came to realize that is a wrong assumption based on faulty logic.

A believer can persevere in faith and good works and yet much of his works might be negated by man-pleasing or other base motives (Matt 6:1-18; 1 Pet 5:1-4) and he might not have been wholehearted in his service for Christ. Such a believer will rule, since he endured in faith and works, but he will not receive praise. Jesus chooses to restrict His praise to those persevering believers who were wholehearted in their service.

This is what we find in Luke 19:11-27 and the Parable of the Minas.

Without going into an explanation of the entire parable, what we find is that two servants are given authority to rule with Christ in the coming kingdom, yet only one of the two is praised. The first is both praised (“Well done, good servant”) and given rulership over ten cities (Luke 19:17), while the second receives no praise and rulership over five cities (Luke 19:19).

All persevering saints will rule. But only saints persevering in wholehearted stewardship will be praised and receive maximum rulership.

Conclusion

First Corinthians 4:5 does not teach that each believer will be praised by Jesus at the Bema. It doesn’t even teach that each *persevering* believer will be praised. Instead, it teaches that each *faithful* steward will be praised by the Lord Jesus at the Bema.

Are you aiming for His praise? I hope you are.

I didn’t aim for His praise until years after I was

born again and learned the wonderful truths about the Bema. You need not wait as long as I did to learn of this powerful motivation.

Jesus loves you and wants to approve of you and your work for Him. Live in light of His soon coming. Remember that He is your Judge; people are not. If we are men-pleasers, then we can expect to miss out on Jesus’ praise at the Bema (compare Gal 1:10-11). ■

“Jesus chooses to restrict His praise to those persevering believers who were wholehearted in their service.”



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX with his wife of 40 years, Sharon. His latest book is What Is the Outer Darkness? (co-authored with Zane Hodges).

1. This article has been slightly modified from a Sept-Oct 2005 article that I wrote for *Grace in Focus*.

2. Other than believers who die at the moment of faith, I agree that all believers will do at least some good works. The Parable of the Four Soils shows that something sprang up for soils two through four (Luke 8:13-15). This suggests some good works. Indeed, since even unbelievers still retain the image of God, I doubt there will be a single unbeliever who did not do some good works during his lifetime. But doing “some good works” is a far cry from being faithful in service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. See also my articles, “The Day of Christ in Philipppians,” *Grace in Focus* (July/August 2012) and “‘The Day’ Is the Judgment Seat of Christ,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 2007).

Boldness and Unity (Acts 4:23-37)



LIGHTSTOCK



By Zane C. Hodges

The Believers Pray for Boldness

After Peter and John exhibit boldness before the Sanhedrin (vv 19-20), they are found in prayer (vv 24-30). There is no bragging about how they stood up to the Sanhedrin, for they realize it is God who grants boldness (v 29; cf. Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:1). Peter had once fancied himself bold and did not pray in Gethsemane. He does not make this mistake here. For boldness arises, not from human personality or purpose of heart or will, but from prayer.

4:23. Note the phrase **their own company** (which can refer to relatives, cf. 1 Tim 5:8). The phrase is very personal. Up to now, it is not used in Acts. No doubt the hostility they had faced deepened (as it often does) their sense of “belonging” to the Christian company. It is *their own* as to spiritual race and as to spiritual family. It is just possible the phrase *their own company* may refer to the apostolic circle itself, rather than the whole Church. However, even if so, the principles stated below are still valid.

4:24a. **With one mind**, expressing the unity which they have with their own company, and all with one another, in prayer. Thus the oneness and kinship and spiritual agreement of the believers are here stressed in prelude to their prayer. The unity of believers is a key to effectual prayer (cf. Matt 18:19). Note, however, that Jesus seeks not agreement as to what to ask merely, but “as touching [*peri*] anything that they shall ask...” This reaches down also to agreement of desire and motive in asking, and it involves the working of the Spirit.

4:24b-30. Three great matters upon which they found “one accord,” spiritual agreement, and which also are three great keys to effectual prayer:

First, they were of one accord regarding *the Person of God* (v 24). He is viewed in His greatness. The magnificence of their vision of Him dwarfs their problem. Threatened by rulers of earth, they turn to the heavenly Despot (*Despota*), Who is also the Creator of the world.

Likewise, we must not let our problems diminish our concept of God, but our concept of God ought to make our problems seem small. A first step is believing prayer.

Second, they were of one accord regarding *the Word of God* (vv 25-28). Psalm 2 is used though its final fulfillment awaits a future day. Yet they understand it well enough to see its relevance to them. They discern a preliminary fulfillment (vv 27-28). They do not say it has been fulfilled. The persecution they experienced exhibited the same spirit of rebellion against the Lord and Christ that will be evident in the final phase of the rebellion under the Beast.

Moreover, the Psalm gives direction to their request through its revelation of the response of God (cf. Ps 2:4). If God laughs at this spirit of rebellion, it would be inappropriate for His people and witnesses to fear or to lose the manifestation of His power among them. So they pray for boldness and the working of God's power (vv 29-30).

Few today could have been so guided in prayer by such a Scripture. Knowledge of God's Word, its relevance to our situation, its implications for our prayer, is essential to a fruitful prayer life (cf. John 15:7). His words must abide in us.

Third, they were of one accord regarding the will of God (vv 29-30). They do not ask God to set aside the threats, or save them from prison and death. They ask that they might glorify Him by being unafraid. Indeed they prayed for the very thing—boldness—which resulted in Stephen's death and the first persecution. We often ask to escape our problems, rather than to glorify God in them (cf. Phil 1:19-20).

They Were All Filled

4:31. If, in v 31, the believers were all filled with the Spirit, that means prior to their prayer they had not been full, for you cannot fill what is already full.

Note that in Acts 2:4 they were all filled. And in Acts 4:8, Peter is filled. Hence, at least in Peter's case, we have three separate instances

“When Christianity lacks either unity, power, or love (sacrifice) by so much it is a distortion of genuine Christian experience in the Church.”

of his being filled (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31). But there is no record that Peter and John were filled as they preached in Solomon's porch (Acts 3:12ff). God can bless even when this does not occur (e.g., the results at Solomon's porch, Acts 4:4).

Apparently the filling of the Spirit is a sovereign act of the Spirit. Also note that the Christians prayed simply for boldness, but God chose to fill them. There is no recorded prayer for the Spirit's filling. As previously mentioned in these notes (cf. Acts 2), in Luke-Acts the filling of the Spirit seems virtually equal to divine inspiration. The Spirit takes full control.

The Spirit is a Person. He is not an influence or force to be automatically controlled when all the “spiritual switches” are thrown. Thus He Himself decides when and

where to fill men. But the vessel must be prepared.

These Christians were prepared by the desire to witness, being saturated with God's Word (vv 25-27), and, of course, prayer, not specifically prayer for filling, but certainly for a condition of readiness to speak that is conducive to filling.

“The place where they assembled together was shaken.” God did not surely shake the place: (a) to prove He can shake a house, for He can shake creation (Job 9:6; Heb 12:26-28); or (b) to give some needed accompaniment to the filling of the Spirit, since nothing was shaken in Acts 2:1-4; or (c) to prove they had been filled (no externals at all are really necessary; cf. Acts 4:8).

Surely He shook the house as a visual lesson of what He desired to do spiritually.

The place where they were assembled together was some sort of building. This building was physically shaken, while Jerusalem as a whole was spiritually shaken, (cf. Acts 17:6).

Had they heeded the Sanhedrin, Satan (who was behind it) would have stifled the growth of the Church before it ever touched Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. The Church would have died in Jerusalem (thus do all churches which do not witness). The Satanic attack was defeated by their believing prayer. God had yet a world to shake.

We, too, can be used to shake the place where we are assembled, if God can indeed “inspire” all of us with His Spirit and if all speak His Word with boldness.



“Possessions are a good test of our love and oneness with the brethren (cf. 1 John 3:17). Such community of goods would still be possible today if all had the prerequisite oneness of heart and soul.”



Holding All Things in Common

Genuine Christianity is exhibited here in Christian unity (v 32), Christian power (v 33), and Christian charity (vv 34-35).

4:32. Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. They were of one heart, indicating a unity of thought and feeling. And they were of one soul, indicating a unity of life and experience.

It was as if a single heart throbbed in this vast multitude, as if a single soul animated it. The miracle of it is seen in that it embraced *the multitude of those who believed*. The effects reached all.

But unity of heart and soul was not merely a “sweet” idea, it had a practical outworking in

community of possessions. **They had all things in common.** Possessions are a good test of our love and oneness with the brethren (cf. 1 John 3:17). Such community of goods would still be possible today if all had the prerequisite oneness of heart and soul. Just one person claiming his own, or taking advantage of others could spoil it (e.g., Ananias and Sapphira).

4:33. Following v 32, would suggest that the apostolic power bore a relationship to what precedes. Since the members of the body depend one on another, and the health of all is affected by the health of any, it follows that a healthy, spiritual Christian fellowship will enhance the effectiveness of the more prominent members of the body whose responsibility is public.

And their power in testimony is beneficial to all, for next we read: **And great grace was upon them all.** The interdependence of the Body is thus shown.

4:34-35. These verses spell out one aspect of the great grace that was upon them all. Christian grace is sacrificial for the needs of others (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). Note that “needs” not “wants” were met. The Apostles administered. Those who were rich here became poor for the needs of the brethren. If the cross means anything, it points to sacrifice. We take up ours to follow Him. This is genuine Christianity.

When Christianity lacks either unity, power, or love (sacrifice) by so much, it is a distortion of genuine Christian experience in the Church.

Note that the blessings of vv 32-35 (and not only of v 31)

EVANGELICALS AND POVERTY

IN 2014, THE POVERTY LINE FOR A HOUSEHOLD OF 4 WAS \$23,850.

THE OFFICIAL POVERTY RATE WAS 14.8 %, WITH 46.7 MILLION PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY.¹

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION:

- JEWISH: \$72,000
- UNITARIAN: \$58,000
- EVANGELICAL: \$54,000
- HINDU: \$51,000
- CATHOLIC: \$47,000
- NO RELIGION: \$46,000
- MORMON: \$40,000
- PENTECOSTAL: \$31,000
- MUSLIM: \$31,000
- JEHOVAH'S WITNESS: \$24,000²




follow the prayer of vv 24-30. Prayer is ever the secret of the Church's blessing. Though they had asked only for boldness, they got far more (Eph 3:20). God gave them not only the boldness they asked, but the Christian love which alone could support that boldness and make it productive of faith in others (cf. John 13:35). Prayer is worthwhile for it obtains often more than it asks; for God knows what really we need, even to make a correct request fully worthwhile.

