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DISCIPLESHIP AND THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

PLUS "Come after Me" / Back from the Future / Idols in the Wilderness (Acts 7:30-43)
Gym Fees: A Parable / Kindness / John: The Evangelistic Book / Q&A **AND MORE**

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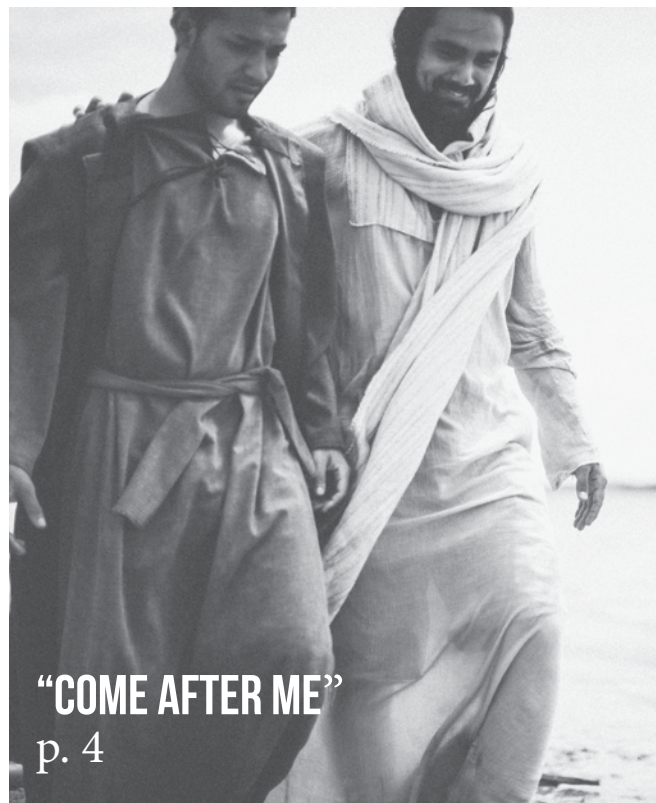
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FROM THE EDITOR

Grace in Focus magazine does what the title suggests. It focuses on God's grace. His favor is why we can have everlasting life simply by faith in Christ. And His favor makes it possible for us to live meaningful lives.

One of the favorite songs at my church is "Free, Free, Free." Everlasting life is a free gift. We do not work to get it or to retain it. It is free.

In this issue of the magazine we have many excellent articles for your edification. All of the articles in one way or another rejoice in the free gift of everlasting life.

Jesus promised that the one who comes to Him will never hunger (John 6:35). Coming to Jesus is a figure of speech for *believing in Him*. But He also called for people to come *after* Him. That is a *discipleship concept*. In order to come after Jesus, we must deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow Him. My article deals with the vital concept of coming after Jesus.

A fantastic article on idols in the wilderness considers Stephen's speech in Acts 7:30-43. Zane Hodges sees ties between the response of the new nation when Moses did not return quickly and Church Age people when Jesus does not return quickly.

The Judgment Seat of Christ (also called the Bema) is rarely discussed in most churches. Nor is it much discussed in Christian literature. But it should be. Phil Congdon paints the picture of a faithful believer who is hard on himself and who thinks that his experience at the Bema will be very painful. Instead, he finds that the Lord is carefully looking for the good he did in his life and He finds plenty that is rewardable.

Ken Yates discusses discipleship from Luke 14:25-35. Christ is our example. And He gives us the strength we need to successfully navigate the path of discipleship.

New GES social media coordinator Brad Bell tells a bit about himself and his ministry.

It is a tricky thing to write your own parable, but Shawn Lazar gives it a shot and he does a great job.



Free, Free, Free

Bob Wilkin, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

His fictional "free" gym membership is a great warning. We dare not change the free gift of everlasting life into an installment plan.

How do we handle money? Wisely, says Bill Fiess.

Kindness is a cardinal Christian virtue. Joe Lombardi discusses this virtue in his article, "Kindness."

Questions are very helpful in evangelism. John Gooding gives seven helpful evangelistic questions that help make the message of life crystal clear.

Leilani Matlack defends the evangelistic purpose of John's Gospel as she summarizes the first eleven chapters.

Finally, Ken, Shawn, and I tackle some tough questions y'all have asked.

—Peace like a river,



***"Come
after
Me"***

Is coming after Jesus a condition for being born again?

By Bob Wilkin

Introduction

What did Jesus mean when He said, “Come after Me”? The expression “come after Me” appears four times in the NT, all in the Gospels (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27). All but one of those involves the verb *erchomai*, *I come*. The exception is Mark 8:34 where *akoloutheō* is used. The latter verb typically carries the meaning of *follow*. We get the English word *acolyte*, one who follows and assists a priest in worship, from it.

Three of these passages are parallel. They all are sayings of the Lord. He said, “If anyone desires *to come after Me*, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

The fourth passage, Luke 14:27, conveys the same message, but with slightly different wording: “And whoever does not bear his cross *and come after Me* cannot be My disciple” (emphasis added). Where this last passage is especially different is in the verses which follow. In Luke 14 the verses which follow concern counting the cost of discipleship. In the other three passages the verses which follow deal with saving or losing one’s life (*psychē*) and the return of the Lord to recompense each according to his works.

New Birth by Following Christ?

Most pastors, theologians, and commentators think that these four passages concern how one is born again. Note the following explanations.

In his commentary on Mark 8:34-38, Alan Cole writes,

Ultimately, to the Christian, this following of Jesus becomes the hope of heaven, since our leader has gone there (Heb. 6:19-20): but first comes the cross (*Mark*, p. 207).

He continued, “So a refusal to accept this ‘death to self’...is a spiritual death; whereas, by divine paradox, spiritual life is to be found only by dying to self



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“Follow after the Lord
Jesus Christ? Absolutely.
Only a fool would
not do so. He rewards
faithfulness.”

(Gal. 2:20).” He concludes, “The kingdom was a good ‘buy’ at any price, if only these hard-headed businessfolk could see it” (p. 208).

Marvin Pate, commenting on Luke 9:23-26, is a bit less clear. Yet his discussion of “true faith” and “eternal glory” (not defined and explained as a special fullness of glory that only faithful believers will receive) shows that he too sees the issue here as everlasting life versus everlasting death:

The response that is called for in all four of these calls to commitment is one of faith, for faith does not focus on that which can be seen (the embarrassment and rejection attached to the crucifixion of Christ) but on that which cannot be seen (eternal glory). True faith is willing to lay one’s life down daily in service to Christ (*Luke*, p. 209).

David Dickson, commenting on Matt 14:24-27, says, “The fruit

of bearing my cross or refusing of it shall be seen at the day of judgment” (*Matthew*, p. 230). He goes on to say the Jesus will “reward the backslider with deserved judgment and shall crown the grace of suffering for [Christ] with the reward of life” (p. 230). He sees everlasting life as a reward for suffering for Christ.

In his famous book *Christ’s Call to Discipleship*, James Montgomery Boice has an entire chapter on Luke 9:23-26 (Chapter 3). There he speaks of the call to deny oneself, take up his cross, and follow Christ as “essential gospel elements” and “essential ingredients of Christianity” (p. 37). Later in a chapter on counting the cost (Chapter 9), Boice gives practical application to what he said earlier:

I say that...the minimum amount a person must give is *all*. I say, “You must give it all. You cannot hold back even a fraction of a percentage

of yourself. Every sin must be abandoned. Every false thought must be repudiated. You must be the Lord’s entirely” (p. 114).

Eternal Rewards by Following Christ

Yet these four passages actually concern exactly what the Lord said, how one *follows Him*. Following Christ concerns discipleship, and contrary to what many say, discipleship is not a condition of everlasting life. The issue is learning more about the Lord Jesus and becoming more like Him, not being born again.

Hal Haller says,

Jesus is talking here [Matt 16:24-28] about rewards, not salvation. The Greek word *psychē* is used four times in vv 25-26 and is unfortunately translated as *life* in v 25 and yet as *soul* in v 26.

Losing one’s *psychē* does not

mean being eternally separated from God in hell. Neither does saving one's *psychē* refer to gaining eternal life. That is not in view here...

Instead, salvation of the soul refers to deliverance from a wasted life to a life of heightened satisfaction, enjoyment, usefulness, victory, status, authority, and rest in the coming millennial kingdom (cf. 2 Tim 2:12; Heb 3:6, 14; 4:11) ("Matthew," *The Grace NT Commentary*, p. 1:76).

Leon Morris seems to hold the same view, saying of Matt 16:24-28 that of the selfish believer, "He exists, but he does not live" (*Matthew*, p. 432). He continued saying of the one who loses his life for Jesus' sake, "That person will find life."

The first three of these "come after Me" passages all end with references to the Judgment Seat of Christ (Matt 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26) and with seeing the kingdom of God, i.e., by seeing the King glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 16:38; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27).

What a Difference the Discipleship Interpretation Makes

The difference in application of these four passages between the justification and sanctification interpretation is enormous. Those


who see the issue as justification preach salvation by self-denial, by taking up one's cross daily, and by following Christ until death on the path of suffering. While those advocating that view try to harmonize that with John 3:16, Acts 16:31, and Eph 2:8-9, they are unable to do so in any convincing way.

"Whatever your circumstances, the Lord Jesus gives you the strength to handle them in a way that honors God."

Those who see the issue as sanctification and eternal rewards call for the same things: self-denial, taking up one's cross daily, and following Christ until death on the path of suffering. But the difference is that we see this call as quite different from the offer of the free gift of everlasting life. We preach the message of life, the free gift of everlasting life by faith alone in the one who took away the sins of the world at Calvary. And we preach as a separate message the call to discipleship and *fullness of life*.

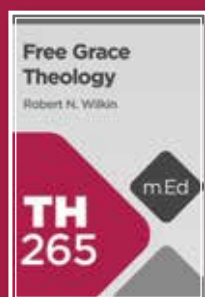
While the people who hold to the justification understanding

of following after Christ are well intentioned, they are wrong. They are unintentionally perverting the gospel of Christ. They make assurance of our eternal destiny impossible since it becomes tied to our perseverance in good works until death. They confuse those whom they evangelize. They don't say it quite this way, but this is the gist of their message: *I don't know where I'm going when I die. If you have just 15 minutes I can help you not know where you are going when you die.*

Follow after the Lord Jesus Christ? Absolutely. Only a fool would not do so. He rewards faithfulness. But do not think that by following Him you are working your way toward spending eternity with Him. Everlasting life is a free gift. The water of life is free, free, free (Rev 22:17). 



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX with his wife, Sharon. His latest book is Inerrancy for Dummies.



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The Indictment Continues

Stephen, accused by the Council, continues his indictment to Israel.

7:30-35. “An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush.” The miracle of the bush which burned and was not consumed (cf. Exod 3:2-3), prefigures the history of Israel, especially since her rejection of Christ. Like the bush, Israel suffered burning in the fires of human hatred and persecution, but was never consumed. Three great facets of the miracle are here in view.

