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HOT OFF THE PRESS

Previews of New Books

PLUS Satan in Opposition / A Back-Loaded Gospel / What City Did Abraham Wait For?
Salvation Worked Out / Churches Should Plant Churches / Crazy Signs **AND MORE**

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

FROM THE EDITOR

On the rare occasions I visit a Christian bookstore, I'm always left wondering, "What's with all the Amish romances?"

The Healing Quilt. A Sister's Secret. Courting Emily. The Quieting.

Sure, who hasn't occasionally enjoyed reading about the perennial Amish dilemma—"Will Zedekiah Yoder choose a quiet life with Hannah Stoltzfus or [gasp] choose to drive a car???"

But is there really a need for entire bookshelves of the stuff? Apparently, Christian women like their Harlequin Romances tied up in a bonnet.

Frankly, the "theology" books usually aren't much better. Shelves and shelves of manuals telling people how to work for their salvation.

No wonder we can't get our books into bookstores!

My point is, the need for sound Biblical teaching is definitely not being filled by your typical bestsellers. If you want the truth, you'll have to look for it.

That's where we come in.

Our purpose is to publish.

We love to put on conferences, film videos, write blogs, and counsel people on the phone. But first and foremost, we are a publishing ministry. In this issue, we preview the new books we've printed.

First, is an excerpt from *Tough Texts: Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works?* Zane and Bob discuss the meaning of the Parable of the Talents.

Second, we have some of Zane's reflections on David's life, from the book *Spiritual Lessons from the Life of David*.




Hot Off the Press

Shawn Lazar, **EDITOR**

Third, there's a chapter about the error of redefining faith, from my book *Beyond Doubt: How to Be Sure of Your Salvation*.

And lastly, I've included a chapter from Zane's new commentary, *First Peter: The Salvation of the Soul*.

You'll also find a number of other helpful articles. Given the lack of Free Grace churches, I would recommend reading Randy White's article as a possible way forward. 

Warmly,



THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

(MATTHEW 25:14-30)



{ This is Chapter 9 from the new book
Tough Texts: Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? }

BY ZANE C HODGES WITH ROBERT N. WILKIN

Bob Wilkin (BW): To understand what Jesus is talking about in this passage, it is crucial to recall the context of the Olivet Discourse and to review its parabolic structure.

In the Parable of the Just and the Unjust Servant in Matt 24:45-51, we see a servant who was doing very well. He was ruling over other servants of the Lord. He was doing a good job. But then we're told in the text that he says in his heart, "My Lord delays His coming." This was when he starts beating his fellow servants. He starts drinking with the drunkards. He loses his focus. When Jesus returns, this person gets a verbal tongue lashing. He's rebuked by Christ, and instead of being made a ruler in the life to come, he's relegated to a position of non-rulership. The lesson to be learned in that parable was that we need to remain watchful in this age for the imminent return of Christ. He could return today, tomorrow, at any moment.

Matthew 25:1-13, the Parable of the Ten Virgins, deals with the Tribulation period. The midnight cry in the middle of the parable deals with the abomination of desolation which takes place at the midpoint of the Tribulation. And here, all ten of these virgins were watchful. None of them failed to watch. All of them were waiting for the Lord's return. But it's possible to be watchful and yet not be prepared. You could watch for a person to come to your house but you haven't prepared any food for him. You haven't prepared for his arrival. The difference then is not that some were

watchful and some weren't. The five foolish virgins had their torches burning, but they didn't have a sufficient supply of oil to keep them burning. They were not prepared. They failed during the first half of the Tribulation to make the necessary expenditure of effort, time, prayer, study of the Word, and fellowship with other believers in order to be prepared for the Lord's return. The lesson from the Parable of the Ten Virgins is that not only are we to be watchful, but that within the watchfulness we also need to be prepared.

Zane Hodges (ZH): That is an excellent summary of the basic lessons in the first two parables that conclude the Olivet Discourse. A word about the structure at the end of the discourse would be helpful.

As we know, there are actually four parables that conclude the Olivet Discourse. I like to label them as A-1, B-1, A-2, and B-2.

A-1 *Parable of the Faithful or Unfaithful Servant*

B-1 *Parable of the Ten Virgins*

A-2 *Parable of the Talents*

B-2 *(Quasi) Parable of the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats*

Now, it seems to me that A-1 and B-1 belong together in the sense that both of them focus on the second advent and on being watchful and ready for that second advent. The statement made in Matt 25:13, "Watch, therefore, for you do not know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes" is a

conclusion to this particular unit. Both of these are what we might call *Advent parables* with the focus upon the arrival of the Son of Man. The focus is on His *actual* arrival.

However, A-2 and B-2 are what we might call *accountability parables* in the sense that they focus upon the judgments that follow the Second Advent. As you've indicated in your review, A-1, the Parable about the Faithful or Unfaithful Servant, deals with somebody waiting for the beginning of the Second Advent—someone in the church age. And B-1 deals with people who live through the Tribulation.

A-2 is concerned with the accountability of regenerate people who have lived up until the beginning of the Second Advent, that is, church-age believers. And B-2 concerns the accountability of believers who live through the Tribulation period when the Lord then comes and executes the judgment of the sheep and the goats.

The Lord gave us a very carefully structured and balanced presentation. Two Advent parables are followed by two accountability parables. The first member of each of these pairs deals with people of this age—the church age—and the second member of each of these pairs deals with people who pass through the Tribulation. This is the way in which our Lord has structured His discourse.

The Talents

BW: Now, let's discuss the third parable, the Parable of the Talents, which is the first of the two accountability parables. Let's begin with a brief summary of what's going on.

ZH: In this parable, the Master, who is going abroad, commits a significant responsibility in monetary terms to the servants He leaves behind. And in this particular parable each servant is given his responsibility in accordance with his ability. One of them is given five talents, one is given two talents, and one is given one talent.

The parable focuses on the assessment of the performance of these servants after the Master returns. In the first two cases the individuals have maximized the responsibility they've been given. The five-talent man now has ten talents, and the two-talent man now has

four talents to present. The final one-talent man has been too timid to do anything and has wrapped his opportunity up in a napkin and simply brings what he started with.