Imitating Barnabus

4:36-37. Barnabus is here a typical example of what the Church was producing in men. He seems to have been a special encouragement to the Apostles who gave him this name, perhaps because as a Levite, as well as a man of some wealth, his subjection to the faith was uplifting against the background of rejection on the part of the Temple officialdom, those in charge of Jewish worship. Here was one Levite at least who came to Christ.

Barnabus' career of service begins by his being an encouragement to the Church. There is little hope for future usefulness of those who

are not encouragements in the assembly. We need more Barnabuses, more "sons of consolation (encouragement)" and fewer "sons of discouragement."

He was a Levite and, as it were, returned to his true inheritance. The Levites had no inheritance in the land, but the Lord was their inheritance (cf. Num 18:20; Deut 10:9). Before his salvation, Barnabus possessed an inheritance in the land, but having come into possession of Christ he sells it and becomes a true Levite again. Indeed, hereafter in Acts, it is clear his wealth in the Lord is increasing (cf. 11:24). We need more spiritual Levites. 



Zane Hodges taught New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary for 27 years. His book, Acts of the Risen Christ is forthcoming.

Writers wanted.

Magazine articles. Bible study curriculum. Commentaries. Send your submissions to shawn@faithalone.org



1. [HTTPS://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/LIBRARY/PUBLICATIONS/2015/DEMO/P60-252.HTML](https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-252.html)

2. KOSMIN AND KEYSER, RELIGION IN A FREE MARKET, 2006.

Want to Learn About God's Grace Online?



www.youtube.com/user/GESvids/videos

Shine Your Light, Not Your Religion

By Bill Fiess

There is a sense in which everything we do as human beings takes place in the sight of men. But, surprisingly, the simple Greek phrase *emprothen tōn anthrōpōn*, that is, *before men*, occurs just six times in the entire New Testament. What is most surprising, however, is that each occurrence comes from Jesus Himself. Let's consider each one in the order they appear.

Matthew 5:16

“Let your light so shine *before men*, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16, emphasis added).

This statement occurs in the “Introduction” of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. He is speaking—in this context—collectively to his disciples how they should be open in their witness to the world. Note:

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house” (Matt 5:14-15).

If the on-looking world sees multitudes of Christians doing good works by the power of the Holy Spirit, it will bring great glory to God. I think that is exactly what happened just after the day of Pentecost when the Assembly was first formed by the Holy Spirit.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the Assembly daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:46-47).



shine.





Matthew 6:1

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable giving *before men*, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matt 6:1, emphasis added).

This statement was also made during Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and clearly is speaking of reward. Jesus is reminding us not to inform everyone of my financial giving. This certainly relates to the evaluation we will have at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

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

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Rev 22:12-13).

Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 12:8

The references in Matthew [and perhaps also Luke] are spoken by Jesus to the Twelve Apostles [including Judas] as He sends them into the nation of Israel to proclaim “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 10:7). But Jesus also speaks prophetically of His Second Coming and of the responsibility of those representing Him in the world.

“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes” (Matt 10:22-23).

“Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:27-28).

“Therefore whoever confesses Me *before men*, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32-33, emphasis added).

“Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me *before men*, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8, emphasis added).

This certainly refers also to the Judgment Seat of Christ where our works will be evaluated. But our willingness to openly confess Christ *before men* relates directly to the privilege of reigning with Christ in His kingdom. The Apostle Paul states:

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us [the privilege of reigning] (2 Tim 2:12).

The Apostle John—who was listening when Jesus first spoke these words—also speaks of this evaluation:

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected with us [apostles] in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been

“We are to live
exemplary lives
without trying to be
seen by people.”

made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:15-19).

Matthew 23:13

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven *before men*; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Matt 23:13, emphasis added).

This statement was spoken to the unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees who—actively before men—were preventing people from believing in Jesus. Note:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matt 23:15).

“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?” (Matt 23:33).

They were going to face the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15) and be condemned forever in Hell. Preventing people from believing in Jesus would undoubtedly factor in the severity of their final judgment.

Conclusions

We are not to give, pray, or fast so as to be seen by men, that is, “before men” (Matt 6:1-21). But we are to confess Jesus “before men”.


And we are to live exemplary lives without trying to be seen by people. But if we drive courteously, use language that is not salty, avoid complaining all the time, and live honestly, people will notice even though we are not doing these things for them to see us.

faithalone.org

The key is to distinguish between 1 and 3. It is not always easy. For example:

1. Is it OK to have a short public prayer at a restaurant before you eat?
2. Is it better to pray silently before a public meal, or to pray with your eyes open?
3. Is it OK to announce at church, in order to encourage others to give, that you gave X dollars toward the building program? Or is that wrong?
4. Is it OK to mention to a friend—in order to affirm that you find the group helpful—that you help support a given parachurch group, yet without mentioning the amount?

I believe 1, 2, and 4 are all gray areas. Most likely your heart attitude is the key in such cases. In my estimation the third example is far less gray. Any time we announce how much we gave, we run the risk of violating what the Lord commanded in Matt 6:1-4.

So in light of these verses, the key question for me is: Am I living my life in light of the Judgment Seat of Christ that I might be richly rewarded at His coming and glorify Him wonderfully before men? 



Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia. He may be Logos Bible software's #1 fan.

WHAT IS GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY?

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

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

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

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

For more information about our ministry please visit

FAITHALONE.ORG





Edifying Examples (Nehemiah 3)

By Ken Yates

Profitable

In a famous verse in 2 Timothy, Paul writes that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

Paul says here that all Scripture is useful for us. This would certainly include the OT.

In referring to the OT, Paul also tells the church at Corinth that what happened to the Jews in the wilderness was written for us, that is, the Church. These things are an example from which we can learn (1 Cor 10:6, 11).

When the NT explains how things in the OT apply to us as examples, it is easy to see and understand.

For example, in the passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul says that the attitude and actions of the Exodus generation in the book of Exodus teach us that we should not live immorally and in rebellion against God. If we do, we will experience negative consequences, just like they did.

In a positive example, James presents us with Elijah. In this OT prophet we learn that the prayers of a believer in fellowship with God can accomplish much (Jas 5:16-18).

When the NT gives us divine interpretations of these events in the past, we can comprehend how these things are useful for us. But what about when we do not have a NT explanation of how a particular passage applies to us today? Admittedly, this is much more difficult. However, we

can still look at such OT passages and see that they provide examples for us to learn from.

One such passage is Nehemiah 3. Not only is this passage not discussed in the NT, Nehemiah is one of the few books in the OT that is not mentioned at all. But it is my contention that it is useful for us as believers today, just as Paul says to Timothy. To understand how, we must look at the historical background of the book.

Historical Background

Nehemiah was one of the leaders of the Jews who returned to their homeland after their captivity in Babylon. Because of the sins of their fathers in disobeying God, they had been conquered by the most powerful nation on earth and become their slaves. Their capital city, including the Temple of God, had been destroyed.

After the Jews had lived 70 years as captives in Babylon, the Persians had defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to their land. It was a difficult return. Many Jews decided to remain in Babylon, which for most was the only home they had ever known. Those that returned were a poor group of people. They returned to a desolate land and a destroyed capital city.

We are told that at times their crops were poor. In addition, enemies such as the Samaritans and the Arabs tried to thwart their attempts at rebuilding their land. To make matters even worse, we are told in the book of Ezra that many of the Jews who returned to the land followed in the same example of disobedience as their fathers. They had married foreign women in the land, which was a direct violation of God's

commands. There was the fear that God would judge them as He had done their ancestors.

Nehemiah Arrives

It is with this background that Nehemiah arrived on the scene. He was given the task of rebuilding the wall that surrounded Jerusalem. This wall was very important because it provided safety for the inhabitants of the land. If their enemies decided to attack them, the city would provide a safe haven

“The work of God is not something we do as individuals, but as part of a group. For believers today that is the Church.”

within the wall. It was Nehemiah's responsibility to motivate the Jews in this undertaking.

It is interesting to note that Nehemiah did not come to Jerusalem to accomplish this work until about ninety years after the Jews had returned to the land. No doubt, the Jews had other more pressing needs than building the wall. They had their own homes to build and they had crops to plant. The idea of building a two-mile wall around the city took a low priority. And, as mentioned above, this was a discouraged group of people.

This discouragement is seen in the book of Nehemiah. In chapter 4, Nehemiah records the scorn of the enemies of the Jews as they

began building the wall. Both the Samaritans and Arabs mocked their work. They referred to the Jews as a weak group of people. They only had burned stones with which to build the walls. These were the stones that remained from the destruction many years earlier when the city was burned by the Babylonians. Such stones were of a weaker quality and would not make for a sturdy wall. In fact, one Arab taunted them by saying that if they built the wall and a small animal were to climb on it, the whole thing would fall down (Neh 4:1-3).

What Was Their Motivation?

But in the midst of all their discouragement, the Jews built the wall. The first question that must be asked is, “What motivated them to do so?”

To be sure, they were concerned about their safety, and the wall would provide a measure of that. But there was more.

Before and during the captivity in Babylon the Jewish prophets had told the people that God would bring them back to the land. In addition, God said that the Messiah, their King, would come to Jerusalem, the very city they were rebuilding!

In fact, the prophet Daniel said that the rebuilding of the city would start the clock running on the time the Messiah would come (Dan 9:25).

By building that wall, they were doing the work of God and believing in what He had said.

Even in the midst of discouragement and surrounded by enemies, they were demonstrating that God

would fulfill His promises to the nation.

An Example for Us

In this context, we can see how these people are an example for us. We see this in the building of the wall in Nehemiah 3.

One of the things we see is that the Jews who built the wall, and who were engaged in this work, did it together. Each one was assigned a portion of the wall to build and over and over again in the chapter it says that each person worked “next” to the one previously mentioned.

The work of God is not something we do as individuals, but as part of a group. For believers today that is the Church.