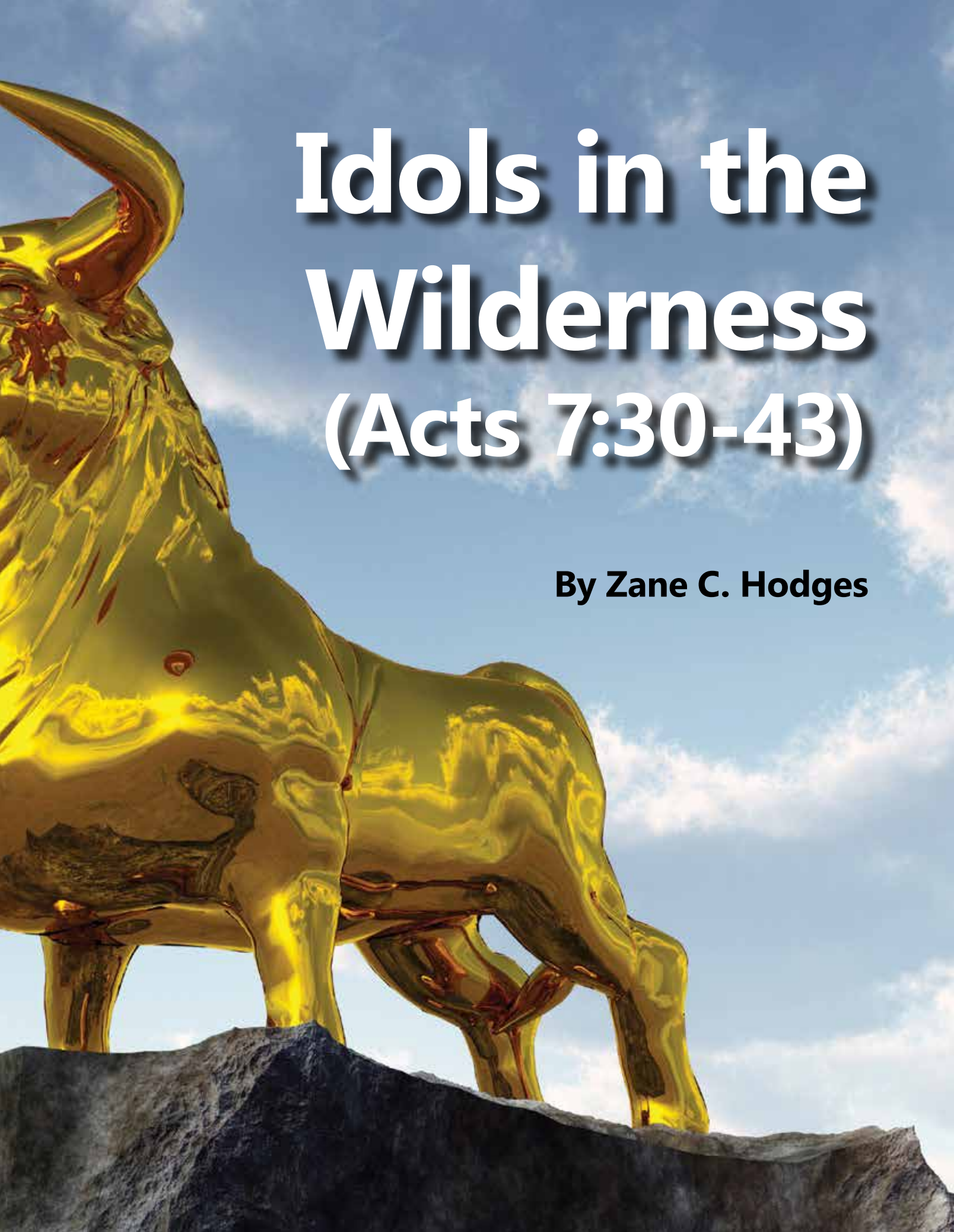
First, it involves an amazing sight (“**he marveled at the sight**”). The miracle of the preservation of Israel may indeed inspire wonder in us, as the bush did in Moses. God’s people cannot be destroyed. Neither can we, for He never leaves nor forsakes us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38). Trials for God’s people are not to *consume*, but to *purify*.

Second, it involves an awesome Person. The secret of the bush’s preservation lay in the Person Who was in it. He has a single title (“**I am the God of your fathers**”), followed by a triune one (“**the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob**”). One God revealed in a threefold way. As Abraham was preeminently a father, and Isaac a son, and Jacob’s history suggests the work of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity is suggested by the triple title. The Triune God is in the bush. Moses trembles in awe.

It is the presence of the God of the Jewish fathers, and His preserving power, that accounts for the Jewish race’s failure to be consumed. In like manner also, it is God with us, and in us, Who preserves us through all trials. The presence in us of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is cause for godly fear and trembling (for the Father in us, cf. Eph 4:6).

Third, it involves hallowed ground (“**the place where you stand is holy ground**”). The bush had its roots in



A large, highly reflective golden bull statue stands on a dark, jagged rock. The statue is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing left. Its surface is highly polished, reflecting the sky and clouds. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The title text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Idols in the Wilderness (Acts 7:30-43)

By Zane C. Hodges

the ground. Moses, attracted by the bush itself, and by the presence of God, might have ignored the ground he was standing on. God does not. He calls Moses's attention to its holiness.

The fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) are the roots from which the nation has sprung up (cf. Rom 11:18, 28). They are rooted in the land which God promised all three of them. And hence, this land is holy ground.

God has still not forgotten the land, and in His faithfulness to the fathers—for He is the God of these fathers—He will perform His word. In a coming day He will surely see the affliction of Israel and hear their groaning (v 34), and will come down to deliver them (v 34) by sending back to them the One they had rejected (vv 34-35). The Lord Jesus will then become a Ruler and Deliverer (not merely a ruler and judge, v 35) for them. The land will be theirs.

As the faithfulness of God guarantees Israel's earthly inheritance of the land, so His faithfulness assures us of our heavenly inheritance (cf. 1 Pet 1:4).

The Prophet

7:36-37. Having traced the history of Christ from His birth to His coming again (vv 20-35), the Spirit (through Stephen) now presents a new picture of Him. In vv 20-35 He is seen primarily as the promised Deliverer (cf. vv 25,35), but now He is seen as a Prophet (cf. Heb 1:1-3).

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet.” Note that Deut 18:15 was previously quoted by Peter (Acts 3:22) and applied to Christ (Acts 3:26). Israel has resisted the Spirit in rejecting its

Deliverer, but even more in rejecting the greatest of all Prophets.

“After he had shown them wonders and signs.” Moses, as a type of the Prophet like unto him, is now presented as a miracle worker. His miracles are apportioned into three phases: (1) **“the land of Egypt”**; (2) **“in the Red Sea”**; and (3) **“in the wilderness.”**

The Red Sea is the central, and crucial, miracle of the three, for without it the miracles in Egypt would have done no good, and those in the wilderness would never have occurred. The Red Sea was foremost a salvation miracle (cf. Exod 14:13, 30), and points to the Cross and its miracle of sin-bearing, voluntary death, and resurrection.

Thus our Lord's miracles in the world (e.g., Egypt), and in the midst of a redeemed people (e.g., wilderness), hinge on these “signs and wonders” which were done in accomplishing our salvation at the “Red Sea” of every saved soul, i.e., the Cross (cf. 1 Cor 10:1-2).

Thus the **“Prophet like me”** is like Moses in His miracles—showing signs and wonders as He delivered His own from this present evil age and **“brought them out.”** The salvation of the company of which Stephen was a part had as its background these three great phases of the miraculous working of the Lord.

“This [houtos] is that Moses.” Note how the *houtos* of v 37 ties back with v 36. It is specifically the miracle-working Moses who is a prophet. For miracles in Scripture, when displayed to any great extent, are always linked with prophecy and designed to confirm it. So were our Lord's miracles (John 5:36 with 5:31; Mark 16:19, 20; Heb 2:1-4).

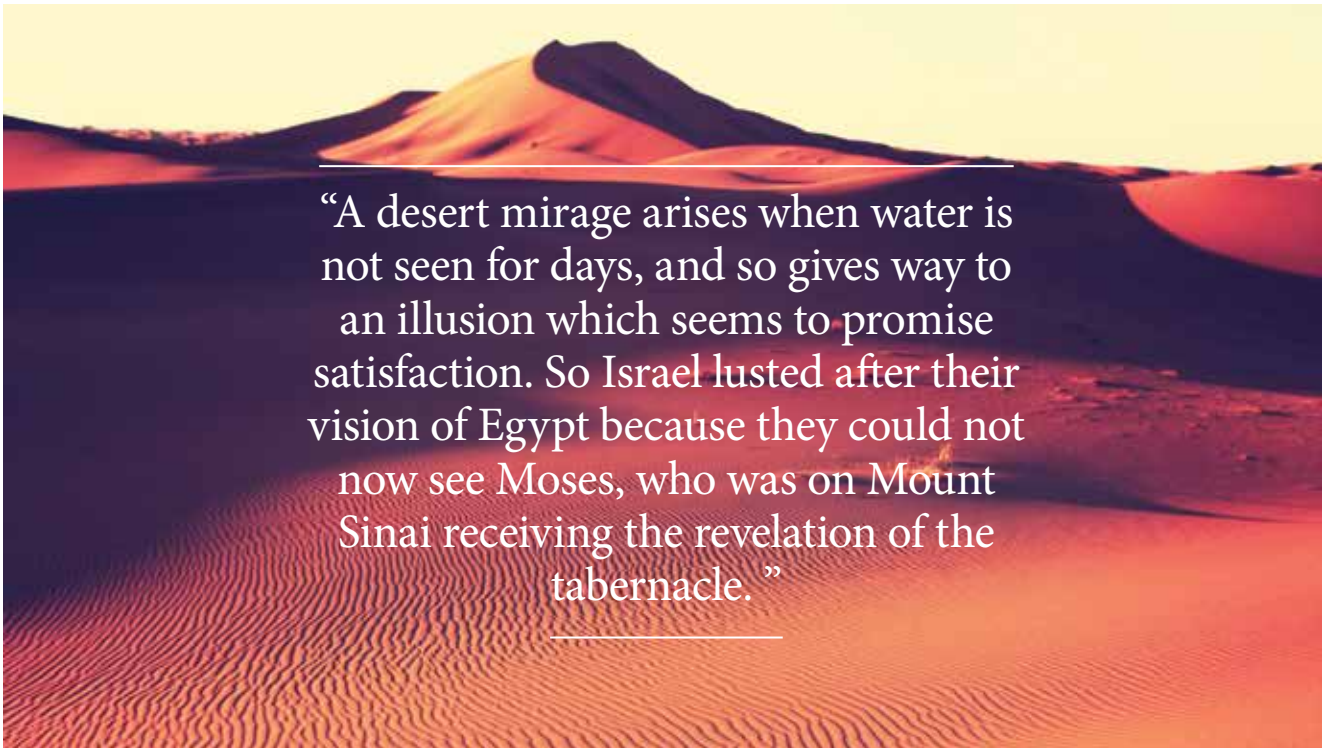
Today, we do not live in an age of miracles because we do not live in an age of prophecy. But the fact that these miracles have occurred make the salvation which began to be spoken by the Lord (the Prophet) all the more a thing not to be neglected, having received such confirmation. This is the message of Heb 2:1-4, having introduced this Prophet in Hebrews 1. Resistance to the Spirit speaking through such a Prophet, who had performed such confirmatory miracles, was for Israel in Stephen's day exceedingly serious. And so it is for us.

The Mirage in the Desert

7:38-39. “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness.” In the wilderness, the children of Israel are afflicted by a kind of mirage. **“And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt.”** Egypt, the scene of their bondage and misery, now appears attractive and desirable. Thus they refuse obedience to their deliverer, thrust him away, and turn to Egypt in their hearts (v 39).

Likewise, for the believer, the world is a moral and spiritual wilderness where it is hard and trying spiritually to subsist. The soul sometimes sees the “mirage” of a world which he knew in unsaved days which deceitfully appears attractive and enjoyable. Often, as with Israel, this happens soon after salvation. The deluded believer forgets their bondage and misery. Thus the Christian may refuse to obey His Deliverer, thrust Him away from his life, and turn back in heart to the world.

7:40-41. “Make us gods to go before us.” Now Israel wants a



“A desert mirage arises when water is not seen for days, and so gives way to an illusion which seems to promise satisfaction. So Israel lusted after their vision of Egypt because they could not now see Moses, who was on Mount Sinai receiving the revelation of the tabernacle.”

“little Egypt” out in the desert. **“And they made a calf.”** They make a god like Egypt’s, and they revel in the idolatry after the manner of the pleasures and sins of Egypt (vv 40-41, cf. Exod 32:1-6). [Note: the Jewish Rabbis affirm Moloch to have had an ox’s head.]

The calf of gold fitly symbolizes the materialism of Egypt where, anciently, wealth depended upon possession of herds productive in their calving. Gold was gained by this.

So too, the believer, allured by Egypt, may go after the “golden calf” of material well-being, with its attendant degrading descent into pleasures and vice. The soul that thrusts Christ away is not far from idolatry (**“but rejected”; “make us gods...”**). And, in fact, covetousness *is* idolatry (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5).

A desert mirage arises when water is not seen for days, and

so gives way to an illusion which seems to promise satisfaction. So Israel lusted after their vision of Egypt because they could not now see Moses, who was on Mount Sinai receiving the revelation of the tabernacle (the pattern of heavenly things; cf. Exod 24:18ff).

Note the parallel with Christ in v 38. Like Moses, He is in the Church in this desert world. Yet He is unseen, because He has ascended onto the hill of the Lord, there to become the Prophet of “heavenly things” revealed through His Spirit (cf. John 16:12ff). He, as speaking from heaven, has given us **“living oracles”** (i.e., a living Word; cf. Heb 12:25; 4:12). He is thus truly a Prophet like unto Moses (cf. Acts 7:37). But because just now we see Him not (cf. Moses was gone 40 days and nights), the soul may be allured by the world. If faith does not cling to Him we may instead be guided by the earthly things we

see. Thus our desert mirage comes from not seeing Him! Faith is the only antidote.