The first two are rewarded, very much in the same language: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt 25:21, 23). This is something that's said to the first two men. Even though the first man brings much more money, he had more money to start with, and so the Lord evaluates their performance as equal. But the third man is the man who fails to do anything, and he is the man who loses the praise and privileges that were given to the faithful servants.

BW: Some stumble over the fact that the person who starts with five and ends up with ten gets the same commendation and apparently the same reward as the one who goes from two to four. It would seem like the one who goes from five to ten should have more authority in the life to come than the one who goes from two to four. Aside from the bonus the ten-talent servant receives at the end (Matt 25:28), it seems like they're getting the same reward.

ZH: The lesson is that each of these first two servants does the same thing with the amount he is given. The first

man doubles his money, and the second man also doubles his money. From the Lord's standpoint—especially since the original commitments were based on the ability of each individual—they've both done equally well.

An example of this might be a world famous evangelist who maximizes the opportunities God gives to him and a washer woman who spends her life scrubbing floors and pinching pennies and sending off everything she can to the mission fields. The woman may maximize her opportunities in exactly the same measure and degree as the world famous evangelist maximizes his. We should never feel particularly inferior to other people because the Lord hasn't given us the gift that we so much admire in some other servants of His. If we are faithful with the gifts we've been given in terms of our own abilities, then our

"We should never feel particularly inferior to other people because the Lord hasn't given us the gift that we so much admire in some other servants of His."

reward will be the same as someone who has traveled the world and maximized his.

In some ways one would almost think that a man with a large amount of ability is called upon to make special efforts in order to maximize that ability. I would think it's a little bit harder in some ways to preach worldwide and not to succumb to the temptations associated with that and to maximize the opportunity, than it is to labor in obscurity and maximize that lesser opportunity. But in any case, God treats his servants fairly, and He measures what we've done on the basis of what He's given us.

BW: So it's really not appropriate to be comparing ourselves with others and saying, "Woe is me. I've not been given as many blessings and opportunities as other Christians." We should do the best with what God has given us and not worry about what other people are doing.

ZH: That's exactly right. Remember when Jesus predicts to Peter his own death, and Peter says, "Well, what about John?" (see John 21:21). And Jesus basically says, "You know, that's none of your business. Why do you care about that? You follow Me" (see John 21:22). That's the basic lesson here as well. We're tempted to be jealous if somebody has more ability to do more for God, but that's none of our business. That's the Lord's business. My business is to follow Him and maximize my potential.

The Outer Darkness

BW: What about the third servant in the Parable of the Talents? Most commentators take the third servant as representing an unbeliever who's being condemned eternally by Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment. But there's good reason to believe that this person is a believer who, along with the first two servants, is being evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ or, in Greek, the Bema. Isn't there good reason to view this as an evaluation to determine the third servant's reward in the life to come?

ZH: It has always seemed to me that the idea of the third servant being an unbeliever is a totally gratuitous suggestion about the text because, right up front, all three of these men have exactly the same relationship to their Master. All three of them are identified

as His servants. All three are given responsibilities by Him. If we identify the responsibility of the first two as Christian responsibilities, what is the responsibility given to the third servant?

There is no exegetical basis within the text itself for coming to the conclusion that the third servant is not a regenerate man. He is, in fact, a servant of Christ who is called to account at the same time that the other men are called to account, which would be the Judgment Seat of Christ. He's not called to account a thousand years later at the Great White Throne.

But what is important to remember is that the story is parabolic. And what he receives is the opposite of what the others receive. They receive commendation.

They receive new authority. They receive participation in the joy of their Lord. Those are precisely the three things that are denied to him. Instead of commendation, he gets rebuke. Instead of additional authority, he loses the opportunity he has. And he is excluded from the joy of his Lord.

This is not to be understood in some kind of universal framework that the unfaithful Christian has no joys in the future. That would be contrary to lots of other Scriptures. But there are special joys which the Lord Jesus Christ shares with His faithful

servants and only faithful servants are admitted to those. Unfaithful servants are excluded from those special joys.

BW: A lot of people then are confused by vv 29 and 30, about the outer darkness.

"For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

But what is this outer darkness and the weeping and gnashing of teeth?

ZH: One of the things I always like to point out is that when people come to the phrase *outer darkness* they tend to forget all about the parabolic nature of the teaching. Here's a servant who has a talent wrapped up in a napkin. There's no literal talent. There's no literal napkin. And he is stripped of the talent and that

"There are special joys which the Lord Jesus Christ shares with His faithful servants and only faithful servants are admitted to those."

is given to the man who has ten talents. There's no exchange of talents at the Judgment Seat of Christ. All of this is parabolic, and people understand that.

But then, when we get to the outer darkness, we suddenly jump the track and begin thinking this is literal. It would be much better to keep within the framework of the parable and understand the outer darkness as figurative. There is no such thing as a literal dark spot to which unfaithful servants will be sent. This is all part of a parabolic apparatus that Jesus has expounded in Matthew.

In Matthew 22, the outer darkness is fully fleshed out in terms of a wedding supper which was customarily held at night. An individual arrives at the wedding supper without the proper garment. He's tied up hands and feet and cast into the darkness outside, which means he's put out of the brightly lit banquet hall and put out on the grounds. The parable does not say there are some torturers out there who inflict unending torture on this poor guy that's tied up hands and feet. All of this is parabolic. Nobody believes that even the lost are going to be tied up hands and feet. What this means is that the man's activities are restricted and he is excluded from the brightly lit banquet hall where there's joy and festivity.

That gives us the background for the Lord's statement, here, "Enter thou into the joy of your Lord." Or, alternatively, "Cast him into the outer darkness." The faithful servants are admitted to fellowship with our Lord's special joys inside the banquet hall. But the unfaithful servant is excluded. This is not to be understood as hell or anything like that. The weeping and gnashing of teeth is an expression of extreme remorse on the part of the servant who now realizes what he has lost by not being diligent in serving his Master.