We also see that all kinds of people were involved in the work. In Neh 3:1 we are told that the high priests and his fellow priests built part of the wall. As leaders they had a responsibility to be engaged in and encourage others in this endeavor.

But those with less stature in the community were also involved. In v 26 we are told that the Nethinims worked side by side with the priests. The Nethinims were those men assigned menial tasks within the Temple. In addition, v 12 says that women also took part in the work. People from all walks of life worked together to accomplish what God desired.

Even though the nation had its enemies surrounding them, some of the workers had additional opposition.

Verse 5 relates how the men of one city came to work on the wall. They came from the town of Tekoa, which was about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. However, Nehemiah

relates how the leaders of that town were not willing to help. Perhaps these leaders felt the men were needed at home or perhaps they felt more exposed to the enemies of Israel and did not want to provoke them further.

In any case, these men obeyed the Lord even though they faced opposition in their own community.

A Man on Fire

The highlight of the chapter, in my opinion, is found in v 20.

A man by the name of Baruch worked on his section of the wall. It says that he did his work “earnestly.”

The basic meaning of this word is that of “fire.” He had a burning zealotry about his work. He did it diligently. Here was a man that was doing the work of the Lord, preparing for the coming King. And did his work with gusto. He did this even in the midst of the discouragement that was all around him.

Application

I do not think we are going out on a limb when we conclude that these Jews in Nehemiah 3 are an example for us.

As believers in Jesus Christ we are part of a group doing the work of the Lord.

As the Church, the Body of Christ, we are to be about doing what He has commanded us.


We are preparing for the day when the King comes again.

Within the Church with our spiritual gifts, and outside the Church in evangelism, we are preparing for that day. We work side by side, and there is nobody

who can say that what they do is unimportant.

Just like the Jews in Nehemiah, there are plenty of things that can discourage us. These things can come from the world or even from people close to us.

But may we not simply be those who work for the Lord. May we all be like Baruch and do what we are doing for the Lord with a burning zealotry, with diligence, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that Baruch’s name means “blessed.” When we stand before the Lord to give account of the work we did for Him (2 Cor 5:10) in order to determine our rewards in the world to come, how “blessed” will we be if the thing said about Baruch is said about us. 



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

The Younger Generation Cares!

By Kayla Pesce

Hey all.
I was reading “The Mailbag” from the first 2016 issue and decided to share some encouraging news with you and maybe a prayer request within that.

I heard that you have a new “younger” member of the GES team and might possibly be trying to target a younger generation. Be encouraged because I am 27 years old and cherish the material GES has provided me in my growth as a disciple.

I was a new believer at only 18 years old and I almost immediately gained assurance of my salvation. I have been a sponge ever since, soaking up Biblical knowledge where I can—always using the lens of Scriptural truth as a filter.

Anyways, that’s my background. But what I wanted to share mostly is that I am a leader in our church’s youth group. I always teach assurance of salvation to the high school girls I lead in small group (reminding them of it almost every time we meet). And I always use the *Grace New Testament Commentary* for reference when discussing difficult-to-interpret passages.

More recently I’ve been discipling a new believer who is only 16. She desired to learn more about her faith so I offered to help teach her. And wow! She has also been like a


sponge, soaking up theological concepts and Biblical knowledge with ease.

It’s inspiring.

I gifted her the commentary and she expressed how it has helped her while studying 2 Corinthians (the book we are reading through).

So, be encouraged! The younger generation cares! We still seek truth and need these resources to help us navigate through Scripture.

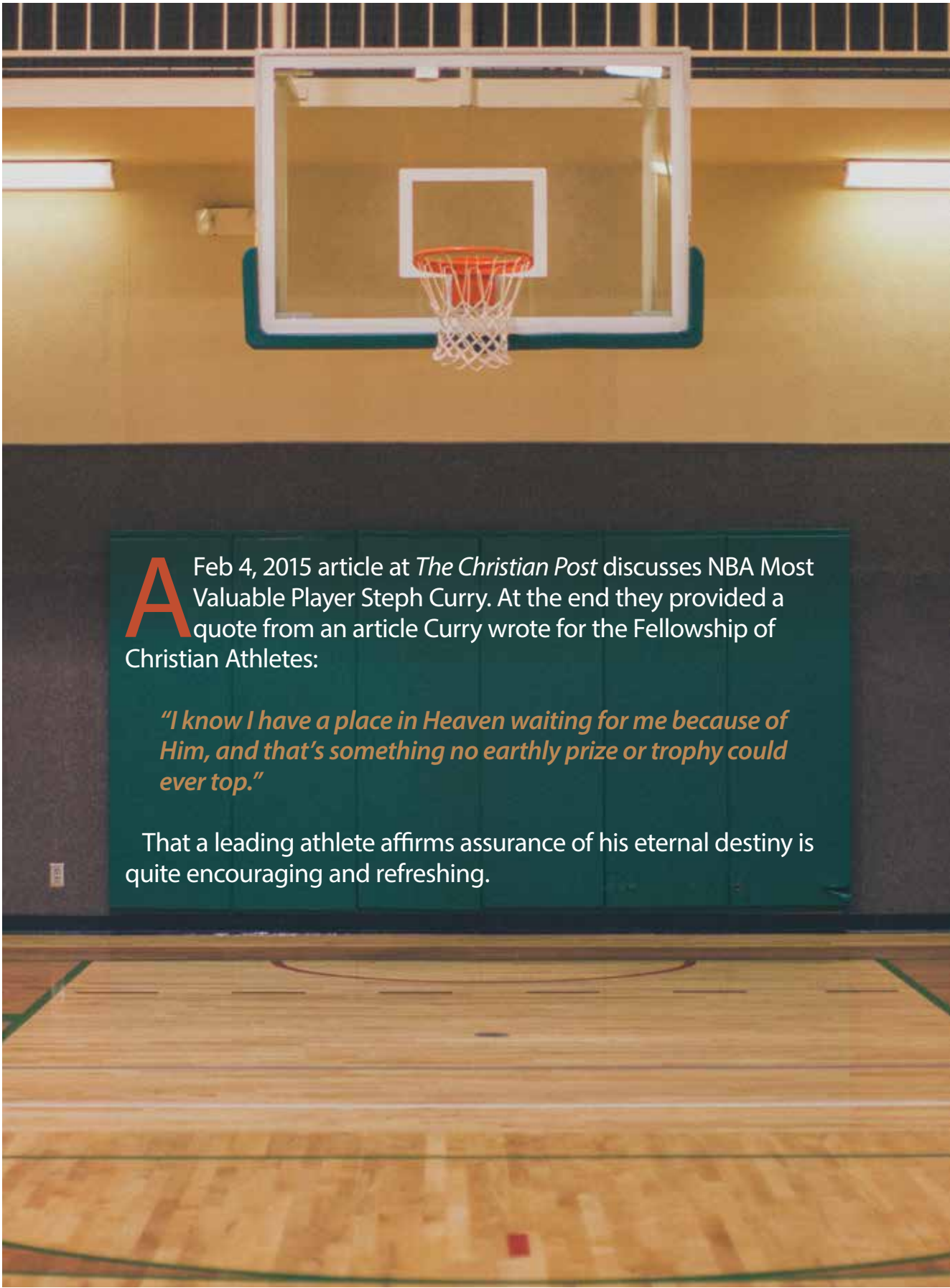
I always recommend the resources GES has provided to my peers and to the students I mentor. I know our generation in the church has a bad reputation but there are still some of us who love absolute truth and the Word of God. Please keep us in your prayers as my generation stands up and continues to share the Free Grace message with the next generation!!

Let me know how I can help reach these age groups more if needed. Youth ministry is one of my great loves! 



Kayla Pesce is an intensive care nurse and the volunteer nurse manager at Care Net of the Treasure Coast, a faith-based crisis pregnancy center. She is married to Justin.





A Feb 4, 2015 article at *The Christian Post* discusses NBA Most Valuable Player Steph Curry. At the end they provided a quote from an article Curry wrote for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes:

"I know I have a place in Heaven waiting for me because of Him, and that's something no earthly prize or trophy could ever top."

That a leading athlete affirms assurance of his eternal destiny is quite encouraging and refreshing.

The Bookstore

NEW



What Is the Outer Darkness?

Zane C. Hodges with Robert N. Wilkin

Zane Hodges and Robert Wilkin discuss all three occurrences of the phrase “the outer darkness” in Matthew. They show it does not refer to hell, but to grief at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

USD \$14.00

Softcover • 112 pages

Code: wod

NEW



Power to Stand: An Exposition of Jude

Zane C. Hodges

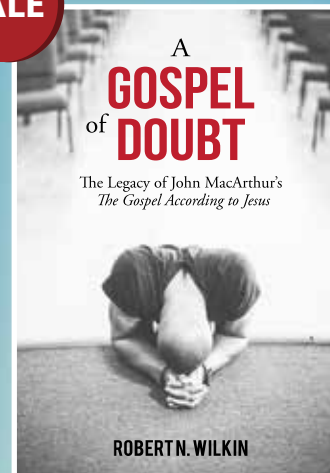
What is to be done about apostates in the church? Zane Hodges shows that God gives every believer the power to stand, so as not to fall away themselves.

USD \$9.00

Softcover • 76 pages

Code: pts

SALE



A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*

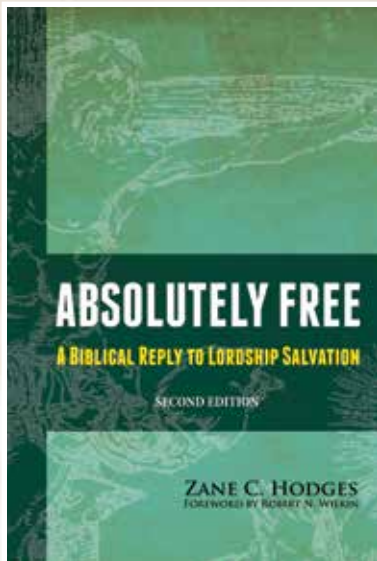
Robert N. Wilkin

Do you have doubts about your salvation? John MacArthur's bestselling *The Gospel According to Jesus* has introduced a generation to Lordship Salvation. Wilkin shows that MacArthur's gospel leads to doubt and despair.