Note that in v 40 Israel claims not to know what has become of Moses (**“as for this Moses...we do not know what has become of him.”**) So an unsaved world scarcely knows what has become of Christ. They might say, “He is up there somewhere, but has been gone a long time.” And Christian people may virtually say this, that if they are blind to His present glory and His heavenly prophetic ministry! A worldly mirage may blind us to heavenly truth.

And, as Moses came down and judgment followed (Exod 32:15-35), so our Lord’s second advent will destroy the “golden calf” of the world and of carnal believers. Divine judgments will sweep the earth. As for Christians, we shall be at the Bema of Christ.



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Turned to Idolatry

7:42-43. “Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven.” Rejection of the Word and knowledge of God may result in God’s turning men over to the folly and evil of their own hearts.

Here the idolaters of vv 40-41 are turned over to the idolatrous worship of vv 42-43. This is like God turning men over to their own sin in Romans 1. The *paredōken* in v 42 finds a parallel in the *paredōken* of Rom 1:24, 26, 28. There, as here, those who knew God glorified Him not nor were thankful; thus their foolish heart was darkened. The two passages together present a principle of God’s ways with men.

“As it is written in the book of the Prophets.” Stephen affirms the reality of this statement by an appeal to OT Scripture. Taken from Amos 5:25-27, the immediate context (Amos 5:21-27) points to the emptiness of the religious forms of Israel in Amos’ day because of their superficiality.

God despises and rejects religion unaccompanied by holiness. Through Amos He says that this is what He had done through 40 years in the wilderness. Though in actuality they did sacrifice to Him in those years, He did not acknowledge it. This proves they had been given up.

It is sobering to see that even though the Tabernacle was graciously established by God shortly after Israel’s disobedience (vv 40-41), nevertheless, Israel’s idolatrous heart never really availed itself of it in a deeply meaningful way. How easily forms are observed without reality!

The idolatry to which the Israelites’ hearts were really inclined

(rather than to true sacrifice to God) is now presented. **“You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch.”** The worship of Moloch involved the sacrifice of children (cf. Lev 20:1-6; Ps 106:37-38). An Ammonite deity, Moloch was—according to the Rabbis—an image of bronze with a man’s body and an ox’s head. Hollow inside, it was heated by a fire below it and into its searing hot arms children were cast as sacrifices. But, in fact, all

“All idolatry demands sacrifice of one’s children. Sadly, children often fall victim to the idols of their parents.”


idolatry demands sacrifice of one’s children. Sadly, children often fall victim to the idols of their parents.

Ancient worship of **“the host of heaven”** suggests its true origin. Since the angelic world is linked with the stellar heavens, and Satan is represented as casting “the third part of the stars” to earth (Rev 12:3-4), it is natural to conclude that these spirits inspired the worship of heavenly bodies as a thin veil over worship of themselves (cf. 1 Cor 10:20). Moloch seems linked with Saturn. Remphan is obviously a star-god (**“And the star of your god Remphan”**), perhaps Egyptian for the god Chiun of Amos 5:26, which also is linked with Saturn.

It would seem that the worship of Saturn was widespread over the ancient world. This unity of idolatrous worship implies its single satanic source. Indeed all idolatry,

whether literal or spiritual, is promoted by the enemy of souls to turn them from God. The idols of our hearts are satanic, as derived from the world of which he is the prince.

As Stephen speaks about how God turned from Israel of old, He is about to turn from Israel again and give them up to the folly of their own hearts. This likewise will ultimately result in satanically inspired idolatry in the abomination of desolation.

“And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.” The Spirit, through Stephen, substitutes Babylon for Damascus of Amos 5:27. Amos spoke to the northern kingdom of the Assyrian captivity, but the same principle applies to the Babylonian captivity which came later to Judah and Jerusalem. Stephen is speaking in Jerusalem, hence speaks of this latter. The penalty of idolatry is ever bondage and captivity. The soul becomes enslaved to the idols of his heart (whether money, fame, pleasure, sex, etc.). Only where the Spirit of the Lord is, is there liberty (2 Cor 3:17). 



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

Back from the Future

By Phil Congdon

Good morning. My name is John. I'm here to tell you my story, a story that really isn't remarkable at all. In fact, if you had known me during my life you would probably say I was just an 'average Joe,' nothing special, certainly not a model Christian. Maybe that's why I'm here. Everywhere I go I meet people who say they feel like a failure, like their lives have no real purpose for God, whatever that purpose may be. I'm here to tell you today that your life, right now, today, has purpose for God, and how you live today will make a difference in eternity.

Back from the Future

If you're confused, let me explain. I've returned from the future to tell you my story, about what happened to me in what you call heaven, after I left this life in the rapture.

Please, don't ask me when the rapture happens. Something about passing from time into timelessness—I don't remember things in a continuum any more. Don't get me wrong: I remember events from my life on earth, but not dates and historical context. It's almost as though the moment I saw Jesus everything else faded into insignificance.

I'll tell you this: It all happened exactly as the Bible said it would.

Remembering the Rapture

I remember it vividly. We all met the Lord in the air, just as Scripture said we would. At the time I remember being amazed that Bible prophecy was fulfilled so literally, so exactly. I guess I had fallen into the trap of

thinking that since it hadn't happened in almost 2000 years since Jesus lived, it would never happen! The Apostle Peter wrote that people in the last days would scoff at the Second Coming (2 Pet 3:4). I'm ashamed to think how little I thought about it before it happened. This much I know: When it happened, everything became clear as crystal in an instant.

Time to Stand before Him

Now we were to stand before Him. Somehow this moment had always seemed so distant. But there I was. All of us, gathered. White robes like light. Faces beautiful and young—ageless. Everyone else, it seemed, delighted, secure.

But I was afraid. What would He say about me?

All my life I'd known the words: "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). I guess I'd always thought...

Well, what does it matter what I thought? This was real! There was no going back, no hiding now. I knew very well what would happen—that verse that talks about "escaping so as by fire" (1 Cor 3:15)? That was me. Why try to hide it? Everything would be burned up. I'd have nothing left for a reward.

Who Was I?

After all, what did I have to show for my life? I had been a salesman...pushing someone else's products all my life. An insignificant cog in a big materialistic machine. Let's see: I was a husband and a father. But anyone could do that.



I wished I had done something big. Like Augustine, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Spurgeon, C.S. Lewis, Billy Graham. Next to those guys, who was I?

I suddenly saw my life as I never had before: Full of potential—all potential, and no production! I felt a deep sense of regret. You see, one time early in my life I had sensed God calling me to give my life in service for Him, but...circumstances didn't allow it.

Oh, come on! Who was I kidding? Fact is, I had just put it off. I wanted to have fun. I was young. Then middle-aged. Then old. Then one day, it was just too late.¹

Things I Tried to Do

I had tried to do things. I just wasn't that good at them. I taught Sunday School once or twice, but what good is that? None of my students became pastors or missionaries. At least none I knew of.

A few times I'd passed out tracts—you know, at a booth at the fair or something like that. I'd told a few people what I believed. But I didn't see much fruit—certainly not the “30-fold, 60-fold, or 100-fold” that Jesus talked about!

I'd been asked to serve on the deacon board—a few times. But I never felt qualified. I was just a salesman who did things he didn't like...and later confessed them.

In my job, I did decent work, and tried to be honest. I sold a good product—printers and copiers. I had moved up in the company a few times. I played by the rules. But who didn't do that? A lot of guys who weren't even in heaven had done that!

An Average Guy at the Judgment Seat

So there I was, waiting with all the other saints, and feeling acutely un-saintly! I just didn't see what my life had amounted to. I hated admitting it, especially there: I was just an average guy. Maybe less than average.

But it was here: The Judgment. And I was beginning to feel worse and worse. Even with a new body and a sense of absolute security, I felt a little sick. What would Jesus say to me? What could He say? “Glad to have you here, John. Have a nice eternity!”

And then, I started to think of some things I was happy about in my life. Maybe Jesus would mention how I had liked things like going to church and worship, and visiting people. I had even read the Bible

pretty regularly at times, and prayed for a missionary couple I knew. I was no ‘Holy Joe,’ but maybe I wasn't a total nothing.

Maybe He'd just pass over me—you know, to save time! Well, that was silly; there is no time there! Or maybe He'd just include me with everyone else in my church. There were times I had just been part of the crowd.

But no. I knew it. The words of scripture came back to me: “...that *each one* may be recompensed for his deeds in the body.”

Why couldn't I have written a book or been a worship leader or a great preacher or an evangelist leading thousands to Jesus? Once I helped manage my son's Little League team. Would that count for something?

Finally I just gave up. “Stop beating yourself up!” I said. “You'll just have to take what comes! Worrying about it won't help!”

At Least We Were There!

“Chin up!” my mother used to say. Did I mention that she was there? My mother! I never thought she would. I was overjoyed about that part. All those years I lambasted her with the gospel, and come to find out she believed all along! Not like me, but she believed, and that was all He required.

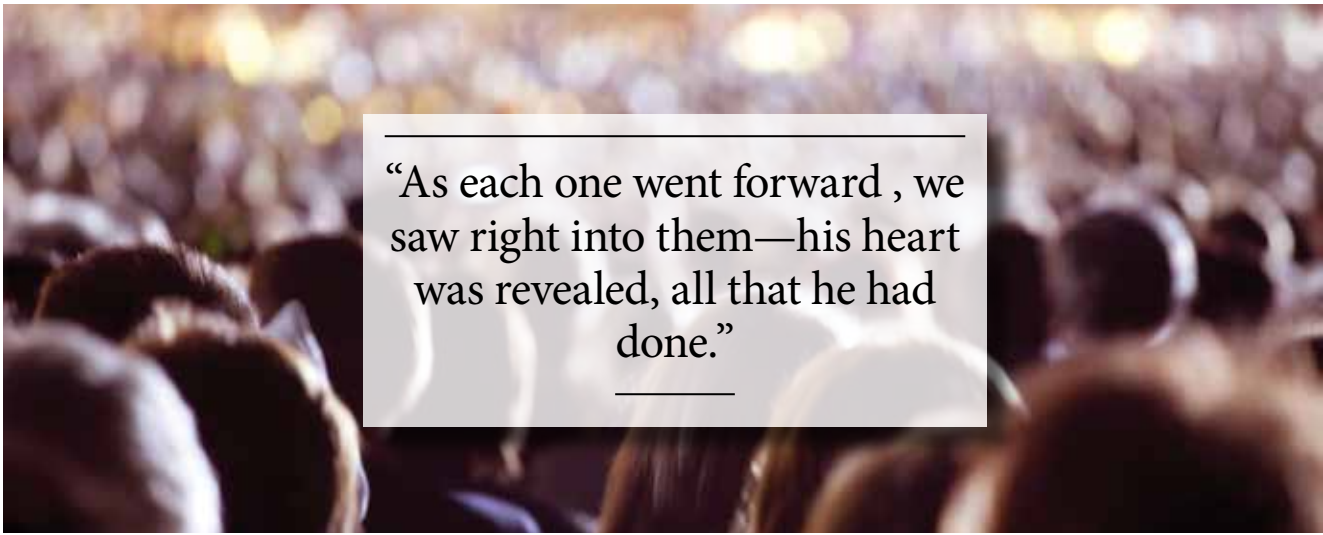
My dad was there, too. And my sister and brother, and at least some of their families. Frankly, I was surprised. None of them had the “bolt of lightning” conversion like me, so I assumed they didn't really believe. But they did! We were all overcome with a worshipful gratitude. No high fives: Just a humble awareness of the unfathomable value of Christ's saving love for us.

My three kids were there, too. And my wife. I hadn't led them to the Lord myself, but I got them to church, to summer camp, to youth group. Quietly I had hoped they each believed. What a joy it was to know they had.

So even if Jesus couldn't say “Well done!” to me, at least we were there! Part of His kingdom forever and ever! There was a lot of rejoicing in that.

One By One

Then it began. Jesus, resplendent and bright, called each one by name, and we came forward. It was amazing. I had no sense of time. It must have taken years in earth-time, but I didn't get tired or need a break. There were no recesses in this court. As each one



“As each one went forward , we saw right into them—his heart was revealed, all that he had done.”

went forward, we saw right into them—his heart was revealed, all that he had done. They came forward in order of birth. The early Christians, many who had been martyrs, were first. Then the great early church leaders, and faithful saints down through the centuries. On it went...