Just as with the first parable (A-1), we need to keep in mind that in the Middle East, extreme expressions of grief are very natural. They may not be as natural to us in the West, but it would be quite unsurprising for a man who has lost his beloved wife to weep and gnash his teeth. So, there's nothing about the phraseology itself that belongs only in the context of hell. And the context here is clearly that of a servant who has failed his Master and who is excluded from very significant privilege.

As a result he's very, very sorry. This does not mean there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth forever and ever. But imagine being at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the Lord Jesus says, "You've failed Me

significantly. I cannot admit you to these privileges and to these rewards." It would be very strange if we didn't weep over that. It would be even stranger, because when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, we'll be perfect. We will be capable of the shame and regret that we're not now capable of because of our sinful nature. We'll be standing there with purified natures. And it would be very appropriate for a wholly transformed man, who looks back on a life that has been significantly wasted, to weep and mourn severely. That's what the Lord has in mind here.

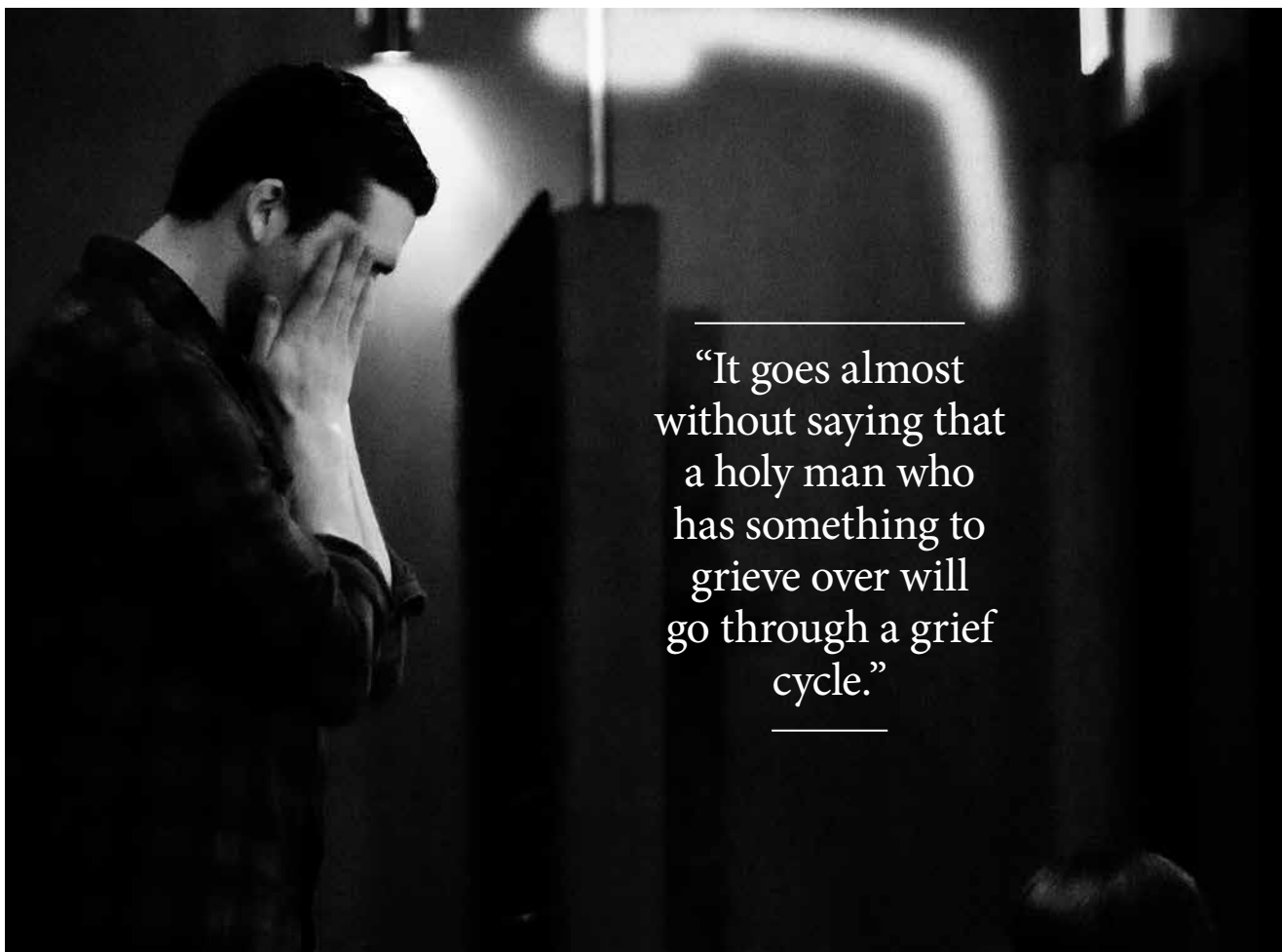
BW: It would also be expected for a person with a glorified body and with no sin nature to also bounce back from this weeping and gnashing of teeth rather quickly. In other words we don't anticipate this person weeping and gnashing his teeth for the thousand years of the Millennium, for example.

ZH: It's surprising how rigidly some approach these passages without any touch of realism in our understanding of them. Let us suppose that I have, on this earth, lost a loved one who is very close to me. Would others find it strange that I would weep and grieve over that? If I didn't, they would find it strange.

Losses of that kind that we experience on earth send us through a grief cycle. If we have good emotional structure and a good personality structure there's a recuperation period. We get to the place where we're not weeping about it at all. There may be spurts of weeping, but eventually the weeping stops; the grieving ends.

It goes almost without saying that a holy man who has something to grieve over will go through a grief cycle. But he'll recover from it much better than we human beings down here, with our sinful nature remaining in us, would recover from a grief cycle. But we all know people who have recovered remarkably from deep and significant losses. There's no reason to think that the redeemed person who is transformed into the likeness of Christ will not have the capacity to bounce back as quickly as possible, even from a deep grief like this.