USD ~~\$22.00~~ **\$8.00!**

Softcover • 305 pages

Code: agd



Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation (Second Edition)

Zane C. Hodges

This book clearly explains the gospel of God's free grace, and how popular theologies tend to confuse faith and works, salvation and discipleship, eternal life and eternal rewards. For this second edition, endnotes have been incorporated into the text or converted into footnotes, and appendices have been added that continue Hodges's refutation of Lordship Salvation.

USD \$20.00

Softcover • 272 pages

Code: af2

The Atonement and Other Writings

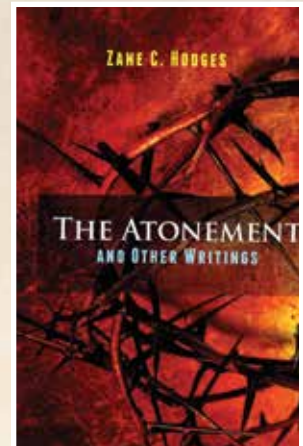
Zane C. Hodges

This book collects three hard-to-find shorter works by Hodges: *The Atonement*; *Jesus, God's Prophet*; and *Did Paul Preach Eternal Life?* Every student of the Bible will have their understanding enriched by these studies.

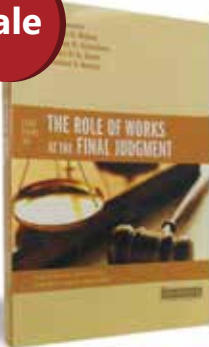
USD \$15.95

Softcover • 116 pages

Code: atm



Sale



The Role of Works at the Final Judgment

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

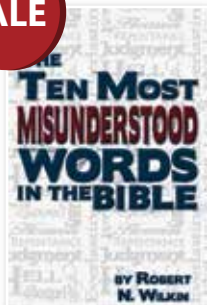
Through a discussion of Biblical texts, this book presents four perspectives on the role of works at the final judgment including: Robert N. Wilkin, works will determine rewards but not salvation, and Thomas R. Schreiner, works will provide evidence that one actually has been saved.

USD ~~\$17.99~~ **\$10.00!**

Softcover • 240 pages

Code: fj

SALE



The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible

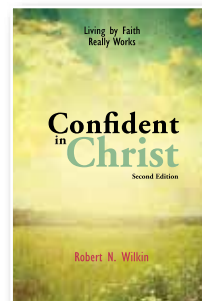
Robert N. Wilkin

An exploration of Biblical terms everyone knows, and yet few understand.

USD ~~\$9.95~~ **\$7.00!**

Softcover • 221 pages

Code: ten



Confident in Christ (Second Edition)

Robert N. Wilkin

This book examines sixteen "tough texts" from the New Testament that are often used to teach salvation by works.

USD \$22.00

Softcover • 278 pages

Code: cic2

The Grace New Testament Commentary

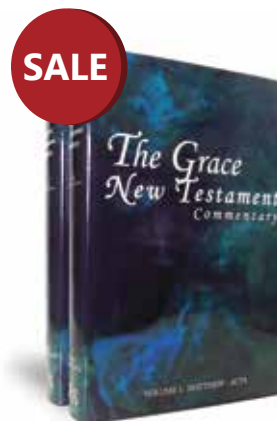
Authors include: Zane C. Hodges, Robert N. Wilkin, Hal M. Haller, Dwight L. Hunt, René A. López, J. B. Bond, and J. Paul Tanner.

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

USD ~~\$29.95~~ **\$18.00!**

Hardcover • Two Volumes • 1334 pages

Code: ntc



The Road to Reward (Second Edition)

Robert N. Wilkin

25% new material! If everlasting life is a free gift, and believers are eternally secure at the moment of faith, what is our motivation to live for Christ? Robert N. Wilkin takes us through the Biblical doctrine of eternal rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

USD \$20.00

Softcover • 200 pages

Code: rr2



Second Peter: Shunning Error in Light of the Savior's Return

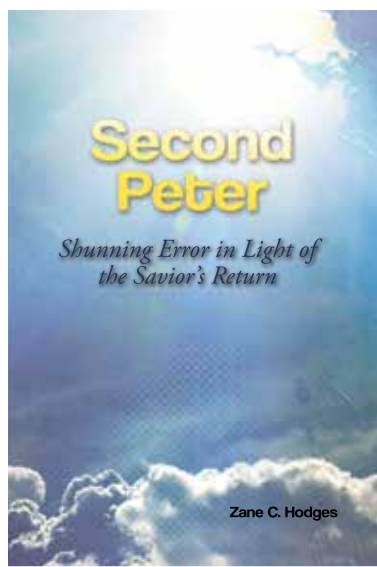
Zane C. Hodges

Second Peter is about growing in holiness in light of the Second Coming. Hodges shows that believers ought to take our Lord's prophetic teaching seriously and should draw from them a sense of deep moral obligation to persevere in the midst of a dying world. As you read through this commentary, you will long for the Savior's soon return!

USD \$15.00

Softcover • 142 pages

Code: 2pet



Faith in His Name: Listening to the Gospel of John

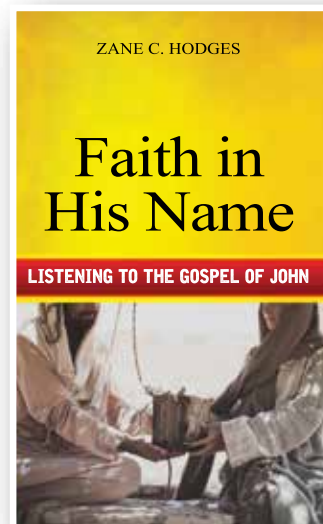
Zane C. Hodges

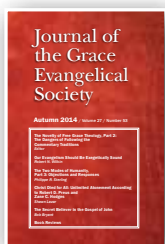
In this practical and pastoral commentary on John 1:1–6:21, you will be led into a deeper understanding of the purpose of John's Gospel, with its emphasis on the meaning of Jesus' signs and the power of His Word.

USD \$15.00

Softcover • 180 pages

Code: fhn

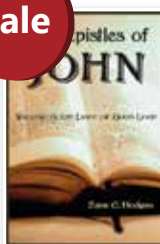




Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

100+ pages. Two issues each year. Scholarly yet practical articles and reviews.
USD \$18.50 / \$9.25 for new or gift subscriptions.
Code: jotges
View website for other special deals.

Sale



The Epistles of John

Zane C. Hodges
First John is all about fellowship with God, not tests of life. Second and Third John are also explained in this valuable commentary.
USD \$8.95 **\$6.00!**
Softcover • 312 pages
Code: 1-3john



Best of Zane Hodges DVD

Over 10 hours of Zane Hodges' messages on two DVDs utilizing a combination of video, when available, or audio with transcription.
USD \$40.00
2 DVDs
Code: bozhdv

Sale



The Epistle of James

Zane C. Hodges
This is the best commentary available on James. The section on James 2:14-26 has helped thousands understand this pivotal passage.
USD \$15.00 **\$11.00!**
Softcover • 128 pages
Code: jas



Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism

C. Gordon Olson
Defends a middle view of salvation between Calvin and Arminius.
USD \$20.00
Softcover • 467 pages
Code: bca

Sale



Secure and Sure

Robert N. Wilkin
Assurance of eternal life is one of the most important, and for many, elusive truths. You can be Secure and Sure.
USD \$9.95 **\$4.00!**
Softcover • 252 pages
Code: sas

Sale



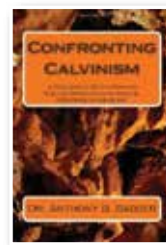
A Free Grace Primer

Zane C. Hodges
Collects three of Hodges's books, *The Hungry Inherit*, *The Gospel Under Siege*, and *Grace in Eclipse*.
USD \$9.95 **\$7.00!**
Softcover • 524 pages
Code: fgp



Romans: Deliverance from Wrath

Zane C. Hodges
Romans teaches us about deliverance from temporal wrath and slavery to sin.
USD \$24.99
Softcover • 488 pages
Code: rom



Confronting Calvinism

Anthony Badger
A detailed refutation of the Five Points of Calvinism from a Free Grace perspective.
USD \$24.95
Softcover • 397 pages
Code: cc

Sale



Power to Make War

Zane C. Hodges
This book traces the career of the man, called in the Bible the "Beast", who will establish a new world order.
USD \$8.95 **\$4.00!**
Softcover • 135 pages
Code: pow

Sale



Harmony with God

Zane C. Hodges
Repentance is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in the church today. If you have questions about repentance, read this book.
USD \$9.95 **\$5.00!**
Softcover • 133 pages
Code: hwg

Sale



Six Secrets of the Christian Life

Zane C. Hodges
Hodges explains how to walk with God and grow in grace.
USD \$6.00 **\$4.00!**
Softcover • 80 pages
Code: ssl

The Master List*

* These are retail prices. For sale prices see previous pages or check online.

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

- Code: **jotges** / \$18.50 (renewal) / \$9.25 (new or gift subscription) Other options available on website.