Before Jesus spoke, any who wished to share a testimony could bear witness to the work of the person being judged. I testified of people in history who had affected my life. I thanked Peter, Paul, and James for their writings. I shared how the lives and writings of the great Reformers had impacted me. It was incredible, thanking all those people in person. And when we were done, Jesus spoke. He knew much more than we did. Everything was remembered.

Many times Jesus spoke those wonderful words, “Well done!” Oh, how I came to love them! I wished I was one of them. Of course, there were some others, too. Not as many as I thought there would be. They were saved, as the Bible said, “so as by fire.” It wasn’t easy to watch—Scripture said they would “suffer loss,” and we all felt, without any self-pride, their pain. And I knew I might be one of them.

The Rewards

The rewards—man, it was so exciting! This made the Heisman Trophy or the Oscars look like junk! The gold, silver, and precious stones that remained when a person’s life had passed through the fire became part of that person’s reward. Then there were crowns, the hidden manna, the white stone, authority over nations, reigning with Christ. These were no items to gather dust, like all those plaques and trophies on

earth. Those who shined brightest for Christ on earth, shone brightest for Him in heaven!

As the centuries passed, the excitement never waned. This was the greatest event I’d ever witnessed, and I wanted it to never end! Everyone was cheering and happy. We wanted each one to do well and receive a reward. There was no competition. The die had been cast already, and Jesus’ judgment was always right and exact.

My Turn

And then it came to my year—1967. Soon it would be my turn. What would He say? My mixture of fear and excitement made me giddy. I was jumping up and down like a kid waiting to get his report card in school—not knowing if he’d get an A or an F! He spoke my name.

I made my way forward. The crowd parted, and I stood before the Judgment Seat. I can’t really describe Him: Words aren’t enough. He was holy—everything that word meant to me. And He was love, too. There was a warmth in Him that filled me and made me feel secure. I could feel His love holding me, and my fear vanished.

He asked if anyone in the crowd wanted to speak. My son was the first. “There are so many things, Lord.”

“Tell them all,” He said.

I was amazed. We’d had some bitter times on earth.

My son began, “I remember him playing with me, Lord. Wheel-barrow and piggy-back rides. Singing songs in the car. Fun. He made life fun.” He went

on, recounting all sorts of deeds. I was humbled and grateful.

Then my wife stepped forward. She had always loved the way I held her, even when I was tired and wanted to go to sleep. She told how I had provided for them over years, working without complaint even when the job was tedious. She seemed to go on and on. A lump formed in my throat, and I found myself fighting back the tears.

Others came forward.

A woman I didn't know told of me teaching a Bible story that stuck in her mind. It was the story of Zacchaeus I once taught in a Sunday School class. "Later in my life," she said, "it motivated me to help some homeless people." I couldn't believe it. She remembered that? I didn't even remember that!

There was Johnny Martin—I taught him to throw a baseball. And Bill Briggs, a fellow salesman. I'd been patient in training him, and he'd come to Christ years later. Doris Parr shared how my strong singing in church one Sunday had encouraged her. On and on it went. Most of the time I was in tears.

A woman shared how I helped her along the road when her car had broken down. A boy—now a man—on the Little League team, told how I encouraged him when some guys ribbed him because he was small, and quoted a Bible verse to him. Even though he wasn't saved at the time, he remembered it years later when he did believe.

There were times I prayed for friends. Odd jobs I'd done for folks who needed help. One time I talked in church. A friendly smile I gave one of our office workers. Nothing was too small. Nothing was forgotten—although I had. My heart was broken with joy.

Then the Lord judged my life with His fire. Suddenly there were gold, silver, and jewels. So many pieces I couldn't count them! Each reflected a word, deed, thought, or prayer.

And then He spoke...of how the Spirit had worked in me. I had practiced Biblical principles in my work. He recounted every day I had refused to lie or steal, and chosen to be honest and work hard. I hadn't ever thought it even mattered.

He spoke of my love for my wife, working to be a good husband, listening to her, responding to her needs. He remembered I had modeled Biblical principles for my family, and read the Bible to them. Even though He hadn't given me gifts in teaching or speaking, He said I had tried, and done well.

He pointed to my giving—to the church and missionaries and Christian organizations. It hadn't seemed like much, but it had gone so much further than I ever knew. There were people who had become Christians because I gave, and others because I had given them a tract.

When Jesus was done, He asked how many people had been influenced or affected in some way because of something I had done. I could not count the number of people who cheered and thanked me.

The Verdict

Finally, Jesus Himself stood to speak. "John, look at me," He said. I looked into His eyes, and in that moment understood all that He had done for me—all that He had given up to come to earth and die for me, all that His gifts and guidance had done in making this moment of unspeakable joy possible. I realized that this wasn't really about me so much as it was about Him—all that He had planned and prepared for me to do, so that He could reward me there. And in that instant I loved Him as I had never loved Him.

Then He spoke. "John, you have done much that I prepared for you to do, many good works, in My name. You have touched the lives of thousands. Well done. Receive your reward!" His words were like an everlasting embrace.

Then He presented me to all those gathered. "Welcome John into the eternal bliss and reward of His Lord!"

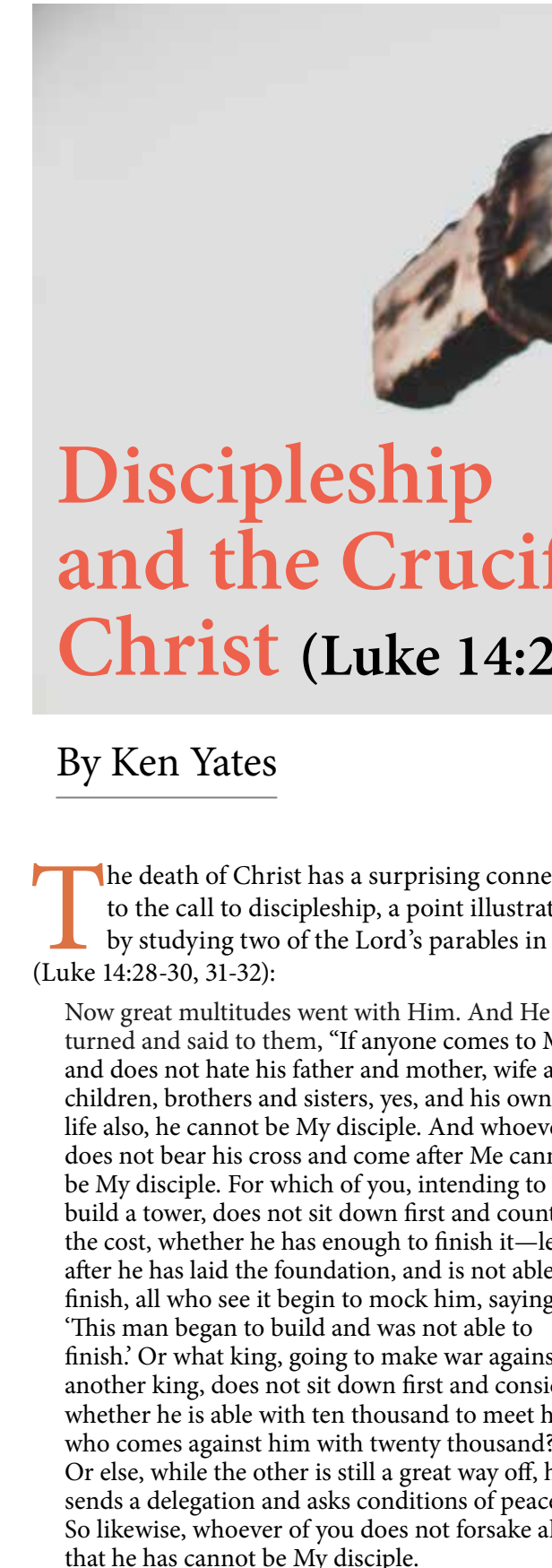
The cheering never seemed to stop. But it was only the beginning.² ■



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

1. Editor's note: The author is portraying a man who was too hard on himself. As such, the man illustrates many believers who fail to realize that God really has used them in many ways.

2. Editor's note: Phil Congdon is giving in this story the *positive* side of the Judgment Seat of Christ. He knows there is a negative side, and that some believers will experience *shame* at His coming (1 John 2:28).



Discipleship and the Crucified Christ (Luke 14:25-35)

By Ken Yates

The death of Christ has a surprising connection to the call to discipleship, a point illustrated by studying two of the Lord's parables in Luke (Luke 14:28-30, 31-32):

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

"Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor,

how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Luke 14:25-35).

It has been my experience that when most Christians hear this parable they think that the main point that Jesus is making is that the Christian life involves sacrifice and a commitment to Christ. However, as I reflect on this passage and how it relates to other Scriptures, I do not think that is what Jesus is saying. Instead, He is emphasizing something else.

A Closer Look at the Parables

A striking feature of the parables is that the phrase "cannot be My disciple" occurs three times. In each case, these words are associated with another concept. This concept is said in three different ways. To be a disciple one must "hate his own life," "bear his own cross," and "say farewell to all he has." These three phrases are also connected by the fact that the words "his own" occur in all three. It is my opinion that these three things all refer to the same thing.

Parallel Teachings of the Lord

To find out what these phrases refer to, we can turn to some other teachings of the Lord where He says very similar things. They also are found in His parables:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and *sells all that he has* and buys that field” (Matt 13:44, emphasis added).

“Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and *sold all that he had* and bought it” (Matt 13:46, emphasis added).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves *his life will lose it, and he who hates his life* in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:24–25, emphasis added).

What stands out here is that in these three instances, where the similar phrases found in the parable in Luke appear, they each speak about the death of Christ or the believer’s identification with the death of Christ. Of course, Jesus’ death was one of crucifixion. If a believer is identified with the death of Christ, it is an identification with His crucifixion. Paul makes this connection explicit in the book of Galatians:

I have *been crucified with Christ*; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gal 2:20, emphasis added).

And those who are Christ’s have *crucified the flesh*

with its passions and desires (Gal 5:24, emphasis added).

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the *world has been crucified to me*, and I to the world (Gal 6:14, emphasis added).

In these verses in Galatians, Paul is speaking about the power of the cross in the Christian life. The Christian life can only be lived by the power of the crucified Christ living through us. Because of Christ’s death on the cross, the power of sin has been broken. The similar phrases and concepts leads me to believe that this is what the Lord was saying in Luke 14 as well. Discipleship, or growing in our likeness to Christ, is only possible through our identification in His death.

The Emphasis in Luke 14

It is interesting that in the parables in Luke 14, the Lord refers to building a tower and going to war. Both of these are pictures of the Christian life. If the parallel passages discussed above are correct, what Jesus is saying is that we cannot grow in discipleship and fight the forces of evil apart from Christ living through us. His crucifixion to the power of sin makes victory possible.

When a person believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life, he or she receives that as a gift. It is a gift that cannot be lost. However, in Luke 14, Jesus is talking about *Christian living*. Successful Christian living, or *discipleship*, is an *ongoing thing*. It is like building a tower. It is like going to war. We cannot do that in our own power. To be successful, the Christian must take up his own cross.

Victorious living is possible as we allow the crucified Christ to live through us. 

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Ken Yates
is Editor of
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pastor of
Little River

Baptist Church in Jenkinsville, SC.

Employee Spotlight

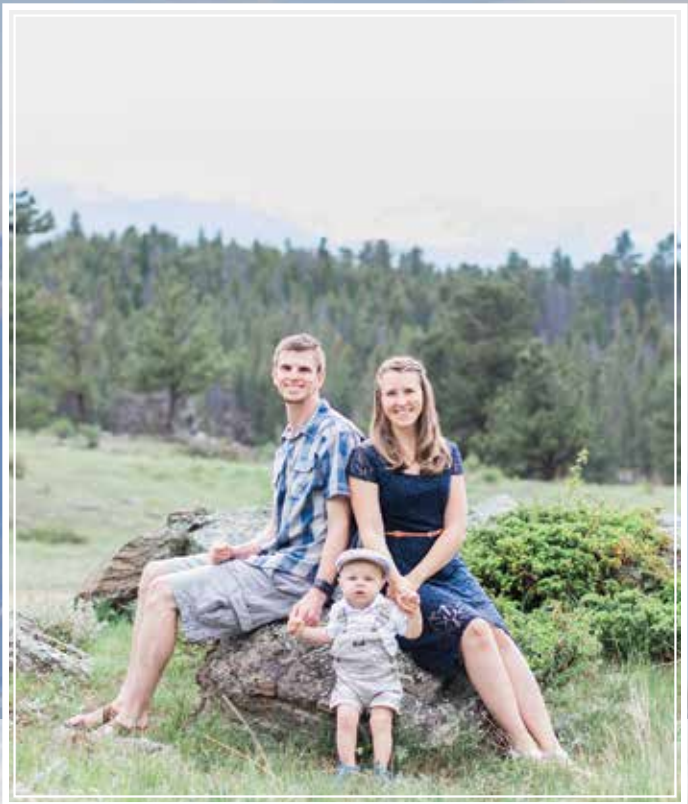
Brad Bell, Social Media Coordinator

I was first introduced to GES when reading Zane Hodges' commentary on James at New Tribes Bible Institute. It, along with other writings, helped me come to clearly and consistently understand that everlasting life is given by Jesus totally apart from works, not even dependent on works after the new birth.