BW: In v 28 the Lord says, "Therefore take the talent from him [the third servant], and give it to him who has ten talents." So the first two servants both doubled what was given to them. Both received equal commendation, equal authority in the life to come. But now something extra is given to only one of the two, not both.



“It goes almost without saying that a holy man who has something to grieve over will go through a grief cycle.”

ZH: The structure of the parable is about three servants, yet there will be far more than three servants. There are going to be millions of servants on review here. The point of taking the talent from the failing servant and giving it to one of the other servants is that the opportunity is lost by the failing servant and gained by a faithful servant.

It would be incorrect, given the structure of the parable, to read something into this about the inferiority of the second servant. Suppose there had been a fourth servant, and he had also failed. Then it might very well be that his talent would be taken from him and given to the second servant because both he and the first servant were equally committed. But the nature and structure of the parable prevents that. In any case, that's not a very meaningful point. The point is the loss of opportunity on the part of the unfaithful servant, and it is gained by a faithful servant.

BW: So the talent represents opportunity for service.

ZH: That's the way I would express it. Obviously this is a commercially oriented parable. The unfaithful

servant was told he should have gone and put his talent in the bank so he could collect interest. So, we're thinking in commercial terms here. Money is a good parabolic image of opportunity because money has potential. And so we would say every servant has potential granted to him by God. The parable is not interested in identifying the various forms of potential but the lessons about potential.

More or Less

BW: Back in v 29 we read, “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.” The principle stated here has application today to the believer in relation to how he uses what God has given him, how he takes in His Word.

ZH: The Lord uses this particular statement in more than one context. And each context would have to be examined to determine what its meaning might be. In one instance, the idea is that if you have knowledge

of the Scripture, more knowledge will be given to you (Luke 8:18).

But that's not the way the Lord uses it here. This is one of His very useful articulations which is applicable to a number of situations. The point here is that the man who appears before the Judgment Seat of Christ and has something to offer his Lord, will get more. And the man who appears before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and doesn't have anything to offer his Lord will lose what he already had. So here the statement belongs in the context of the Judgment Seat of Christ, but other passages have it in other contexts and apply it in different ways.

BW: The third servant puts his talent in a handkerchief, and he buries it. This is symbolic, but of what? What would this look like in the life of a Christian today? And, Christ says this servant should have deposited the money with the bankers. That wouldn't be doing as much as the first two servants did, but what does that minimal sort of involvement look like today?

ZH: One of the important elements of this parable is that it's significant that the man who got one talent is the one who does this. That doesn't mean it can't be done by somebody who gets a lot of talents. But in this particular story it's the man with the least amount of opportunity or ability, who does the burying.

This is very true to life, because in the Christian church there are people who realize, correctly, that they don't have a whole lot of talent. They don't have a whole lot of giftedness. They should realize they have something because the Scriptures assure us that all Christians have a spiritual gift. But it is easier for the man with the small gift to say, "What can I do? I could never be a world famous evangelist. I couldn't pastor a church. I can't even teach a Sunday school class. I just won't do anything. I've got so little talent that if I tried to use it, I'd probably squander it and mess things up like I do with a lot of other things in my life. And so I just won't do anything. This way, at least I won't harm anything."

This is the thinking of the third servant. He essentially says, "I knew what kind of Master you were. You were a very exacting Master. And I didn't want to take a chance of blowing the talent that you gave

me, so I just hid it. Now you can have it back" (see Matt 25:24-25).

The Master replies by saying in essence, "That's the wrong approach" (see Matt 25:26-27). We can understand why the parable singles out the least talented people for this because there is a greater temptation to do nothing, to hide abilities, when the abilities are small.

BW: And in regard to depositing the money with the bankers, this would be what—giving money to others who will effectively serve the Master?

ZH: That may be, but since this is a commercially based parable, it's likely that the other servants also deposited their money with the bankers. But if you

had five talents and you invested very wisely, you could reap another five talents. Ditto with two. So, I don't think He's saying, "You should have done something a little bit different from what the other ones did." We don't know what the others did.

There are always various ways of investing money, but the point is that this man should have at least done something with the money. The

simplest and easiest thing was to deposit it with the bankers. But instead of banking it, he hid it.

For the Christian who feels he has minimal talents, the church is his bank. He can invest it in the church life. The whole nature of spiritual gifts is that they're given for the benefit and edification of the church. So it doesn't matter that he has a small gift. He can make a contribution to the church, no matter how insignificant the contribution seems. The bank is there; do something with the ability God has given you.

Risk and Reward

BW: Would it be fair to say, then, that Jesus is suggesting here that there is some risk in the Christian life in investing what God has given us, but that timidity is the wrong approach? Instead, we should, indeed, take risk? There's the old adage that says, "If you never attempt anything, you may not do anything wrong, but you're going to accomplish nothing."

ZH: The minute I try to serve God, significantly or insignificantly, I run a risk. I not only run a risk of personal failure, because my sinful nature induces me down the wrong path, but I also run into the opposition of Satan and his agents. Satan does not sit idly by

“There is a greater temptation to do nothing, to hide abilities, when the abilities are small.”

while I try to serve God. We take it for granted that he will attack the guy with a lot of talents. But Satan has time to attack the one-talent Christian, as well.

There's risk up and down the line. But the more prominently God places you in ministry, the more the risks multiply because then you become a target for everybody and everything. Therefore, there's every bit as much risk for the five talent man as there is for the one talent man. The idea of risk is inherent in this parable.

BW: Jesus taught a similar parable in Luke 19:11-27, the Parable of the Minas. And there, instead of each servant being given according to his own ability—five, two and one—each servant in that parable gets one mina. Each gets the same exact sum. The first servant goes from one to ten, the second from one to five, and the third buries his mina. But what you find in that parable is they don't receive equal commendation. One of them hears, "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17). The next one just hears, "You also be over five cities" (Luke 19:19). I wonder if you can comment on the distinction between the two parables.

Here we have two servants who maximize what God has given them to invest, and one who doesn't. But in Luke 19, we have a servant who neither maximizes nor buries his mina.