The Grace New Testament Commentary (Two Volume Set)

- Code: **ntc** / \$29.95

Anthony B. Badger

- Confronting Calvinism, Code: **cc** / \$24.95

Harlan Betz

- Setting the Stage for Eternity, Code: **sse** / \$14.00

Steve Elkins

- The Roman Road Revisited: New Vistas on the Road to Resurrection Living, Code: **rrr** / \$11.95
- Keys to Kingdom Greatness: An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Code: **kkg** / \$19.95

Zane Hodges

- Absolutely Free (2nd ed.), Code: **af2** / \$22.00
- The Epistle of James, Code: **jas** / \$15.00
- The Epistles of John, Code: **1-3john** / \$8.95
- Faith in His Name: Listening to the Gospel of John, Code: **fhn** / \$15.00
- A Free Grace Primer: The Hungry Inherit, The Gospel Under Siege, and Grace in Eclipse, Code: **fgp** / \$9.95
- Harmony with God, Code: **hwg** / \$9.95
- Hebrews (Out of Print)
- Here Walks My Enemy: The Story of Luis, Code: **hwme** / \$5.00 (hardcover), \$3.00 (paperback)
- Luke (Vol 1), (Out of Print)
- Luke (Vol 2), Code: **luke-vol 2** / \$8.95
- Power to Make War, Code: **pow** / \$8.95
- Power to Stand: An Exposition of Jude, Code: **pts** / \$10.00
- Romans: Deliverance from Wrath, Code: **rom** / \$24.99
- Second Peter: Shunning Error in Light of the Savior's Soon Return, Code: **2pet** / \$15.00
- Six Secrets of the Christian Life, Code: **sscl** / \$6.00
- The Atonement and Other Writings, Code: **atm** / \$15.95

- Zane Hodges JOTGES Memorial Issue, Code: **zhmi** / \$7.50

- What Is the Outer Darkness?, Code: **wod** / \$14.00

Bill Lee

- Grace Recovered, Code: **gr** / \$9.95

René López

- Romans Unlocked, Code: **ru** / \$14.99

Ken Neff

- Choose to Live, Code: **ctl** / \$9.95
- Free to Choose, Code: **ftc** / \$9.95
- Hold Fast, Code: **hfn** / \$9.95

C. Gordon Olson

- Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism, Code: **bca** / \$20.00

Lawrence Vance

- The Other Side of Calvinism, Code: **osc** / \$29.95

Bob Wilkin

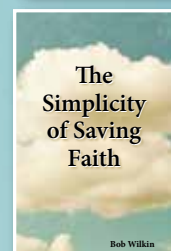
- A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus, Code: **agd** / \$22.00
- Confident in Christ (2nd ed.), Code: **cic2** / \$20.00
- Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment, Code: **fj** / \$17.00
- The Road to Reward (2nd ed.), Code: **rr2** / \$20.00
- Secure and Sure, Code: **sas** / \$9.95
- The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible, Code: **ten** / \$9.95

Booklets

Various Authors

- Enduring till the End / Code: **ete**
- His Promise Is Certain / Code: **hpc**
- Saving Faith in Focus / Code: **focus1**
- The Simplicity of Saving Faith / Code: **ssf**
- There's a New Day Dawning / Code: **ndd**
- What Is Free Grace Theology? / Code: **fgt**
- You Can Be Eternally Secure / Code: **ycbes**

Quantity:	Price Each
1-24	\$.25
Pack of 25	\$5.00



For more titles go to: www.faithalone.org

3 Ways to Order

- By phone (940-270-8827)
- Online at faithalone.org/bookstore.html
- Or complete the order form below



ORDER FORM

Prices effective until Sept 15, 2016
Refunds / Exchanges only within 60 days of purchase date.

SHIPPING ADDRESS

(No PO Boxes if order is over \$30)

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

PHONE

EMAIL

Acct.# (if you know it)

BILLING ADDRESS

(If different from Shipping Address)

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

PHONE

EMAIL

Acct.# (if you know it)

METHOD OF PAYMENT / Check ☐ Money Order ☐ Credit Card ☐

Send Check or Money Order to:

Grace Evangelical Society
P.O. Box 1308
Denton, TX 76202

Credit Card Information:

Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐

CREDIT CARD #

EXP. DATE

NAME ON CARD

CODE

TITLE

QTY

PRICE

AMOUNT

EXTRAS

Extra copies of this magazine are available for \$1/ea, while supplies last. Call for cost of shipping and handling. Foreign subscription prices are \$36 per year to Canada, and \$66 per year for all other countries.

SHIPPING

All personal orders \$100 and over will receive free shipping. Bookstores and institutions will be charged regular UPS shipping rates.

SHIPPING CHARGES

Media Mail:

\$4.00 first item
+\$2.50 for each additional item

UPS:

\$0-\$20	\$10.00
\$21-\$50	\$14.00
\$51-\$99	25%
\$100+	FREE

SUBTOTAL

SHIPPING

DONATION

TOTAL

The Mailbag

By You

Send us your letters of encouragement so we, and other readers, can get to know you better. We love to hear from you!

“Thanks for presenting such a clear, simple, and true gospel.”

~F.G., Homer, AK

“Keep up the great work for the Kingdom!” ~D.D., Salina, KS

“Thanks for keeping the grace torch alive. Thank you for teaching me ‘my faith is not in my faith’ but ‘my faith is in Jesus’ finished work.’ Thanks for helping us believers with ways to express what we already believe. Sometimes I can’t find the words. You know, the bad guys are smart, but y’all are smarter. Ha!”

~C.C., Dekalb, MS

“Praise God for your work edifying God’s people.” ~S.P., email

“Wonderful work, thank you!” ~P.W., Elgin, OR

“I love the magazine and articles to include in my library. Thank you.” ~T.E., Centennial, CO

“We so appreciate your accurate and stimulating articles. They are confirming, challenging, and personally helpful.” ~M.D., Elgin, OR

“Love the magazine! Really in-depth articles.” ~D.L., Tampa, FL

“I pray that God will bless your ministry. It is so needed in this day of legalism!” ~A.A., Denham Springs, LA



“Support what you all do, and how you are probably one of the few sources of thoughtful and thorough scholarship for the Free Grace position, which I hold. Your work is appreciated.” ~J.M., Lincoln, NE

“You guys rock!” ~N.D., Omaha, NE [Ed. I don’t know about “rocking,” but Bob can do a mean Serbian folk dance.]

“Thanks again for a good and fruitful conference! Glad to see that some new blood is joining the Free Grace ranks. May the Lord continue to give you wisdom as you expand your outreach, and may He graciously meet your financial needs.” ~K.P., Fort Worth, TX

“Thank you, may your organization continue to follow God’s will.” ~H.M., San Antonio, TX

“Thank you for all your good work!” ~J.M., Rushville, NY

Send your letters to ges@faithalone.org or P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202.

DEACONS

SERVANTS OF MERCY (ACTS 6:1-7)

BY SHAWN LAZAR

In his book, *Ministers of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon*, Alexander Strauch writes, “During the last three decades, a major revival of interest in deacons has taken place. In nearly every denomination and branch of Christianity, efforts are underway to discover God’s design for deacons” (p. 8). However, he suggests that much of that

interest has resulted in confusion because not everyone has gone to Scripture for answers.

There are two major sections of Scripture that address this office of the deacon: Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Tim 3:8-15 (with a brief mention in Phil 1:1). This article will look at Acts 6:1-7, where the office of the deacon first appears in proto-typical form.





The First Problem (6:1)

Luke tells us that **In those days...the number of disciples was increasing.**

It's interesting that Luke uses the word *disciple* here, when earlier in Acts, he wrote about *believers* (2:44). In the ancient world, a *disciple* was someone who apprenticed himself to a teacher. They left home, work, and family to *literally* follow that teacher from town to town, learning from them, until such time as the teacher died, or the disciple became a teacher himself. Thus, in the Gospels, while many people believed in Jesus, only those who literally followed Him were called His disciples. However, in Acts 6:1, these people are called *disciples* even though they are not literally following Jesus. Why?

I suspect Luke wanted to make the point that, unlike other famous teachers with disciples—from Socrates to Aristotle—Jesus was *alive*, not dead. He was *still* teaching and leading the believers personally. And no one can outgrow the need to be continually taught and led by the Lord. We are all His disciples *for life*.

The community of disciples was growing (*the number of disciples was increasing*). But as with any organization, there were growing pains.

As an expression of their love for one another, in Acts 2:46, we read that the believers had adopted the practice of eating meals together on a daily basis.

In Acts 4:32, and 34, we read how the disciples made their personal belongings available for the needs of all (“all things were common property”). When a need arose people would sell their belongings and bring the money to the apostles who then “distributed [the money] to each as any had need.”

And here in Acts 6, we learn that one of the needs they were meeting was feeding the widows on a daily basis. There already existed a Jewish practice of taking care of the poor through a common pot of money, a practice continued by Jewish believers in Jesus. But there was a problem. The **Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution [*diakonia*, service] of food.**

“Hellenistic Jews” grew up outside of Israel, spoke Greek, and adopted Greek customs, while the “Hebraic Jews” were native to Israel, spoke Aramaic, and kept Hebrew customs. And apparently, there may have been some subtle prejudice between the



two cultural groups because the Hellenized widows **were being overlooked.** They were not getting their fair share of the common pot, so the Hellenized Jews complained.

The Second Problem (6:2)

Given this problem, **the Twelve gathered all the disciples together.** The apostles listened to the complaint. They didn't ignore it, sweep it under the rug, or hope it would go away. They listened to the complaint, addressed it head on, and did so publicly. Moreover, they not only acknowledged the problem, but identified a second one. **“It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.”**

Put simply, the apostles were being distracted.

Time spent at the money tables was time spent away from their calling to preach and to pray. It wasn't right to be so distracted, not because serving the needy was *bad* thing to do, but because it wasn't the *best* thing they could do.



“Did you know that one of the biggest challenges in ministry, indeed in all the whole Christian life, is not having to choose between *good* and *bad*, but having to choose between *good*, *better*, and *best*? There are *too many good things to do*.”

Did you know that one of the biggest challenges in ministry, indeed in all the whole Christian life, is not having to choose between *good* and *bad*, but having to choose between *good*, *better*, and *best*?

There are *too many good things to do*, and you need wisdom to prioritize between them.

One way of prioritizing is to know your spiritual gifts, callings, and vocations from the Lord. Knowing what those are will often help you discern which option to choose, when you are given several good things to do. You'll discern where to serve, based on your giftedness.

Knowing their gifts, callings, and vocations certainly helped the apostles in their decision. Although they were more than qualified to tend to the money table, their primary giftedness and calling from God was to preach and to pray. That was the best service for them to do.

A Solution Proposed (6:3-4)

Faced with these two problems, the apostles proposed a common-sense solution. “**Brothers and**

sisters,” they said. “**Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry [diakonia, service] of the word.**”

The apostles told the people to choose **seven men** who could take responsibility for the distribution of food.

One of the most interesting aspects of this solution is what is *not* mentioned. The book of Acts is full of supernatural guidance. Angels speak, voices are heard, visions are seen, and the risen Christ even appears to give personal instruction.

But in this case, faced with the problem with the widows, there is no voice from heaven, no vision, no trance, and no angelic appearance. Instead the apostles use sound judgment to address a practical problem.