I planned to go into missions and pursued training for such. During this time one of my roommates and I would host the *Free Grace Café*. We would open our apartment for students to come every week. They would bring an empty vessel and allow it to be freely filled with the life-nourishing nectar of the roasted coffee bean. Many theological and life conversations took place on those evenings.

I later continued my studies at Rocky Mountain Seminary. I was privileged to learn under GES contributors Steve Lewis and John Niemelä. This brought further clarity to my convictions about God's grace. It also nurtured Soteriology and Biblical Exegesis as two favorite areas of study.

Towards the end of my schooling, I met my wonderful wife, Jenny. We married, had a boy named Fletcher, and planned to pursue some form of ministry, yet we were not sure what that would be. We




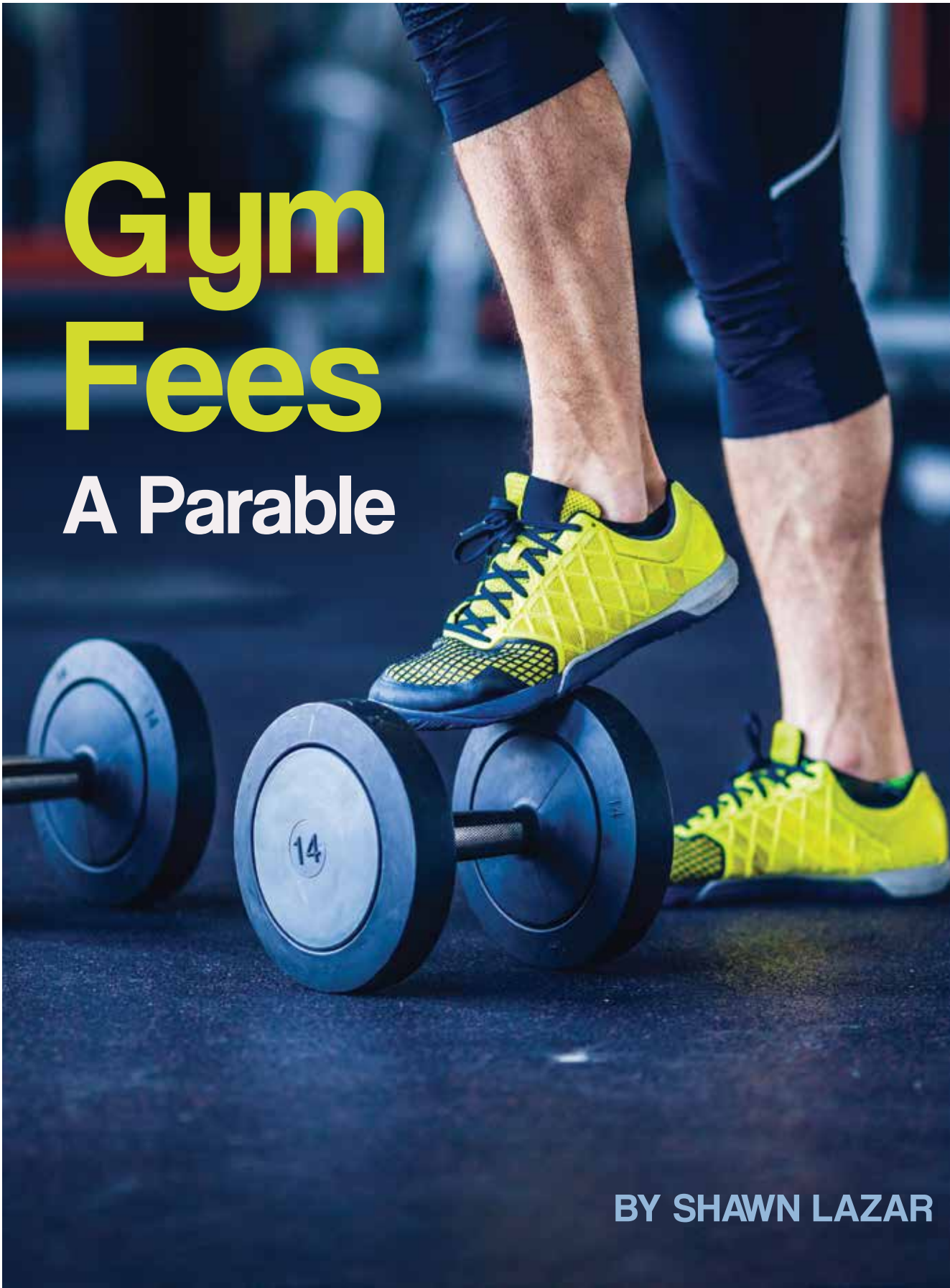
waited, worked, and waited some more. We took steps towards various ministry opportunities and nothing panned out.

This past spring I was discouraged and my wife pointed out my need to view life in light of the gospel. I checked the GES website, looking for books to encourage me, and saw the position posted for a Social Media Coordinator. We decided to apply and before long were packing our bags to move.

We are excited for the opportunity to work with GES, making known the free gift of everlasting life and providing resources to encourage believers.

I love my job. I get to research and write on the treasures of Scripture. I enjoy the mingling of art through producing videos and blog posts. It is a privilege to help GES expand its internet ministry.

When I first read Zane's James commentary I never imagined that I would someday work with GES. I am grateful. Grateful for the grace God gives, the wife he provided, our son Fletcher, another baby on the way, and the opportunity to serve as a family. 

A photograph of a person's lower legs and feet in a gym setting. The person is wearing black leggings and bright yellow sneakers with black laces. They are standing on a blue dumbbell with the number '14' on its end. The background is blurred, showing other gym equipment.

Gym Fees

A Parable

BY SHAWN LAZAR

Free or Not?

One day, a young mother wanted to get fit. She heard about a wealthy benefactor who founded several gyms and endowed them with enough money so they could be free and open to all. However, when she visited the gyms and asked about joining, she found they had changed their policies.

The first gym now charged \$50 a month, but if you didn't have enough money, they would *accommodate* your budget.

The second gym was free to join, but cost \$75 a month to *keep* your membership.

The third gym claimed to be free, but said that paying \$100 a month was an *inseparable part of being a member*.

The fourth gym also claimed to be free, but said if you were *really* a member, you'd pay anywhere between \$50-150 a month to *prove it*.

By contrast, the fifth gym was still *completely free and open to all*.

So the young mother joined the fifth gym and used the money she saved to help her family and neighbors.

Adding Works to Salvation

In the parable, the founder of the gyms intended for them to be free. He gave enough money to fully support them in perpetuity. However, over time, the gyms began charging for membership, violating the founder's express wishes.

Something similar has happened with salvation.

Jesus offers us everlasting life for free. He gives it as a gift, through faith in Him, apart from works:

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

Jesus' death on the cross fully paid for our salvation. No works from us are necessary. Nevertheless, over time, churches have added works as a condition of salvation. They do so in different ways, some more subtle than others.

Some churches openly teach salvation by works, but are very accommodating about how many you need to do.

Some churches say we are initially saved by grace apart from works, but say we need works to *stay* saved.

Some churches claim to believe in salvation by faith apart from works, but then teach that doing works is part of *what it means to believe*.

Still other churches claim to believe in salvation by faith apart from works, but say you can't know if you're *really* saved unless you do good works.

Finally, there are Free Grace churches.

Not a Denomination

When I use the term "Free Grace," I am not referring to a denomination. I am referring to a school of theology in contrast to other schools of theology, such as Calvinism, Lutheranism, Arminianism, Thomism, Adventism, Wesleyanism, Augustinianism, and so on.

People from many different denominations and churches are Free Grace in their beliefs.

I know Free Grace folk who are Baptists, Brethren, Bible Church,

Calvary Chapel, Christian & Missionary Alliance, Congregational, E-Free, Mennonite, and even United Methodist!

Free Grace folk can be found everywhere—wherever people have heard and believed the simple promise of John 3:16, that by simply believing in Jesus for everlasting life, you have it, and will never perish.

So far as I know, Free Grace folk are the only ones who teach that salvation *really is free*.

So far as I know, they are the only ones preaching that salvation *really is by faith apart from works*.

That is, you don't need works to *earn, keep, prove, or be assured of* salvation.

It's all by faith in Jesus.

It's all thanks to *His* work, not *ours*.

Don't get me wrong. Our good works are useful for many different things, especially for *helping our neighbors*. That's why Jesus commanded us to love them—because our neighbors need our love. They need our help. They need our acts of charity and mercy and generosity.

Works are useful. But they are not a condition of having everlasting life.

Eternal salvation is by faith alone, apart from works.

Keep salvation free. That's what Jesus intended. ■



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Denton, TX with his wife and three children.

Use It Wisely

(Luke 16:8-13)

By Bill Fiess

Jesus taught us how to use money without being corrupted by it, in the Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16. The passage in question is:

So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *unrighteous mammon*, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (Luke 16:8–13, emphasis added).

The fact that “the unjust steward” (*ton oikonomon tēs adikias*) is associated in Luke 16:8 with “the sons of this world” (*hoi huiōi tou aiōnos toutou*) suggests that “unrighteous mammon” (*tou mamōna tēs adikias*) in Luke 16:9 is equivalent to the idea of *the mammon [or wealth] of this world*. This seems to fit the idea found in Luke 16:11 where unrighteous mammon is contrasted with true riches.

In other words, the mammon of this world is contrasted with the mammon of eternity, which are true riches.


So I conclude that I am to use the wealth I have in this life to “make friends” (i.e., meet the needs of my fellow believers and of those who are proclaiming the gospel) that I might rejoice with them in the



age to come (“they may receive you into an everlasting home”) and I may be entrusted by God with true riches, the wealth of the world to come. I am not to *love* the wealth of this world (Luke 16:13), but I am rather to *use it* to gain eternal reward.

Jesus was not teaching that money is inherently evil, but rather that I must not strive for unrighteous mammon. There seems to be a real temptation to strive for the wealth of this world (1 John 2:16), which has no eternal value at all unless it is used to please God.

I think that this fits perfectly with what Jesus had said previously in Luke 12:32-34:

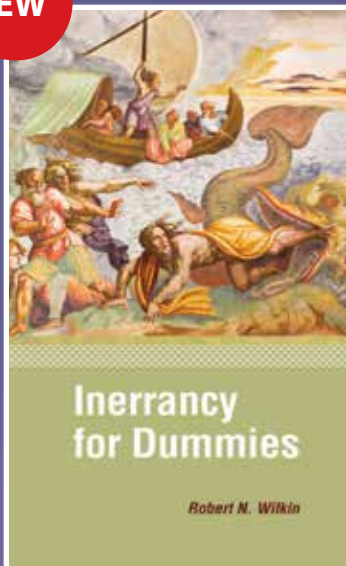
“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (cf. Matt 6:19-21). 