ZH: The key to the distinction between these two parables is that in the Parable of the Talents each individual receives a different amount of money to invest, according to his ability. However, in the Parable of the Minas, all the servants receive the same amount of money.

And, by the way, there were ten servants, but only three of them are recorded in the accounting part of it. Jesus doesn't tell us about the other seven because He only needs three to make His point.

When taken together, the point of both parables is that there are two ways of looking at our capacity to serve. One is that I serve God in accordance with the abilities and capacities that He has given me. And these vary from one Christian to another.

The other is that I serve God with my heart and life. I serve God with my whole self. At this level, all

Christians are equal. No matter what our talents and abilities, we are to give ourselves fully to God. We are to serve God with all our hearts. This is true of every Christian, regardless of the gifts that have been given.

So in the Parable of the Minas we have three servants who start out in exactly the same place. The first is twice as good as the second in terms of his productivity, and the third one does nothing. So, it is obvious that, since they all start at the same place and they get different results, they have to receive different rewards. The first servant does ten times the worth of what was committed to him. The next servant does only five times what he was given. God can't treat those as equal because there was nothing in the original

commitment that would have prevented the second servant from getting as much money out of his investment as the first servant.

So the first servant gets a commendation and ten cities. The second servant doesn't even get a commendation, just the five cities. And the third servant gets a rebuke and no cities. All Christians have an equal opportunity to serve God fully. And they also

have the opportunity to use their talents to the max.

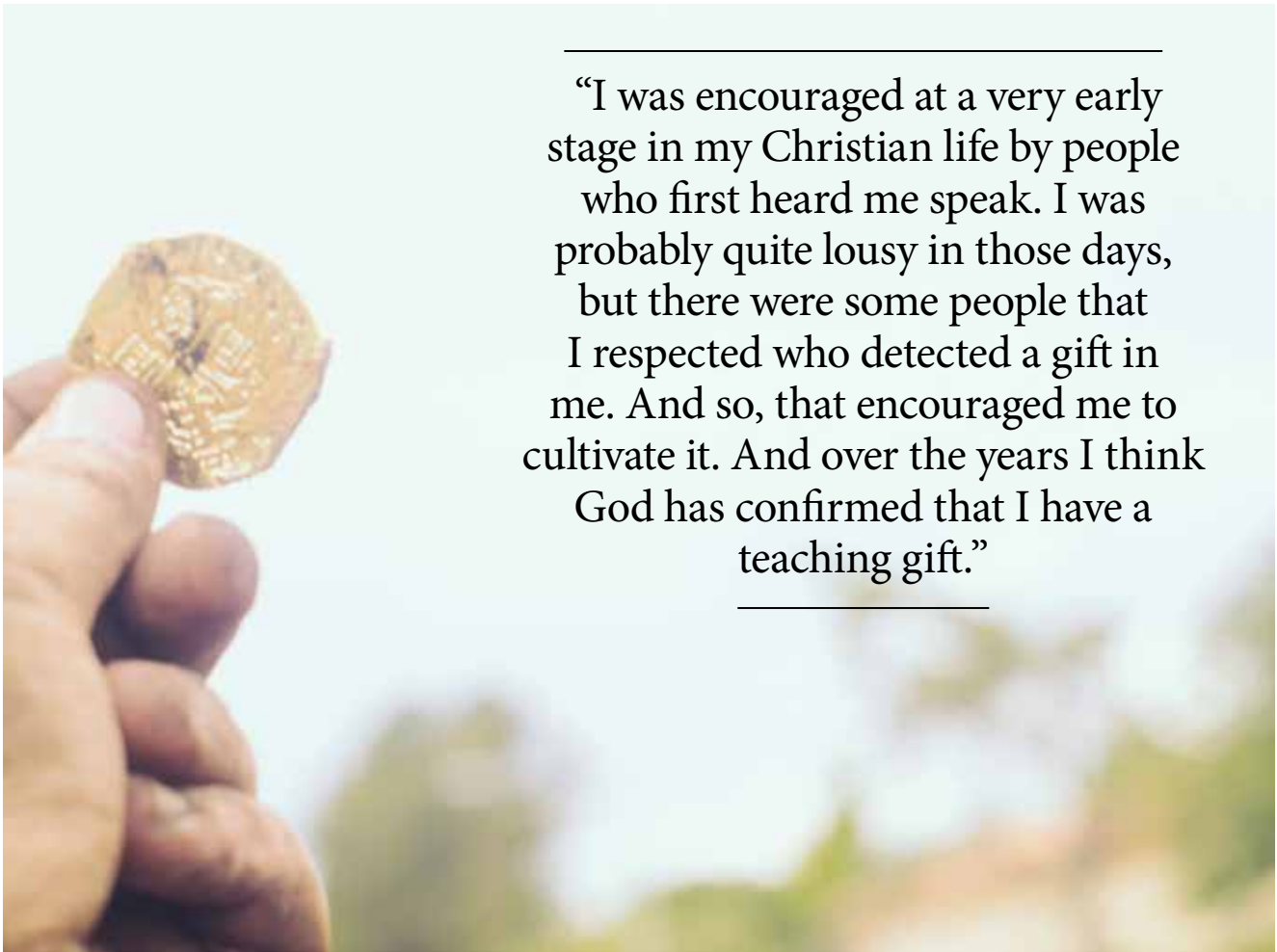
**"We are to serve God
with all our hearts.
This is true
of every Christian,
regardless of the gifts
that have been given."**

The Citizens Who Hated Him

BW: It is important to note the presence of a group of people in the Parable of the Minas which is not mentioned in the Parable of the Talents. There are citizens that didn't want Jesus to rule over them. This transparently looks at unbelieving Israel. And they're slain in the Master's presence (Luke 19:27). This is in direct contrast to the third servant (Luke 19:20-26). This lends support to the view that the third servant is not sent to eternal punishment in hell.