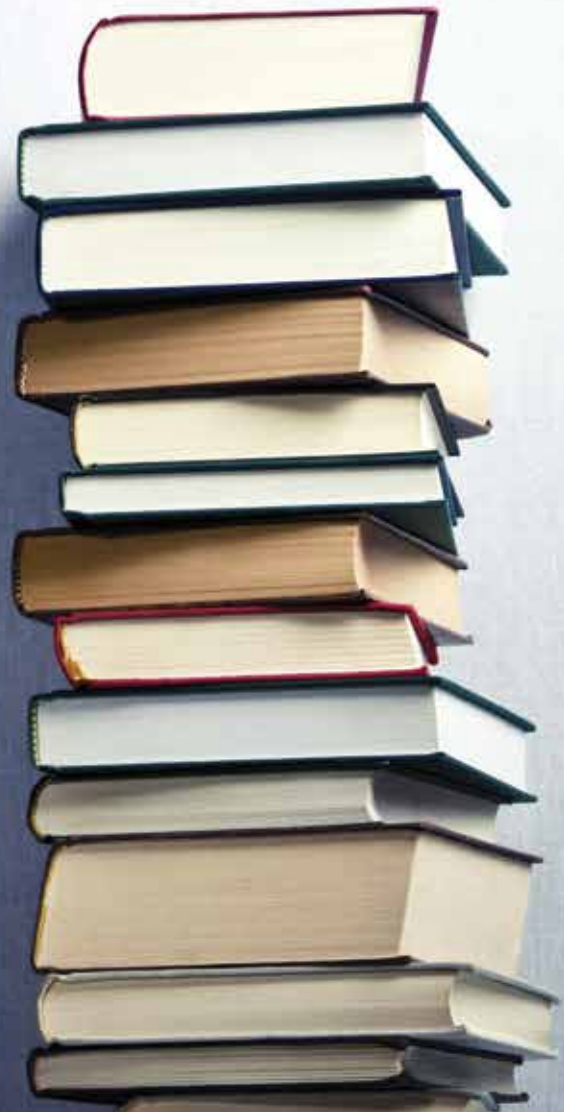
How appropriate! The life of a deacon is one of practical service that must rely on Biblically informed experience to come up with common-sense solutions in serving the neediest members of the community.

“WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT FREE GRACE?”

Visit our redesigned website!

- **New user-friendly format**
- **Hundreds of academic journal articles**
- **Hundreds of popular magazine articles**
- **YouTube Videos**
- **Audio messages**
- **Conference Schedules**

faithalone.org



The men had to have the right character qualities for this position, with the apostles mentioning three things in particular.

First, they needed to be **known** in the community. That is, they needed a track record of service, and be the kind of natural leaders that everyone knew and trusted.

Second, they needed to be **full of the Spirit**. That is, they needed to be empowered to do the ministry. In the book of Acts, that is what the Spirit is for—empowerment. As Jesus promised, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8).

And third, they needed to be **full of...wisdom**. Please don’t confuse this with having worldly wisdom, or being highly opinionated, or being full of hot air. The apostles were talking about Biblical wisdom, as found in the Word of God. Wisdom is practical knowledge of how to live a good and godly life. The men who would be put in charge of the distribution to the widows would need that practical knowledge to solve the problems they would be faced in serving the community.

The Seven Are Chosen (6:5-6)

Luke tells us the **proposal pleased the whole group**. At a time of discord and potential fracture, the apostles brought unity, not only by proposing a reasonable solution, but by making the people themselves ultimately responsible for working out the problem. It was up to the community to choose these new servants. And their choice was somewhat surprising.

So **they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism**. What is surprising here is that all the men have Greek names. This indicates they may have all come from the Hellenized group. One would have expected a few Hebrew names to maintain a sense of balance in the service to the widows. But this may be a sign of contrition and humility on the part of the Hebrews. Maybe they recognized the wrong that had been done, and out of a strong desire to restore peace, willingly entrusted the work to men from “the other side” as it were.

Although we don’t know very much about the last five men, in later chapters we will about Stephen and Philip, and how God used them both mightily to

preach the good news and even to perform miracles. It seems the congregation had made the right choice.

After making their choices, **they**, the congregation, **presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them**. And so, while the community elected the deacons, the apostles confirmed the congregational choice.

The Result (6:7)

And what was the result of appointing these men? Interestingly, Luke doesn’t tell us that it solved the first problem with the widows. Instead, he concentrates on the second problem of the apostles being distracted from preaching the word. Indeed, in that respect, the results were very positive.

As a result of appointing the seven, three things happened.

First, **the word of God spread**. The apostles were freed to concentrate on preaching, and the Word was heard far and wide.

Second, **the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly**. Not only did the Word spread, but people openly believed it and joined the community.

Third, in an even more impressive sign of the apostles success, **a large number of priests became obedient to the faith**. The Temple priests would have had much to lose by openly believing in Jesus. For example, they would most likely lose their priestly jobs, be ostracized by their families and friends, and immediately become special targets of the religious authorities as relatively high-profile converts to the new faith. And yet, despite these dangers, many of the priests believed anyway, and did so openly, becoming *obedient to the faith*.

Application

What does this passage tell us about the role of deacons? Let me suggest four applications.

1. *Deacons should be disciples.*

Just because you believe in Jesus for eternal life does not make you a disciple (nor does being a disciple necessarily mean you have believed in Jesus for eternal life). A deacon should both have believed in Jesus for eternal life and should be self-consciously following the Lord’s teachings. Being a disciple also implies a deacon must be teachable, always seeking to learn from the Lord Jesus, and to be led by Him.

Alexander Strauch on Deacons:

“Through the deacons, the local church’s charitable activities are effectively organized and centralized. The deacons are collectors of funds, distributors of relief, and agents of mercy. They help the poor, the jobless, the sick, the widowed, the elderly, the homeless, the shut-in, the refugees, and the disabled. They counsel and guide people. They visit people in their homes. They relieve suffering. They comfort, protect, and encourage people, and help to meet their needs. In contemporary language, they are the congregation’s social workers.”

From *Ministers of Mercy*, p. 156.

2. Deacons should love people.

The reason why the church needed deacons at all, was so the community could be more effective in loving its neediest members. The deacon is the one sent on behalf of the church to love the least among us. And more often than not, the reason why it is a deacon helping, instead of a friend or family member, is because the needy member has no one else to help them. Like the widows in Acts 6, they are alone in the world. In those cases, what is really being ministered to is not a material need, but a need for relationship, human connection, and for family. In sum, it is a need for love. Hence, a deacon must love people.

3. Deacons should be wise.

The apostles did not receive a revelation from God on how to deal with the widow problem. They used their sound judgment.

Likewise, in order for a deacon to be effective, he must develop a Biblical mind in order to exercise sound judgment.

Colossians 2:3 says that all “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are found in Christ. And in 1 Cor 2:16, Paul says, “we have the mind of Christ.” That wise mind is developed through a life of prayer, Biblical study, and faithful living.

As you grow in spiritual maturity, and develop Biblical habits of thinking, you’ll be able to make good decisions.

4. Deacons should magnify the preaching of the Word.


Deacons exist so the word of God can be preached without distraction. They exist to magnify the Word. Deacons serve people’s physical

needs, so that preachers can help meet their eternal needs through the preaching of the Word.

Since deacons hold an office that is meant to facilitate the preaching of the Word, deacons should be diligent students of the Word themselves.

Conclusion

Heidi Baker, a missionary in Mozambique, whose ministry has emphasized caring for orphaned and abandoned children, was asked how she would summarize her mission. “We are trying to do one thing,” she explained. “We are trying to learn how to love. This is our job. It’s our only goal. We are a bit of a mess, but we are trying to learn how to love.”

Loving people can be messy. It is the deacon’s job to get their hands dirty. 



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Denton, TX with his wife, Abby, and their two children (soon to be three). All their cats ran away.



THE BUILDING BLOCK OF GODLINESS

BY JOE LOMBARDI

Introduction

In the United States physical fitness has become, according to the heading of one magazine article, “a national obsession.” That particular piece, which was published in the June 16, 1986 edition of *Time* was subtitled, “The U.S. Turns On to Exercise.” It began with these words:

At the dawning there were isolated stragglers, determinedly circling suburban high school tracks or pacing through city parks. Most Americans did not suppose that these were the harbingers of a U.S. craze. But by the end of the 70’s joggers were everywhere, all seemingly training for the marathon.

According to that article, the United States fields at least somewhere between 10-12 million dedicated runners. And, speaking of marathons, it is now estimated that more than one million Americans have raced the Greek-inspired 26-mile, 385-yard race since the running craze began in this country three and a half decades ago.

I would guess that not everyone reading this article is into running. (I prefer a less strenuous sport, i.e., fishing). However, many Americans have plunged into other alternative activities—and with just as much fervor. Swimmers boast of laps completed; cyclists boast of kilometers toured; and weight lifters boast of pounds pressed. (Anglers like me, on the other hand, like to talk about “the one that got away.”) The *Time* magazine article concluded with these words, “Today Americans live in a land where (fitness) is proper, i.e., it’s okay to strut your sweat!”

When I read that, I could not help but think of 1 Tim 4:7, where Paul wrote to his young protégé, “exercise yourself toward godliness.” He elaborated further, “for the training of the body has a limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim 4:8, HCSB).

What could possibly be of more value to an individual than their physical fitness? Their spiritual fitness, or godliness.

I believe Peter would agree. I say that because that very same word, *godliness*, is found in the midst of a

group of verses in 2 Pet 1:2-11, that we are using as the basis for this series of articles titled “Christians Under Construction.” When we began we explained that the Bible makes it clear that there is a sense in which every believer is a builder. Each one is constructing a spiritual “house,” if you please. According to Peter, we are building into our lives a super-structure of Christ-like character that rests on the solid footing of faith in Jesus Christ.

Verses 5-7 of 2 Peter 1 are essentially a Divine blueprint that identifies and specifies seven building blocks that are to be used in the framing and fashioning of Christians in and under construction. Thus far we

have described four of the seven: virtue, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance. In this article we will examine the fifth building block of *godliness*.

“What could possibly be of more value to an individual than their physical fitness? Their spiritual fitness, or godliness.”

Godliness Explained

Perhaps the best way for us to begin is to define the term. The Greek word Peter used is *eusebeia*. The prefix *-eu* means *good*, as in our English words *eulogy*

(literally, a “good word”), and *euphoria*, (literally, a “good buoyancy”).