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

The Bookstore

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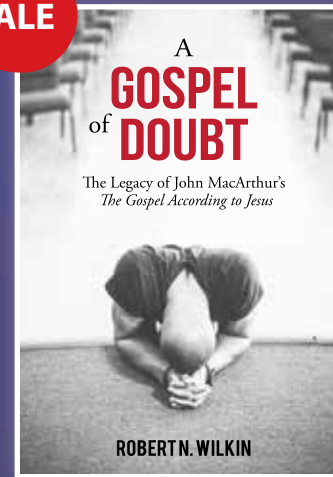
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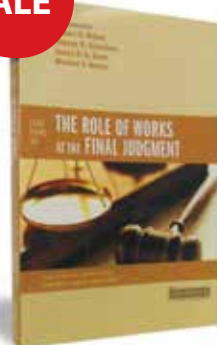
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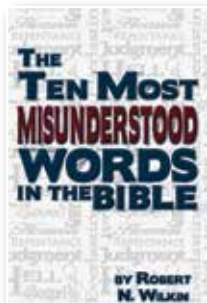
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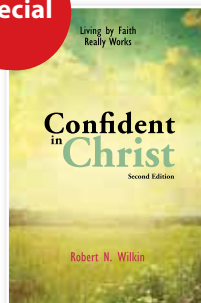
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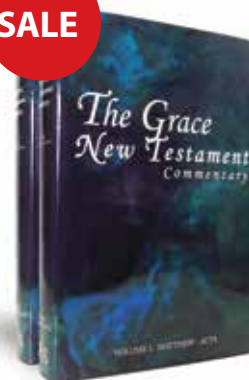
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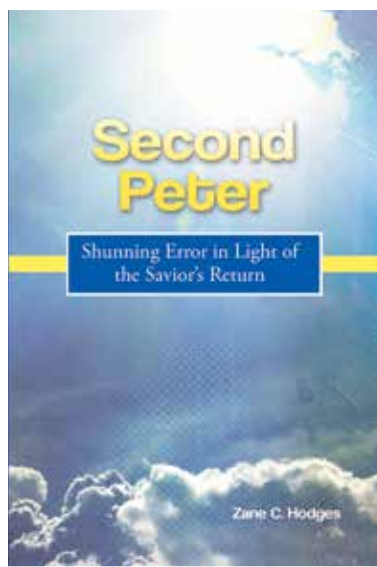
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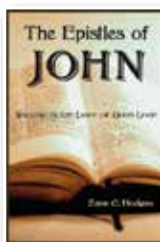




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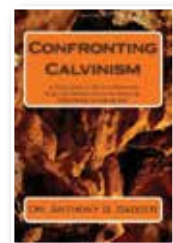


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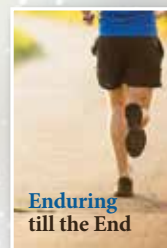
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Kindness

By Joe Lombardi

Introduction

When we were still living in New Jersey, I read an article in our local newspaper that announced, “New York group struggles to add a little sweetness to the crabby Apple.” It was all about a “courtesy” advertising campaign that was being directed by a group called “New York Pride.” Their message was short and sweet. It was summarized by the slogan, “C’mon, New York. Ease up!”

According to that piece—in a city where its inhabitants “continue to hog payphones [obviously before the day when we all began to carry cellphones], fight over cabs, curse New Jersey drivers and bump, elbow, knee and shove each other”—that idea might be a mission impossible. In fact, Ron Burkhardt, whose advertising firm had been contracted to sell New Yorkers on civility, called it “the ultimate marketing challenge.”

However, if we would be honest, we would all have to agree that rudeness knows no boundaries. Wherever there are people, rudeness will be present. Sometimes even fellow Christians can be critical, cynical, spiteful



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and revengeful, or even downright cruel. I suspect that all of us have been sliced, diced, cubed, and crushed by some of the most vicious and malicious verbal attacks imaginable.

Now, it is one thing to be wounded by the world. That should not surprise us. After all, Jesus warned, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18). However, it is quite another thing to be wounded by fellow members of God’s family, with their cutting comments and stinging statements. The Apostle Paul warned the believers in Galatia, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” (Gal 5:15). As someone once said, “It is better to bite your tongue, than to have a biting tongue!”

How should we then live? Paul said, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14). He concludes one chapter later, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). In other words, you need to love your brothers and sisters in Christ. That is essentially the same thing Paul said in Rom 12:10, where we read these words, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with *brotherly love*, in honor giving preference to one another” (emphasis added).

That is also essentially what Peter meant when he wrote that one of the seven building blocks to be used in the framing and fashioning of Christians in and under construction is *brotherly kindness* (2 Pet 1:7). Taken together these seven qualities describe the

very nature and character of our Lord. In this series of articles, we have been studying them one at a time, in order to learn as much as we possibly can about each and every one. Why? It is because they inform us how we need to live in order to receive “a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom” (2 Pet 1:11, NIV). You see, our eternal rewards will be based on how, why,

“Philadelphia is referred to as ‘the city of *brotherly love*,’ because that is what the word *Philadelphia* literally means.”

and what each one of us builds upon the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ. It is imperative that the framing of your Christian character must include this building block of *brotherly kindness*.

For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins (2 Pet 1:8).

An Explanation of Brotherly Kindness

The Greek word that Peter used for *brotherly kindness* is one that should be very familiar to most Americans, especially those who live on the east coast of the United States. That is because the Greek term is the name of the city that

served as our nation’s first capital during the years 1790–1800. It was the name adopted by William Penn and his Quaker associates for the new city which they founded as a haven of rest for the persecuted people of Europe: Philadelphia. It is referred to as “the city of *brotherly love*,” because that is what the word *Philadelphia* literally means.

In the original language it is actually a compound term consisting of the words *philos* and *adelphos*. The first term, is one of three Greek words that is translated “love.” It is used, for example, in our English words “philanthropy” (love of mankind) and “philosophy” (love of wisdom). The second term, *adelphos*, means “brother.”

Link them together and you have *philadelphia*, literally “the love of brother,” or “brotherly love.” It is a love that is:

- expressive and responsive,
- deeply affectionate and always considerate,
- tender as well as true,
- amiable and cordial,
- gentle and loyal.

It is a love that values another person highly and cherishes them dearly. It is also a people-loving attitude that understands and overcomes the occasional and incidental “hurt” we sometimes cause one another, because of the far-surpassing value, benefit and just plain fun of such loving relationships with one another.

Philadelphia is used at least a half dozen times in the N.T. For example, in Rom 12:10 Paul said, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with *brotherly love*, in honor giving preference to one another. He used it a second time in 1 Thess 4:9, “But concerning



brotherly love [*philadelphia*] you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love [*agape*] one another.” The next occurrence of the word is in Heb 13:1, “Let *brotherly love* continue” (emphasis added).

The Apostle Peter’s first use of the word is found in his first letter: “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere *love of the brethren*, love [*agapao*] one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet 1:22, emphasis added). In other words, this brotherly love is not to be a sham or a charade. It is to be sincere. Peter does not want his readers to simply “play the part” and thus be hypocritical. He wants them to love one another deeply and sincerely. Then he adds in

1 Pet 3:8, “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.”

Another Greek word that is almost synonymous with *philadelphia* is the term *chrestos* and/or *chrestotes*. It is found in either one of its two forms some seventeen times throughout the NT, and the two forms are usually translated as “kind” and “kindness/goodness” respectively. So we read, for example, in Rom 2:4 (HCSB), “Or do you despise the riches of His *kindness*, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God’s *kindness* is intended to lead you to repentance?” (Other references where Paul uses the term are Rom 11:22, Eph 2:7, and Titus 3:4-5).

In Luke 6:35 Jesus said, “But love your enemies, do good, and lend,

hoping for nothing in return...”

Why? Our Lord goes on to explain in that same verse that the “Most High” Himself is “kind”—even towards those who are “unthankful and evil.” That is kindness at its best.

However, those words not only refer to God’s kindness toward us, but they are also used to describe the mutual and reciprocal loving interaction we are to have with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

For example, consider the following admonition from Paul to the believers at the church in Ephesus:

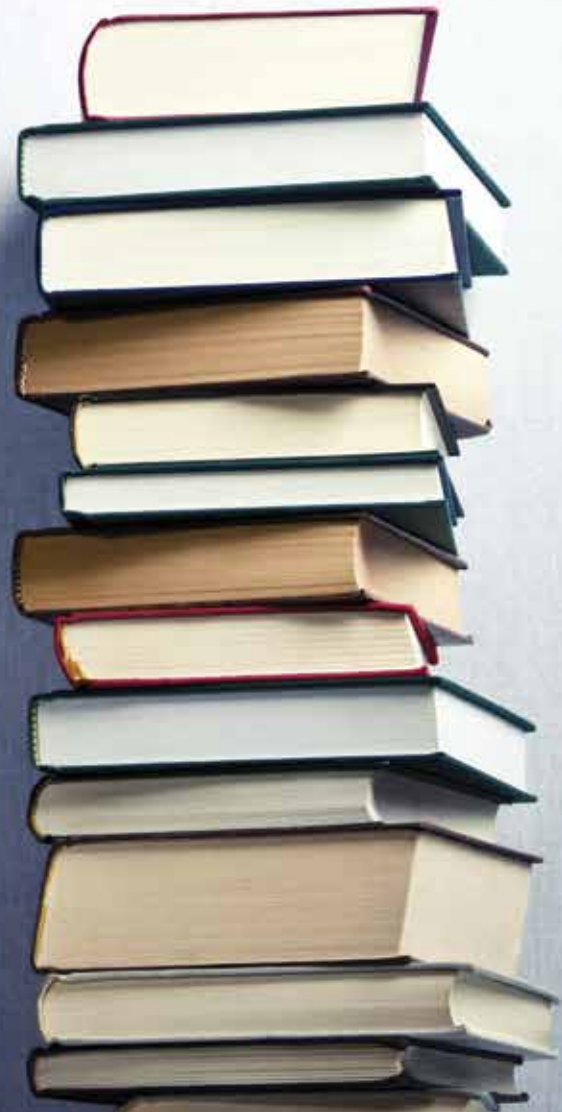
Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom

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you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be *kind* to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma (Eph 4:29–5:2).

By the way, the word that is translated “kind” in Eph 4:32 literally means *serviceable*. In fact, it originally denoted *usefulness*. It was often used to refer to something that was suitable to fit and meet a need. Therefore, to be kind, literally is to make yourself useful! Kindness is a demonstrable love in practical action. Indeed, in his very first remarks about the true meaning of love in 1 Cor 13:4ff, Paul begins by saying that love is, first of all, patient, and then he adds that love is kind.

This *brotherly kindness* is to be expressed in goodness and meekness. From the context in Ephesians 4 we learn that it is to be courteous and gracious in both word and deed. It is to be:

- thoughtful and respectful,
- humble and gentle,
- sweet-tempered and mild-mannered.

It is the flipside to the bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking and all malice in Eph 4:31.

By the way, there is one Hebrew word that could be considered a synonym for *brotherly kindness*, namely, *chesed*. In the NASB it is usually rendered “lovingkindness”

and in the NIV it is almost always translated “love.” The NKJV translation of Ps 89:1 renders it this way: “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever...”

Most of the time it refers to the “loyal love” of the Lord God and to the eternal, Divine kindness behind that love. That is how it is used more than two dozen times in Psalm 136, in which the “refrain” or “response” to the first line of each of the twenty-six verses says, “For His mercy endures forever.”

In Job 6:14 the patriarch responds to the words of his friend,

“Kindness is a demonstrable love in practical action.”

Eliphaz, “To him who is afflicted, kindness [*chesed*] should be shown by his friend.” In essence, Job is saying that hurting believers need loving brothers!

Insight into this building block of loyal love/lovingkindness/mercy is sprinkled throughout Proverbs as well. For example, “Let not *mercy* and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man” (Prov 3:3-4). “What is desired in a man is *kindness*...” (Prov 19:22). Ken Taylor’s paraphrase of that verse reads like this, “*Kindness* makes a man attractive.”

By the way, according to Prov 31:26, it is also very becoming on a virtuous woman as well: “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of

kindness.” And Micah 6:8: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, *to love mercy*, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Is it any wonder that Peter would include the building block of *brotherly kindness* in his list of required “materials” in 2 Peter 1?

However, there is at least one more NT verse that I need to bring to your attention with respect to this matter of *kindness*. Paul wrote in Gal 5:22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, *kindness*, goodness, faithfulness.”

If kindness is indeed included in the Biblical grocery list of the “fruit” of the Spirit—and it obviously is—then it must be demonstrated in the words and deeds of everyone who is connected to the “root”—the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don’t think it is merely coincidental that the building block of *kindness* follows the building block of *godliness* in our primary text for this series of articles (2 Pet 1:7). If one would be godly, then one must act kindly.

The Application of Brotherly Kindness

Here are a couple of general and practical principles with respect to the application and demonstration of *brotherly kindness* in one’s life.

First, *brotherly kindness* can and should be practiced in *word*. Someone once said, “Kind words do not wear out the tongue.” There is an old Japanese proverb that goes something like this: “one kind word can warm more three winter months.” Another person has written, “Wise sayings often fall on



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barren ground; but a kind word is never thrown away.”