ZH: The introduction of this fourth group in the Parable of the Minas is interesting. The Master says, "But bring here those enemies of mine, who didn't want Me to reign over them, and slay them before Me." Again, we must remember that this is parabolic. It represents the final judgment and the second death.

In other words, these people also get a time in front of the Master, but not until He is through with His servants. Only then does He say, "Get them together." We know from Revelation that a thousand years intervene between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the



“I was encouraged at a very early stage in my Christian life by people who first heard me speak. I was probably quite lousy in those days, but there were some people that I respected who detected a gift in me. And so, that encouraged me to cultivate it. And over the years I think God has confirmed that I have a teaching gift.”

Great White Throne Judgment. But the outcome of the second judgment is death, spiritual death, eternally, in the Lake of Fire. That second judgment is what is represented in Luke 19:27.

This does confirm the general approach that we took to the talents, because the three servants in the Parable of the Minas are in contrast to these people who are slain at a different time and a different judgment. That reinforces the interpretation that all three of the servants in the Parable of the Talents are saved.

Together, these parables offer a very solemn warning that we should assess the abilities that God has given to us. It would have been strange if the servant with five talents never counted the talents, or the man with two never counted his. He knew he had two talents. And the first servant knew he had five. Similarly, it is important for us, under the guidance of the Scriptures and with prayerful waiting on the Lord, to discern what gifts God has given us so we can maximize them. If I'm careless about counting the money I've got, how can I know what I have to invest?

BW: Although we don't look at what God has given us to determine if we're born again or not, we do look at what He's given us, and what we're doing with it, to determine how we're doing in terms of these accountability parables.

ZH: That's exactly right. And, of course, when we're first saved we don't know exactly what gift God has given us. One of the simplest ways to find out is to attempt to serve Him in various ways. It soon becomes obvious which ways are natural and enjoyable for us to serve Him. He will bless those areas in which we are gifted and encourage us to continue in that ministry.

I was encouraged, for example, at a very early stage in my Christian life by people who first heard me speak. I was probably quite lousy in those days, but there were some people that I respected who detected a gift in me. And so, that encouraged me to cultivate it. And over the years I think God has confirmed that I have a teaching gift.


In the very early phases of the Christian life we should be prayerfully looking for the capacity that

God has given us. And then, based upon the way in which the Scriptures relate gifts to our lives, we will be able to realize the relative responsibility that we have, based on our gift. We are told, for example, "Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (Jas 3:1). So, we know if we discover that we have a teaching gift we are at a high level of responsibility and accountability.

BW: But one of the pitfalls of knowing our spiritual gift is to limit ourselves to only that area of ministry. Even if I don't have the gift of giving, for example, I'm still to give. If I don't have the gift of helps, I'm still to help. If I don't have the gift of encouragement, I'm still to encourage. If I don't have the gift of evangelism, I'm still to evangelize. If I don't have the gift of teaching, I'm still to teach my children, or others within my sphere of influence.

So, even though I may have but one spiritual gift, I'm called to develop *all* of these other areas and even things that aren't spiritual gifts: natural abilities, the finances God gives me, the time God gives me. All of this is what God has entrusted to us, with a special emphasis upon our spiritual gift.

ZH: Yes, the parable assumes the differentiation between the servants. And one of the things that differentiates us is our gift. But that is certainly not the only thing that differentiates us. I happen to be a

single man. I don't have the responsibilities that God gives to a married man, and I won't be held accountable for those. But maybe I have opportunities and responsibilities that come to me as a single man that a married man doesn't have. We all have to look at our whole life and what God has given us and the abilities He's given us and assess them accordingly. 



Zane Hodges taught New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary. Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX with his wife of 40 years, Sharon. Their latest book Tough Texts: Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? is available now.



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Satan in Opposition

(1 Samuel 18:5-16)

BY ZANE HODGES

{ This is Chapter 10 from the new book }
{ *Spiritual Lessons from the Life of David* }

HOW STARKLY DOES the attitude of Jonathan towards David contrast with the attitude now seen in King Saul. Whenever God is at work, as He clearly was with David, Satan is also at work to oppose Him. And Satan finds his tools where he can—too often among the people of God! Such a tool comes into his hands in the person of Saul.

The King, whom we have seen to be a regenerate man, now faces a crisis in his relationship with God. Samuel has already announced to him that the kingdom will be taken from him and given to “a neighbor of yours, who is better than you” (1 Sam 15:28). But Saul does not as yet know whom God has selected for this role. His most urgent necessity is to bow to God’s will and accept it, just as we too are called upon to accept whatever unpleasant things God’s wisdom may ordain for our lives. Those who fight with God in such matters are destined to lose the blessings that always attend submission to Him.

We have already seen that Saul suffered affliction from a “distressing Spirit” sent by God (1 Sam 16:14) and that his apparent periods of depression were relieved by the music that David played for him (16:23). As a result he, too, loved David (16:21), and had he maintained this love he might well have been able to accept God’s choice of David as his successor. But, regrettably, once the thought occurs to him that David might be the one to succeed him, this love is transformed into hatred.

Jealousy

This thought occurs to Saul almost immediately after the defeat of Goliath. As “they were coming home” from this

victory, women came out from all the cities of Israel to celebrate the triumph with “singing and dancing” accompanied by “tambourines” and “musical instruments” (v 6). Among their songs are words that stir in Saul a spirit of jealousy, as the dancing women sing:

“Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands” (v 7).

It is a sad fact that when we are not close to God, a jealous spirit is easily aroused, even toward those to whom we may be greatly indebted. Saul owes to David not only the relief David’s music brings to him, but also the defeat of the Philistine forces that has just occurred. How easily a gracious attitude might have allowed him to say to himself, “David’s praise is well deserved!” Humility should also have moved him to say, “David accepted the fight that I should have waged with Goliath!”

But Saul says none of these things to himself. Instead, he is “very angry” and thinks, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?” (18:8). The arrow of envy has now lodged in Saul’s heart, and so “he eyed David from that day forward” (v 9).