The second part of the word is the Greek root *-seb*. It originally meant to step back from someone or something; to maintain a distance—usually out of a sense of awe and/or fear, as one might approach, for example, that which is holy and sublime. Eventually the word *eusebeia* came to mean “good respect” or “well devout.” It is often defined as “reverential awe.” For example, Prov 1:7 begins, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...”

When this verse was translated from Hebrew into Greek, the word that was used for *fear* was the Greek term *eusebeia*. That is because the fear that is referred to in this text can best be defined as “reverential awe.” Since our God is an awesome God—that is, because He is holy and sublime—there is a sense in which I feel I must keep my distance from Him as I stand in awe of Him. I must maintain a healthy respect for Him. I dare not minimize and trivialize my relationship with Him. He is not my “buddy buddy.” He is the creator and sovereign ruler of this universe, and I must revere Him, which should result in my obedience to Him. These are the implications of *eusebeia*.

This word emphasizes the kind of life one should live as the result of a profound respect for God. In short, *eusebeia* is a call to be like God. In 1 Tim 3:16, Paul quoted an ancient creedal hymn:

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

The song obviously refers to Jesus, who is described as “the mystery of godliness.” Concerning Him the prophet Isaiah wrote, “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge *and of the fear* [*eusebeia*, LXX] *of the Lord*” (Isaiah 11:2, emphasis added).

There is a sense in which Jesus, who is the mystery of godliness is also the *epitome* of godliness. That is true because Jesus is God. He came to make God known to us (John 1:14-18). A godlier person you cannot find.

Furthermore, He is not just a godly master, but He is also a godly mentor and a godly model. Therefore, if you and I would be godly, then we most certainly should follow His example, because to be *Christ-like* is to be *God-like*. That is why Paul admonished the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). Godliness is essentially knowing the mind of Christ so that one might live a life like Christ. It is to ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” And then, to do it!

In his book *The Practice of Godliness*, Jerry Bridges defines godliness as “that devotion to God (which includes the fear of God, love of God, and the desire for God) which results in a life that is pleasing to God.” He goes on to explain that godliness is “taking on God’s character” and fleshing it out in the “totality of life” (pp. 18-20). It is becoming so much like Jesus that someone might mistake you for the Lord.

Godliness Obtained

Our definition of godliness begs the question, “How can godliness be obtained?”

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul instructed his young son in the faith, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Tim 2:1-2).

Later in that same letter he goes on to say, “But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness” (1 Tim 4:7).

Two chapters later he adds, “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (1 Tim 6:11).

Obviously, there can be no doubt that godliness is required of us. But why?

Here are two reasons.

The first is simply because we belong to Him. Paul explained it like this in his letter to Titus,

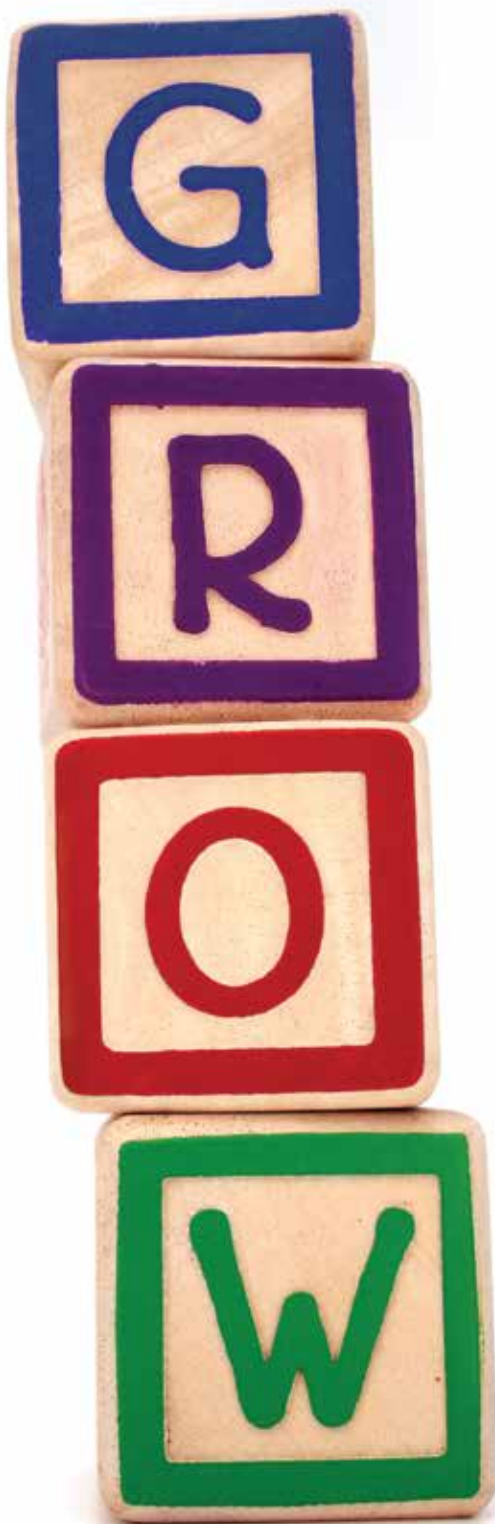
For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying *ungodliness* and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and *godly* in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-14, emphasis added).

Godliness is required of us simply because those of us who believe in Him belong to Him. We are “His own special people” and He wants us to behave like Him. As Paul explained,

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, *which are God’s*” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Because we belong to God, we honor Him by being like Him. It has been said that “imitation is the highest form of flattery.” That may be true. But imitation

“Godliness is required of us simply because those of us who believe in Him belong to Him. We are ‘his own special people’ and He wants us to behave like Him.”



may also be the highest form of *honor*. We honor Him by being like Him.

Furthermore, the Bible makes it clear that if we want to act like God, then we need to learn to think like God.

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col 1:9-10).

We discredit and disgrace His Name by ungodly living. To live our lives in a godly way is to “walk worthy of the Lord.”

A second reason godliness is required of us is because He is coming soon! Based on that truth Paul exhorted Titus to:

...speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine... For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:1, 11-13).

He is coming again and He is coming soon! Peter says virtually the same thing in 2 Peter 3:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, *what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?* (2 Pet 3:10-12, emphasis added).

Likewise, Paul wrote in Romans 13:

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” (Rom 13:11-13).

Revelry, drunkenness, lewdness, lust, strife and envy—a grocery list of the rotten fruit of ungodliness. But then Paul added by way of contrast in the very next verse, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom 13:14). In other words, *be godly*.

Godliness is required of us 1) because we belong to Him, and 2) because He is coming soon. When we are summoned to the heavenly royal dais known as the Judgment Seat of Christ, He will reward every believer for what they have done.

Furthermore, the Bible says that we shall become like Him. For example, Paul wrote that when He comes He will “transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil 3:21). Therefore, John concludes that “everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). That is godliness!

How Godliness Is Acquired

But how is godliness actually acquired by us? For the most part, slowly and gradually. Growth demands both a degree of human responsibility, as well as a measure of Divine sovereignty.

Second Peter 1:5 begins with these words, “But also for this very reason, *giving all diligence*, add to your faith...godliness.”

Our human responsibility is to make every effort to become godly people. That is what Paul illustrated in 1 Corinthians 9, “All athletes are disciplined in their training” (1 Cor 9:25 NLT). So is everyone who would be known for godliness. Paul explained it like this, “But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Tim 4:7-8, emphasis added).

“Exercise yourself toward godliness.” The word that the apostle Paul used that is translated “exercise” is the word *gumnazo*, from which we derive the English word “gymnasium.” Because so much attention was placed on human prowess and strength, nearly every town in the first century world had a gymnasium where young men spent hours training for competition. Paul acknowledged the value of physical fitness, while at the same time prodding all believers then (and now) to a far more valuable disciplined regimen of training for spiritual fitness.

What would such a training program involve?

I believe that Biblically it has both a negative and positive aspect to it.

First, we might identify the negative aspect by the slogan, “Just say ‘No!’” For example, consider the “exercises” that Paul prescribed for Titus: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12). This training program for godliness involves learning to

just say “no!” to ungodliness. For example, when you are tempted...

- To gripe and groan over your lot in life—just say “No!”
- To use profanity or indulge in sexual immorality—just say “No!”
- To criticize and/or ostracize another brother or sister in Christ—just say “No!”
- To give someone a piece of your mind you cannot afford to lose—just say “No!”
- To be indifferent and negligent in your walk with Christ—just say “No!”
- To be spiritually lazy and slovenly in your work for Christ—just say “No!”
- To become half-hearted and distracted in your worship of Christ—just say “No!”
- To sin in any way, shape or form—just say “No!”

If you are serious about training yourself to be godly, then there will be times when you will need to learn to just say “No!”

Second, we might identify the positive aspect by the slogan “Just say, ‘Yes!’” Consider these opening verses of Ps 1:1-2, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly [just say “No!”], nor stands in the path of sinners [just say “No!”], nor sits in the seat of the scornful [just say “No!”]; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night [just say “Yes!”].

In other words, when the Spirit of God prompts you...

- To read God’s Word—just say “Yes!”
- To kneel in prayer—just say “Yes!”
- To testify for Christ—just say “Yes!”
- To attend church—just say “Yes!”
- To use your spiritual gift(s)—just say “Yes!”
- To give a cup of cold water in Jesus’ Name—just say “Yes!”
- To say a kind word or perform a good deed because Jesus would—just say “Yes!”
- To love God with your whole heart, soul, strength and mind—just say “Yes!”

Blessings and Warnings

I have a word of *blessing* and one of *warning* with respect to *godliness*.

First, the blessing. The Bible says “now godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6). What gain is that? In 2 Pet 1:8, Peter writes that if we possess this quality in increasing measure, then we will be effective and productive for the Lord, here and now. That

is gain! Furthermore, if we are effective and productive for the Lord here and now, then, as a result, we will receive a “rich welcome” (NIV) into the eternal kingdom.

Second, the warning. It comes from 2 Peter.

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, *having a form of godliness but denying its power*. And from such people turn away! (2 Pet 3:1-5, emphasis added).