So, first of all, *talk kindly*. Such kind words can be expressed by a call, or through a note and/or card. They can be accompanied by a handshake, or a pat on the back, or perhaps even a “holy hug.” The first application is that *brotherly kindness* can and should be practiced in word. Mark Twain is quoted as having said, “I can live for two months on a good compliment!”

Second, brotherly kindness can and should be practiced *in deed*. In other words, do not just *talk kindly*, *walk kindly*. The 19th century French Quaker Stephen Grellet wrote, “I shall pass through this world but once. If therefore, there can be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

Conclusion

There is an apocryphal tale told of a small, crippled boy who was hurrying to catch a commuter train. However, because his arms were loaded down with packages, he was experiencing considerable difficulty maneuvering his crutches. As other hurried and harried commuters rushed by, someone accidentally bumped into him, sending both his packages and his crutches in all directions. The person who caused the mishap stopped long enough to scold the youngster for being clumsy and getting in the way. However, another older gentleman, seeing the boy’s distress, hurried to his aid. He picked him up and brushed him off. As he retrieved the boy’s packages and crutches, he slipped a dollar bill into the youngster’s pocket, and with a smile he turned and walked away. That was when the child, who seldom had been shown such kindness, called out

after him, “Hey, Mister! Mister! Please, sir...are you Jesus?” To which the old man replied, “No, I am not Jesus. But, I am one of His followers!”

So, let me ask you a question: Do you think you will ever be mistaken for Jesus by anyone because of your kindness?

Talk kindly. Walk kindly. Demonstrate brotherly kindness in word and deed. In the words of Paul, “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). ■



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

Seven Helpful Evangelistic Questions

By John Goodding

Have you ever shared the gospel with someone and felt they really understood what you were saying, and even believed it, but later on you found out they were thinking something different than what you said?

This is an all too common occurrence.

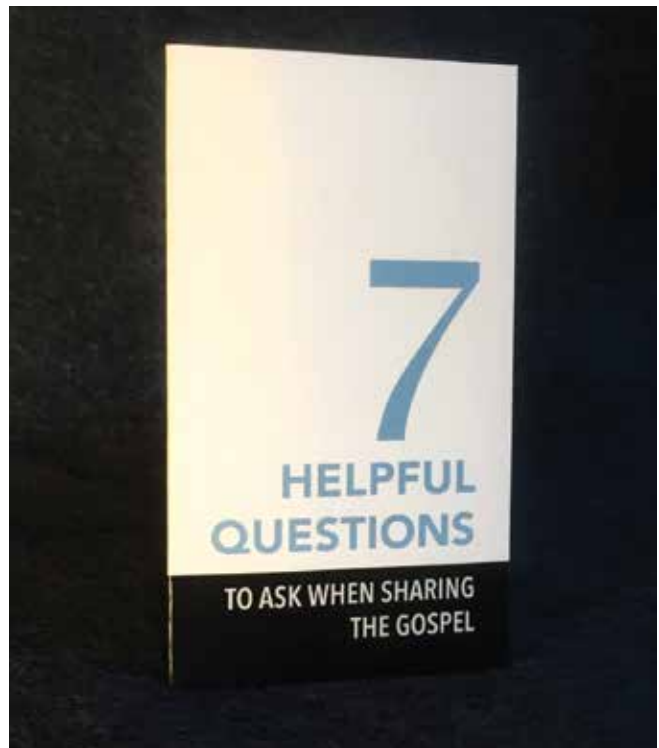
People will nod their heads and agree with everything being said, but in their minds, they are mixing it together with their past teaching and beliefs.

Sometimes people are more interested in being agreeable than actually changing their beliefs.


If you want to know if they understand, and believe, there is really only one way to find out: *ask questions!*

Here are seven helpful questions I use when sharing the gospel:

1. **Do you know for sure that you will go to heaven?** (If yes) How do you know? (If no) Would you like to know for sure?
2. **How many of your sins did Jesus die for on the cross?** Jesus paid for all of your sins on the cross, not just sins in the past, but sins in the future as well.
3. **What is the only thing God asks you to do to gain everlasting life?** Everlasting life is gained only by believing in Jesus alone for it, not by doing good things. (This is the key point that they must understand.)
4. **How long does everlasting life last?** Forever. If it didn't last forever it wouldn't be called everlasting life. You can't lose something you have that lasts forever.



5. **When does your everlasting life begin?** You receive it the moment you believe in Jesus alone for it. (A simple but important point.)
6. **Do you believe this?** (If yes) You have everlasting life, which you can never lose.
7. **If you were to do something really bad and then die, would you go to heaven or hell? Why?** Heaven. (If they are not sure they have everlasting life no matter what, go back over the gospel and show them that once you believe in Jesus alone for everlasting life, it can't be lost. If they still don't seem to understand, encourage them to read the Gospel of John and invite them to talk with you again.)

I've found that asking these questions, in the process of sharing the gospel, lets me know if they really understand. It also helps them clearly understand what they need to believe to have eternal life. 



John Goodding is Director of 289Design.org. You can order copies of this tract through Simplybelief.com/free-tracts.



JOHN

THE EVANGELISTIC BOOK

BY LEILANI MATLACK



THE PURPOSE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

Why did John write his Gospel? John explains, “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing *you may have life* in His name.” (John 20:30-31, emphasis added).

In the KJV, the phrase “eternal life” is used in 30 verses in the NT, 9 of which are in John. The phrase “everlasting life” is used in 16 verses in the NT, 8 of which are in John.

Not only is John the only book whose stated purpose is so that we may believe and have eternal life, but it is interesting to note that over one third of the references of these combined phrases—“everlasting life” and “eternal life”—come from the Gospel According to John. In fact, those two phrases are used almost three times more in John than in any other book.

John’s stated purpose implies his audience is unbelievers, and he intends for them to read his

Gospel and come to faith in Jesus for eternal life. Therefore, John is a good starting place to answer the question “what must I do to have eternal life?”

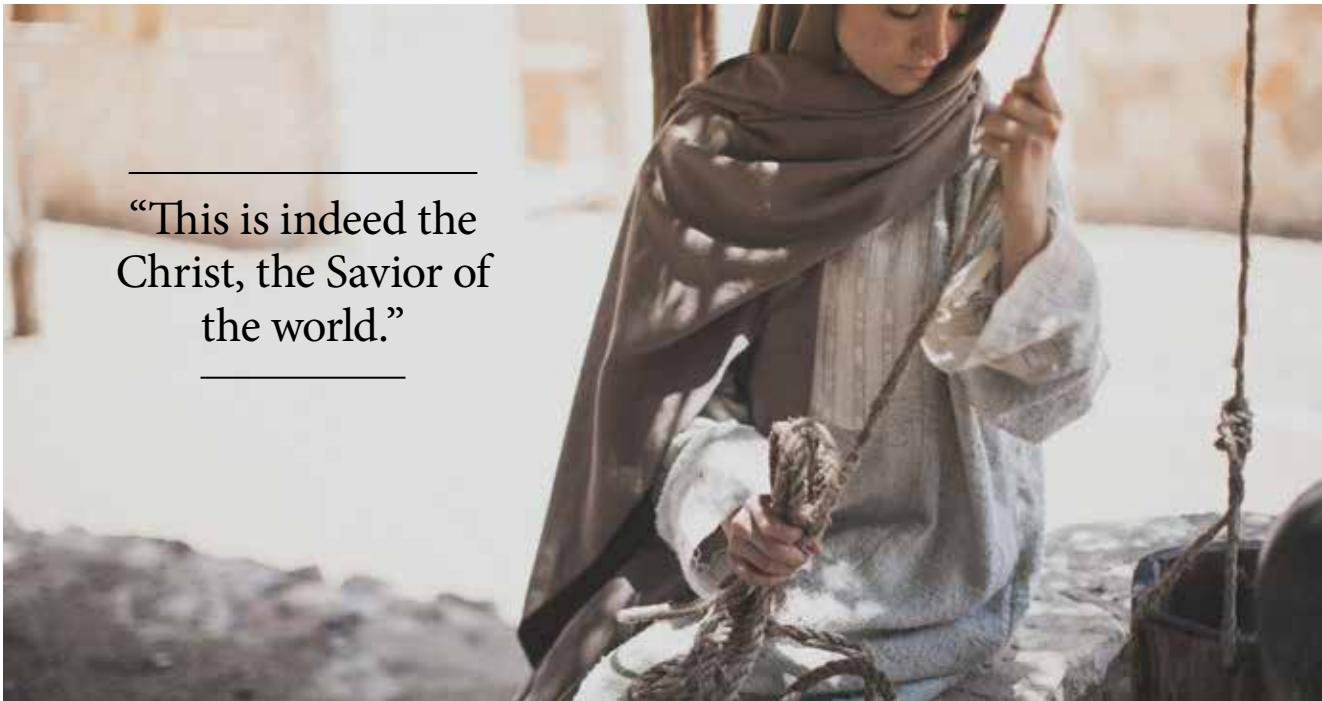
In this article I will give an overview of the first 11 chapters, showing the *only* condition for everlasting life that John presents is to believe in Jesus for it.

CHAPTERS 1 AND 3

John starts off his Gospel by telling us who Jesus is. Jesus is the Word. He is God. He is Creator. He is the “true Light.” And in Him is life.

John states that Jesus gives the power to become the sons of God “to those who believe in His name” (1:12-13).

In John 3, during Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, He refers to being born of God as being born of the Spirit. He expounds “that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (3:15-16). So the only requirement that Jesus gives for eternal life is belief in Himself, the Son of God.



“This is indeed the
Christ, the Savior of
the world.”

LIGHTSTOCK

And what is it that condemns us? Our unbelief. “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (3:18).

John the Baptist repeats this message. “One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won’t see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (3:36). Failure to believe is seen as disobedience—it is no light matter.

CHAPTER 4

In chapter 4, Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman. He refers to the “gift of God,” “living water,” and a “well of water springing up into everlasting life” (4:10, 14). He is the one who can give those things.

Jesus ends their conversation by stating that He is the Christ, the Messiah (4:26). Jesus then proceeds to tell His disciples to “look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal

life” (4:35-36). As a result of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman, many of the Samaritans believe (4:39-41). What does it mean that they believe? We are told in the next verse, they conclude that “this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (4:42).

CHAPTER 5

In John 5, at first glance, it appears the message is slightly different. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (5:24). Belief is still mentioned, but the object of our belief, if viewed only by this verse, appears to have changed. However, when we look at the context of the verse we can see the complete message. Jesus is responding to the Jews who sought to kill Him (5:18). Jesus spends the first several verses explaining His role and His oneness with God (5:19-23).

He also states that “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (5:23). Furthermore, “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself” (5:26). The Jews knew that God was going to send a Savior. If they believed that God had sent Jesus they were in essence believing that He was/is the Messiah. John 12:44 summarizes this well. Jesus says “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me.”

So, what about John 5:28-29? “Don’t marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.” Is Jesus saying here that our works play a role in receiving eternal life?

First, we know that God and His word are consistent. For our works to play a role in our eternal destination would be inconsistent

with the previous chapters, as well as other passages such as Rom 3:20 and Eph 2:8-9.

Second, the context clears up the passage. Jesus had just explained that not only does He have life in Himself, but also He has been given the authority to execute judgment (5:26-27). Furthermore, the one who has believed shall not come into judgment (5:24). And not only will a believer not come into judgment, but the unbeliever has been judged already, not for his evil deeds, but “because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (3:18).

Jesus goes on to tell them that they do not have God’s word abiding in them, they have not believed, and they are looking to the commandments of Scriptures for their salvation. Finally, that they will not come to Him that they might have life (5:38-40).

If there is any doubt as to whether *coming to Jesus* means *believing in Him*, He then goes on in the last four verses (vv 44-47) of the chapter talking about believing (“How can you believe...For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me...But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”).

CHAPTER 6

In John 6 the topic of eternal life and believing is once again discussed.

Jesus says, “Don’t work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (6:27). When the people asked what work they could do, His reply was, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29).

Jesus again compares Himself to living water. In addition, He refers to Himself as the true bread from heaven, the bread of life, and He that gives life (6:35). He further adds, “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (6:40).

Verses 53 and 58 say,

“Most certainly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you don’t have life in yourselves...This is the bread which came down out of heaven—not as our fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

This hard saying raises the question: must we literally eat His flesh and drink His blood?

To better understand this passage we need to look not only at the context, but also at the literary structure.

This passage contains a type of parallelism called a chiasm. It is used to relate parallel subjects or topics with the final emphasis in the middle.

If we look at vv 47-51 in this light the passage makes perfect sense. Notice how the lines with corresponding letters relate to each other.