The NT exhorts us to take “the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph 6:16). And there is hardly any fiery dart in Satan’s arsenal more effective in igniting flames of hostility towards others than the fiery dart of envy itself. When the heart is unprotected by an attitude of faith, such darts often strike home with intense and consuming force.

False Prophecy

How might Saul have quenched the dart that has now lodged in his heart? He might have done so by recognizing in faith that God has granted this victory to David and that God’s name has been honored by Israel’s triumph over an idolatrous enemy. He might have chosen to rejoice—as all Israel was rejoicing—in this grand event. Instead, whatever joy he might have felt is consumed like kindling wood by the fires of resentment and jealousy. But jealousy and resentment are always a spiritual trap for those who nurture them,

and who fail to dismiss them with the nobler attitude that is the fruit of faith alone.

No wonder that it was nothing less than “on the next day that the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul” (v 10). Perhaps he brooded on the night following the victory and worried that David might be the one whom God had ordained to replace him on the throne of Israel. Whether he did or not, however, it is clear that the awakening of his animosity toward David is rapidly followed by an inward distress. Envy and hostility are always a path to crushing torment. To indulge these feelings is to invite spiritual and mental distress.

We are surprised to be told that in this psychological condition Saul “prophesied inside the house”

“Jealousy and resentment are always a spiritual trap for those who nurture them, and who fail to dismiss them with the nobler attitude that is the fruit of faith alone.”

(v 10). Saul had prophesied once before, following his anointing by Samuel, but on that occasion the prophecy is ascribed to the fact that “the Spirit of God came upon him” (see 1 Sam 10:10-13). However, we have already been told that “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him” (16:14). Thus the prophesying by Saul in this text is not the work of the Spirit of God.

As the NT teaches us, prophecy can be the work of many other spirits who are quite distinct from the Holy Spirit himself (1 John 4:1-3). Even the demon-possessed little girl of Acts 16:16-19 was an effective financial tool in the hands of her masters until Paul cast out the demon. Nor is she lying when she proclaims: “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). What exactly the distressing spirit “inspired” Saul to say in his prophecy we are not told. But it might well have been some truth pertaining to David since Satan at least knew of David’s anointing.

In any case, as David once again plays to relieve Saul from his distress, Saul takes the spear that is in his hand and hurls it at David (vv 10-11), who manages to avoid injury. This happens twice (v 11), whether on the same occasion, or also another, we are not told. All of this presents a marked breakdown in Saul’s condition, since the music that was designed to relieve

his problem not only does not do so, but also fails to prevent this violent outburst.

Beyond doubt, when a failure to accept God's will is accompanied by envy and hostility towards those who are obedient to that will, the result can hardly be anything less than rapid spiritual debasement. That such deterioration can then lead to outrageous acts directed toward the object of one's hostility should be obvious. Indeed, the Apostle John equates hatred with murder when he writes, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). The distance from the spirit of murder to the actions of a murderer is by no means as great as we might suppose. Saul has just attempted to murder David!

Fear

David's escape from Saul twice now creates in Saul a spirit of fear. He senses the reality that "the Lord was with him [David], but had departed from" himself (v 12). This is a dreadful realization for a regenerate person to have—a sense of personal distance from the Lord, accompanied by the realization that the person he regards as his "rival" has God on his side. It thus becomes painful even to be in this person's presence and so, not surprisingly, "Saul removed him [David] from his presence" and assigns him military tasks which take him out on the battlefield (v 13). Perhaps Saul even secretly hoped that David would fall in battle (see v 25), but instead David conducts himself "wisely," and it becomes even more evident that "the Lord was with him" (v 14).

How sad it is when a believer is so set in his personal animosity toward some other believer, that even evidence of God's blessing on the target of this hatred only heightens the torment of the one who hates him. It is not for nothing that our Lord's parable about the unforgiving servant ends with the words: "and his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers [or, tormenters] until he should pay all that was owed him" (Matt 18:34). Even when there has been a real offense committed against us, the refusal to forgive leads to "torment." How much more is this true when, as in the case of Saul, the supposed offense is rooted in our own selfish refusal to accept God's will for ourselves and the other person!

Saul's fear of David continues, therefore, even after he has been removed from his presence (v 15), while at the same time David grows in the esteem in which he is held by "all Israel and Judah" (v 16). The very

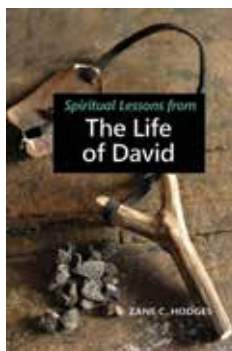
task that Saul has assigned to David, which allows him to go out and come in before Israel, is an instrument in God's hand to increase the public stature of His future king. In his fear-driven hatred, Saul only (and unintentionally) serves God's purpose for David and at the same time carries out God's will concerning the termination of Saul's kingship. The irony is powerful.

Nor is it any different today. Even the opposition that a believer not in fellowship with the Lord shows toward a faithful Christian believer will only serve God's purpose and glory in the very person he is opposing. To fight God's will in our own lives, and to fight it in the lives of others, is to engage in a futile two front war which only brings about our own utter defeat.

The words of James are appropriate here:

Therefore submit to God, Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded...Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (Jas 4:7-8, 10).

Hostility and resentment toward our Christian brothers and sisters are always useful tools for Satan to employ in our lives. He must be resisted by our complete submission to God and to God's will. Only in such humility can God Himself lift us up. **GH**



Zane Hodges taught New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary. His book, Spiritual Lessons from the Life of David is available now.

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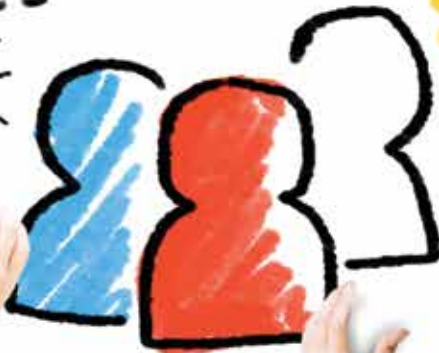
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{ This is Chapter 3 from the new book
Beyond Doubt: How to Be Sure of Your Salvation }

BY SHAWN LAZAR

My college roommate had a talent for card tricks. It infuriated me. He had this one trick called *The Slapstick*. First, he'd shuffle a deck of cards and ask me to pick one without showing him. After I had memorized it and put it back into the deck, he'd shuffle the cards again and place the deck between my fingers. And then—wham!—he'd slap my hand sending the cards scattered across the floor.