I need to warn you, first, that the world in which we live will become increasingly notorious not only for its moral decadence, but for its general ungodliness. And as a result, it will become increasingly intolerant of your personal godliness. When this happens, we need to remember this precious promise:

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified (1 Pet 4:12-14).

Conclusion


About three decades ago (during the 1980's) when stair-climbing became the “craze” in America, Steve Silva, a PE instructor from Randolph, MA, decided to join the climbing generation. He shed 235 pounds in 9 1/2 months. How did he do it? He exercised. He ran 3100 flights of stairs (46,000 steps) a week. That was when he decided to attempt to break the record for the

“vertical mile,” which had previously been set by Dale Neil at the Peachtree Plaza Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia in 1984.

Silva trained rigorously so that he might be able to run up and down the 1,652 steps of the Eiffel Tower 7 ½ times in less than two hours, one minute and 54 seconds, just shy of the record for a vertical mile.

When I first read about this race I could not help but think of another upward race—the one to which Paul referred when he wrote in Phil 3:13-14, “...but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

As the old gospel song says,

I'm pressing on the upward way,
new heights I'm gaining day by day,
still praying as I'm homeward bound,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground. 



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



AFTER LOTS OF DELAYED AND LOST MAIL
WE GOT A P.O. BOX. NOW SEND MAIL TO:
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 1308
DENTON, TX 76202

Q&A

By Staff

Bereans

Comment: I think that Zane's comment on page 25 in *What Is the Outer Darkness?* is right on. He says:

I've been around the Christian movement for a long time, and it is really amazing how often Christians simply repeat what they've heard from others or read in a commentary. It's pretty evident they've done no thinking, no studying, probably no praying about the stuff that they're saying. Instead, they just repeat the traditional interpretation of this passage or that passage, or what so-and-so said about it.

I think it fits right in with what George Muller wrote over 100 years ago:

I had a great deal of time to study the Bible while I recovered [from an illness]. During this time, God showed me that His Word alone is our standard of judgment in spiritual things. The Word can be explained only by the Holy Spirit who is the teacher of His people. I had not understood the work of the Holy Spirit in a practical way before this time.

The Lord enabled me to put this aspect of the Holy Spirit to the test by laying aside my commentaries and almost every other book and simply reading the Word of God. That first evening when I shut myself in my room to pray and meditate over the Scriptures, I learned more in a few hours than during the last several months (*The Autobiography of George Muller*, pp. 26-27).

A lot of people say they are Bereans (Acts 17:11), but really are not.

—B.F.

Response: Great comment. I heartily agree. It is easy to slip into the same approach that the Pharisees had, that tradition tells us what the Scripture means and settles all questions of interpretation.



Thus people ended up studying the traditional writings, not the Scriptures themselves.

While the Scriptures do not forbid the use of commentaries or the reading of Christian books, they warn us against blindly accepting whatever we read or hear. As Zane suggested, we need to pray that God will give us understanding of His Word. We need to meditate on the text. To go to a commentary before you've carefully examined a text for yourself might well make it difficult for you to see the text clearly.

—Bob

Different Levels of Punishment

Q I read a tract written by Bob Wilkin where he seems to imply that there are different levels of punishment in Hell. He wrote, "God has determined that the amount of punishment unbelievers will receive will be related to their works" (*There's a New Day Dawning*, p. 17). Am I misunderstanding him? How can there be different "amounts of punishment?" Since the amount of time is about the same for everyone in Hell the only possibility that could I see is a variation in Hell's intensity between individuals.

A It seems to me that the Bible does indeed teach that there will be different levels of punishment in hell.

Certainly the number or types of sin will play a part in that judgment. Unbelievers are judged according

to their deeds (Rev 20:12) and Jesus says that He will judge every man according to his deeds (Rev 22:12).

It seems to me that this involves more than simply saying that nobody can earn eternal life by their works.

But the NT tells us that more will be involved in that judgment. Jesus said that those who saw His miracles will be judged more harshly than those who did not. He says this in verses like Luke 10:12; Matt 11:20-22; and Matt 12:41-42. Those who were given more light but did not believe will receive a greater judgment, and a greater condemnation. Jesus said the same thing about the religious leaders of His day—they would receive a greater condemnation (Matt 23:14).

So, a person who did not believe but was exposed to much light will be worse off in hell than one who did not. We could say for example that an unbeliever in the United States will be judged more harshly than one in North Korea.

I must admit that I do not know what that will look like. Just like the judgment of believers at the Bema will involve the amount of knowledge they had, their motives, their works, and so on, the same seems to be true for unbelievers.

But what will differences in hell look like? The Bible doesn't say. It only says that is the way it will be. There will be differences among believers as well, and fortunately the NT gives us more info on what that will be like. Since hell is eternal, we must conclude that the element of time is not the difference. But hell will be more "tolerable" for some than others.

—Bob

Left Behind?

Q Is there a Biblical possibility that the "outer darkness" that Jesus talks about, is simply being left behind during the Rapture? Or will all believers be automatically raptured regardless of their obedience to the Lord?

—B.T.

A There are some who believe only faithful Christians will be raptured, but I don't think they see that as the outer darkness.

Some older Dispensational writers held that the outer darkness meant the unfaithful believer would miss the Millennial kingdom. From my

understanding they would either be left in the grace or spend those 1000 years in heaven and not on the earth with Christ.

I think that 1 Thess 5:1ff makes it clear that all believers will be raptured. Could one say that the unfaithful believer will not have a part of the kingdom upon earth with Christ, like some of the older writers did?

I suppose you could say that.

But I think Hodges understanding is more likely—that the outer darkness is understood in relation to the parables and the first century setting. It refers to a place which is not close to the King.

—Ken

How Can People Refuse?

Q I had a question about the English phrase "refuse to believe." What does this phrase really mean?

I've read several articles on your website and elsewhere about the nature of faith (Wilkin, "Beware of Confusion about Faith"; Paul Holloway, "A Return to Rome: Lordship Salvation's Doctrine of Faith"; Zane Hodges, "Faith Subtly Redefined"; Zane Hodges, "Faith Means Just That—Faith!"). Those have been really helpful, but I don't think I've seen an explanation about what it means to "refuse to believe."

If we understand belief as passive persuasion concerning something and not an act of the will, then how can one "refuse to believe" (e.g., he refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah)? Could it just mean, "he didn't want to believe" or be just an emphatic way of saying "he didn't believe"? Any light you can shed would be helpful.

—P.G.

A The exact expression, "refuse to believe," is not found in the Bible. I think you are referring to a number of places which speak of people being unwilling to believe.

For example, in John 5:39-40 the Lord says, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." Coming to Jesus in John's Gospel refers to believing in Him (see John 6:35). Jesus' listeners were unwilling to believe in Him.

Similarly, in Matt 23:37-39 the Lord said he would have gathered the people of Jerusalem and all of Israel to Himself, “but you were not willing.” They were not willing to believe in Him and hence He would not set up the kingdom at that time.

While it is true that the evidence either convinces us or it does not, that does not mean that we automatically are aware of the evidence and are open to it.

For example, most of the Jews who heard Jesus teach were not willing to consider the evidence because their tradition told them that this man must be a sinner. After all, He healed on the Sabbath. He let His disciples sift grain on the Sabbath. In their minds this proved He was not the Messiah. Plus the Jewish leaders rejected Him. Surely if He were Messiah the leaders would know it. So most Jews did not pray for insight and did not pause to weigh out the evidence. They did not ask Him or His disciples honest questions.

Let’s say you have a friend who is an atheist and who refuses to talk to you about Jesus and His teachings. This man’s unwillingness to believe cuts him off from hearing the message that must be believed to have everlasting life.

Clearly God does not draw all equally. Judas spent nearly four years watching Jesus heal the sick and raise the dead. He heard hundreds of His messages. Yet Judas did not come to faith in Christ. Evidently he closed himself off to the evidence.

Maybe one final example will help. Let’s say you are conservative. Have you ever heard a liberal and a conservative debate? The conservative will make what you think to be great points. Yet the liberal will scoff and will counter with some arguments which strike you as weak. Is it that the liberal just doesn’t understand? I don’t think so. I think the liberal understands, but is not willing to be persuaded because his worldview demands that he reject conservative positions, no matter how well the evidence supports them. He has counter-evidence, often from the word of “experts,” that he clings to.

I hope that helps.

—Bob

How to Introduce Grace?

Q I am currently entering my second year as pastor of our church. About six months ago, I finally fully concluded that Free Grace theology is truly what the

Bible teaches. Long story short, I came from a Calvinistic college of sorts. Anyways, I want to begin teaching my congregation these wonderful truths. Where would be a good starting point to build this solid foundation of Free Grace theology? A majority of the congregation, I believe, already hold to a form of Free Grace but don’t really know it. Thanks!

—A.D.

A Thanks so much for your question. I have had similar experiences in the churches in which I have been pastor.

As pastor, an important thing to do is to make the gospel of grace crystal clear each Sunday. It doesn’t have to be the focus of your sermon, in fact, most cases it won’t be, but I would make it a habit to include it in the message. The reason is there might be new folks, and even for those who understand the gospel it needs to be repeated. I have found that in most sermons a clear gospel helps to understand the passage.

For example, if the passage is dealing with pleasing the Lord/rewards/looking forward to the coming of the Lord or something like that, you can make it clear that these things have nothing to do with receiving eternal life as a gift. I assume you have some kind of Sunday School. I would use material from GES. Currently, in the church I attend we are going through 2 Peter using the short commentary by Hodges. It is a Southern Baptist church and the material we get from the SBC is solidly Lordship. I have discontinued that because it only causes confusion.

The material from GES will cost about the same as the material from a denomination and is so much better. There are a number of short books on the atonement, the coming man of sin, and so on, that a class can study. You can do a chapter a week or at whatever speed you choose. That is what I have done.

If you do that, your folk will soon be much more solidly founded in Free Grace! 

—Ken

Send your questions to ken@faithalone.org or to questions@faithalone.org.

Grace Evangelical Society

P.O. Box 1308

Denton, TX 76202

Believe in Him for Life

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE

PAID

ABERDEEN, SD
PERMIT #200



Regional Conferences

October 21-22, 2016
Charlotte, NC

November 4-5, 2016
Edinburgh, Scotland
Carrubbers Christian
Center

January TBD, 2017
San Antonio, TX

See faithalone.org
for more info.