- A. “Most certainly, I tell you, he who believes in me has eternal life. I am the bread of life.
- B. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.
- C. This is the bread which comes down from heaven,

D. that anyone may eat of it and not die.

C'. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven.

B'. If anyone eats this bread he will live forever.

A'. Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

When this passage is looked at within the literary structure used, it helps us see what a powerful message Jesus was giving and why it was such a hard saying. They were challenged by Jesus’ statement that He had come down from heaven, that He was indeed the Son of God and mere belief in Him would result in eternal life.

Finally, the emphasis that anyone may believe in Him and not die, resonates perfectly with the theme of the Gospel of John.

CHAPTERS 10 AND 11

In John 10, Jesus presents Himself as the good shepherd (10:11). This is a clear allusion to David’s remark, “the Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23). Jesus is pointing out that He is the Messiah. Thus the statement logically follows, “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (10:24). Jesus not only referred to himself as the bread, which came down from heaven, but now the good shepherd.

There is no doubt as to what Jesus is saying, yet they still fail to believe. The Jews, as a nation, were in the process of rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. They were relying on being sons of Abraham to give them their position, yet their nationality was not what made them sheep. Sheep can only follow the shepherd if they recognize him

for who he is. Jesus gives his sheep eternal life, not because they follow Him, but because they are His. The issue still boils down to belief. If there is still any doubt as to who Jesus is, He closes the loop. He says “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). In other words, not only is Jesus the Messiah, but He is God. He is The Shepherd. The result: the Jews sought to stone Him. Jesus brings them back to the issue at hand—believe: “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him” (John 10:37-38).

We are told that while some of the crowd sought again to take him, “many believed in Him there” (John 10:42).

Jesus presents the same message of believing in Him for eternal life to Martha in chapter 11. He says to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will still live, even if he dies. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” Her response was, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, God’s Son, he who comes into the world” (11:25-27). Jesus’ message was clear, Martha got it and believed.

THE MIRACLES

Throughout the Gospel, John records certain miracles that Jesus did while on earth. These include the Wedding at Cana (2:1-11), healing of the official’s son (4:46-53), healing of the man born blind (Chapter 9), and raising Lazarus from the dead (Chapter 11). In light of John’s evangelistic purpose, it is interesting to note that he not only

records the incident but takes the time to tell us that as a result one or more people believed in Jesus (2:11; 4:48, 53; 9:35-38; 11:45).

WHAT IS BELIEF?

Because we receive eternal life by believing, the next question that may be asked is what does it mean to believe? And that is a key insight for understanding John’s evangelistic purpose.

The Greek word for *believe* is *pisteuō*. Among the definitions given by Thayers Lexicon are: “to think to be true,” “to be persuaded,” or to “place confidence in.” There is nothing included in the definition of *pisteuō* that refers to any kind of works, obedience, or acting consistent with that belief.

Believing is to be persuaded or convinced that what He said was true: that He is the living water, that in Him is life, and that if we believe in Him we have eternal life at that instant. There is no obedience, no actions, nothing that we can do to add to it, we must merely take Him at His word. In conclusion, to believe in Jesus as our Savior is to place our trust in Him alone for our salvation.


Some people claim that if you act inconsistently with your beliefs, then you must not really believe them. Is that true? Does man ever act inconsistently with his beliefs?

The answer, of course, is yes. We may act inconsistently for a variety of reasons. For example, I may believe that the glass room in Sears tower will hold me up, but not actually go into it because I am afraid of heights. Or I believe that if I pay my bills late I will be charged a fee. And yet that belief hasn’t kept me from making a late

payment every once in a while for a variety of reasons.

John records an instance of this kind of inconsistency in 12:42-43. “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” We are told the rulers believed, yet they failed to act on it, not because they didn’t believe, but because they were afraid and loved the praise of men.

CONCLUSION

What is the only condition for having everlasting life? John could not be clearer. His answer is very simple—believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. For those of us who are not Jews, *Messiah* could better be translated *Savior*. If we believe in Jesus as our Savior we have eternal life. 



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Q&A

By Staff

Is Eternal Security Necessary?

Q Some preachers say that if you don't believe in eternal security, you are not really saved. What do you say?

I have a lot of family and friends who are born again, but they don't believe in eternal security, so now I am concerned about them. What should I do?

—Y.B.

A Thank you so much for your question.

There is only one gospel. It is the message that eternal life is given to those who simply believe in Jesus for it. Once we believe that message, we know we have eternal life, because that's what the message promises. We have assurance at that moment. If we believe we have to do works to keep eternal life, we have not believed the gospel.

There are many people who believe the gospel but later get exposed to works salvation teaching, believe it, and lose their assurance, but who are still saved.

However, if a person has *only* ever believed a false gospel of salvation by works, they are not saved. In that case, they have *never* had assurance of salvation because they *never* understood the gospel of grace.

There is no way to know what the state of your mom and relatives is. The most important thing is to



look for opportunities to present the true gospel to them. If they are saved, they need to understand they should retain assurance of salvation. If they are not saved, they need to believe the true gospel.

Either way, they need to hear the true gospel!

—Ken

Blotting Out Names

Q How does Free Grace explain Rev 3:4-5? It's very confusing for someone like me who believes in once saved, always saved.

—T.G.

A Thanks for your question.

It's worth noting that Lordship folks also have a problem with this verse because they believe in once saved always saved (for the elect). And certainly Scripture teaches that eternal life cannot end or be lost.

The best answer to this is that Jesus is using a *litotes*. A *litotes* is "a figure of speech consisting of an understatement in which an

affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite."

Another dictionary defines it as, "ironical understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its contrary."

For example, suppose I ran a race and said, "Man, that was not easy!" My negative statement is meant to convey a strong positive message, i.e., that the race was really hard!

Revelation 3:4-5 is a *litotes*. Jesus is making an ironic, negative, understatement ("I will not blot out His name") in order to make the emphatic positive point that He will proclaim the name of the believer who overcomes in the midst of great difficulty ("confess his name before the Father").

There is no danger of somebody's name being blotted out of the book of life. Instead, Rev 3:4-5 teaches there is the opportunity to have your name proclaimed and honored before the throne of God in the company of angels and men.

—Ken

Can Faith Die?

Q How does Free Grace theology view James 2, specifically that faith without works is dead?

—J.S.

A The most important thing to realize is that James is talking to believers. He called them brothers (2:1) and tells them they have faith in Jesus Christ. He told them they were born from above (1:18). In addition, in 2:15, right after his comment about faith without works, James gave the example of seeing a brother or sister in need. Well a Christian is only the brother or sister of another Christian.

While there are some very minor differences among Free Grace folks, they all agree with these points.

A dead faith is a faith that does not have good works, especially in being merciful to those in need (2:15-16). Such a faith is “dead” in the sense that it does not benefit the one who has it, if they don’t put it into action. If we do not exercise our faith with good works, it will die. It’s like an arm that is put in a cast and is not used or exercised. When the cast comes off it is basically useless.

Regarding James and justification. Our works justify us *before others*, not *before God* (cf. Rom 4:2). When we do good works others see our faith in action. That is the meaning of vv 21 and 24. James used the example of when Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac. That act did not save Abraham from hell. But by putting his faith to work, Abraham’s faith became so strong he was willing to sacrifice his own son (25 years after he was

saved by the way). Others saw his faith at work—that he was a man that believed in a God who could raise the dead (cf. Heb 11:19)—his actions showed that faith to others, and they called him the “friend of God.”

The bottom line is, James 2 has absolutely nothing to do with whether a person is really saved. What it is saying is that if you want to have a strong and vibrant faith that benefits you and others, which grows and can be seen by others, you must exercise it and demonstrate it by good works.

—Ken

Many or All?

Q Why did Jesus say He died for many? Shouldn’t He have said He died for all? (Matt 20:28; 26:28; Mark 10:45)

—H.N.

A *Many* refers to a large number, not to a percentage.

In Greek, the word *many* (*polus/polloi*) sometimes refers to 100% of a large number. BDAG suggests that *polloi* in Matt 20:28 and Mark 10:45 refers to a large number of people and equals *pantōn* in 1 Tim 2:6, “Jesus...gave Himself a ransom for *all*” (p. 848A).

There are many passages in the NT, in addition to 1 Tim 2:6, which affirm that Jesus died for everyone. In 2 Cor 5:14 Paul says that Christ “died for all.” Again in 2 Cor 5:15 Paul repeats, “He died for all.” John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The Apostle John said that Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”

(1 John 2:2). Peter prophesied about unregenerate false teachers who will spend eternity in “the blackness of darkness forever” (2 Pet 2:17) and who “will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord *who bought them*” (2 Pet 1:1, emphasis added).

So there is no contradiction. If Christ died for *all* people, then He also died for *many*—a large number—of people.

—Bob

Mammon

Q Luke 16:9-12 speaks of using “unrighteous mammon” to gain “true riches” in the life to come. Why does Jesus here refer to wealth as *unrighteous* mammon? Isn’t wealth basically neutral, and can be used for either good or evil? And yet, twice Jesus refers to it as *unrighteous mammon*.

On the other hand, Luke 16:13 says, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” *Mammon* doesn’t sound too neutral there.

In 1 Tim 6:17, Paul speaks of “uncertain riches,” but not of “unrighteous riches [or mammon].”

My only thought is that the *unbelieving* world consists of *sinners* and they always use money *unrighteously*. So in that sense—for unbelievers—*mammon* = *wealth* and is always unrighteous. But God has entrusted money to believers for us to use *righteously*.

What do you think about this?

—B.F.

A Before I dig into this, my first inclination is that mammon is not righteous. While *unrighteous* connotes evil and sinful when referring to people, I doubt, as you do, that is intended regarding money. Instead, the point might be that money does not equal or produce righteousness. We can use money to do righteous things. But the money itself is not righteous. That would be option 1.

I think option 2 is that the Lord intends us to understand that money most often produces wickedness.

The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil (1 Tim 6:10). Thus His point might be paraphrased like this: *Make friends for yourself by means of money, that which typically produces evil....If you are faithful in the use of money, which typically produces evil...*

I think the basic sense here is clear enough: We should use money, which has much potential for evil (drunkenness, prostitution, drugs, murder for hire, pride, bribery, etc), in order to better our eternal experience. We can invest now for our eternal futures.

Here is what I found in a few commentaries.

Leon Morris says, "The adjective reminds us that all too often this [money] is acquired in unworthy [unrighteous] ways...Jesus' use of the term may imply that there is commonly some element of unrighteousness in the way people acquire possessions" (Luke, p. 272).

C. Marvin Pate takes a different approach, the one I suggested, but then he also embraces Morris's idea: "The phrase 'mammon of unrighteousness' probably means mammon leading to

unrighteousness. At the very least, the idea latent in the phrase highlights the tendency of mammon to lead to ill-gotten gain" (Luke, p. 314).

So it sounds like there are three options: money is not righteous, but not unrighteous in itself either; money most often is gained by unrighteous means; money is most often used for unrighteous purposes.

Thanks for a great question.

—Bob

Lutheran Faith?

Q I'm Lutheran and I really liked the blog, "Saved by Faith, or by Faith Formed by Love?" But can you explain what you mean when you said – "If he cannot achieve it by his own natural powers, then he must have the necessary love 'infused' into him by a supernatural operation of grace."

The Lutheran means of grace are word and sacrament (e.g., baptism and the Lord's supper). Having to take the Lord's supper seems like a "work" to me. Even going to church could be deemed a work. Am I looking at this wrong?

—L.K.

A I don't think you're looking at it wrong.

First, that quote comes from Philip Watson, and he was referring to the Catholic belief that grace is a kind of stuff, energy, or substance, which you can receive through sacraments like the Eucharist. The more you take, the more "grace" you get.


The assumption is that God's grace is a substance that can infused instead of a benevolent disposition.

Second, from my readings of Lutheran theologians, they can fall into a similar error, but not necessarily.

On the one hand, I've read Lutheran theologians who describe the sacraments in a way consistent with justification by faith apart from works. For example, they will say the Lord's Supper is a visible presentation of the gospel message. That is, you see the broken bread and wine, and as you eat it, you are reminded of the message that Jesus died for you, paid for your sins, and gives you eternal life when you believe in Him. To me, that is perfectly consistent with justification by faith apart from works, because the emphasis is on believing the promise, not doing a work.

On the other hand, I've read Lutheran theologians who speak of the sacraments almost the way Catholics do. The sacraments become works you have to do to receive or to maintain salvation.

Maybe that's what you've observed too.

—Shawn 

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