All except one.

There, in my hand, I'd still be holding the card I originally picked out of the deck!

How'd he do it?

As I said, it infuriated me!

I wasn't angry at my roommate—his trick was great—I was frustrated because I wasn't clever enough to figure out how he did it. Somehow, he tricked me. I missed his sleight of hand.

Unfortunately, too many preachers play sleight of hand with the gospel.

With one hand they distract you with talk about justification by faith alone, encouraging you. And then—wham!—with the other hand they sneak in salvation by works while you're not paying attention.

They “back-load” the gospel.
What does that mean?

SNEAKING IN WORKS

A preacher *front-loads* the gospel when he teaches that you are saved by faith *plus* works.

A preacher *back-loads* the gospel when he teaches we are saved by faith *that* works.

See the difference?

Or rather, do you see there really is no difference?

Front-loading the gospel *openly* makes works a condition of salvation.

Back-loading the gospel *covertly* makes works a condition of salvation, by subtly redefining faith to include works.

People who believe in a back-loaded gospel lack assurance for the same reason people who believe in salvation by works lack assurance. They need to look at their works to know if they “really” believe. But since they're all sinners, with a mixture of good and bad behavior, they're never sure if they're good enough to be saved.

A BACK-LOADED GOSPEL THE ERROR OF REDEFINING FAITH



Is this at all familiar to you? Have you heard this kind of message before? Do *you* believe a back-loaded gospel?

REDEFINING FAITH

Let me give you an example of the kind of sleight of hand I have in mind, where teachers initially claim to believe in justification by faith apart from works, only to introduce works through the back-door, by redefining faith to include works.

In a recently published *Systematic Theology*, a Calvinistic author claims to believe in justification. As he writes,

Justification is by faith apart from works, apart from works of the law, without works.¹

This is admirably clear, is it not? Three times in one sentence he emphasizes that justification is by faith *apart from works*. If you heard him preach that, you'd think he believed it!

The author even rightly recognizes that if justification were even *partly* based on works, we could not have assurance. In discussing the Roman Catholic view, he says,

This means, then, that salvation is based partly on our works. The consequence, then, is that we cannot be assured of our salvation in this life, because we are never sure whether our works have been sufficient.²

So, if you were to hear this man teach about justification from the pulpit, you would come away thinking he believed in justification by faith, apart from works.

And you would be wrong.

Read on a little further and you find he plays sleight of hand with the saving message and redefines faith to include works:

...saving faith is a *faith that works*...³

...justification is by a living faith, not a dead faith, *a faith that works*, rather than a mere profession. But faith does not justify because of its connection to works. It justifies because its nature is to trust, in this case to trust the grace of God in Christ. That trust motivates us to please God *and therefore to do good works*.⁴

...if you assent to the truths of Scripture, not feebly or forgetfully, *but in a way that determines your behavior, thoughts, and feelings*, then it seems to me that you have all that is needed for true faith. But then your faith is better described

not merely as assent, but according to the third component of faith, trust.⁵

The author goes on to explain that one of the components of trust is "subjection to Christ as Lord, a willingness to obey...faith must be living faith, *obedient faith, faith that works*..."

On the one hand, this man teaches you are saved by faith, apart from works. On the other hand, he teaches that if you don't work you don't really believe and aren't saved.

Confused yet?

What exactly is the difference?

Whether you are saved by faith *plus* works or by faith *that* works, either way, works are made a condition of salvation. And if it's a condition of salvation, we can never have assurance. As the author himself admitted, "we are never sure whether our works have been sufficient."

That is the result of the back-loaded gospel.

WORKS DON'T WORK

If you have become confused by a back-loaded gospel, the only solution is to clearly understand that salvation is by faith apart from works, period! No tricks. No fine print. No reservations.

John's Gospel tells us the result of believing in Jesus is that we get eternal life (cf. John 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:28). It never ever says that salvation depends on works. It only ever says that salvation is by faith. The verb *believe* is mentioned one hundred times. No wonder John's Gospel has been called "The Gospel of Belief."

Paul, in his letters to the Galatians and Romans, is even more explicit. He repeatedly proclaims that we are justified by faith apart from doing the good works of the law.

Remember the verses we quoted above?

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

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 (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us (Titus 3:5a).

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works

of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Galatians 2:16).

Does it get any clearer than that?

We are saved through believing in Jesus, not by doing good works. If doing good works was part of what it means to believe, Paul's argument would fall apart.

But they're not the same. Faith and works are polar opposites.

To believe means to be persuaded that something is true. It contains no element of behavior. No work. Of course, our beliefs *influence* our behavior, but you can't say that works are part of faith itself.

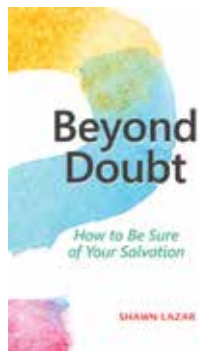
Faith and works are two different things, and faith is the *only* condition of salvation.

Is that why you lack assurance?

Were you taught that works were part of faith?

Were you taught that you didn't really believe unless you acted a certain way? Were you confused by a back-loaded gospel?

In that case, instead of believing the back-loaded gospel, believe Jesus' promise that we are saved by simply believing in Him. Let that be your only ground for assurance. ■■



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. Buy his new books, *Beyond Doubt: How to Be Sure of Your Salvation* in the bookstore.

1. John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 970

2. Ibid., 969, emphasis added.

3. Ibid., 970, emphasis added.

4. Ibid., emphasis added.

5. Ibid., 952-53, emphasis added.

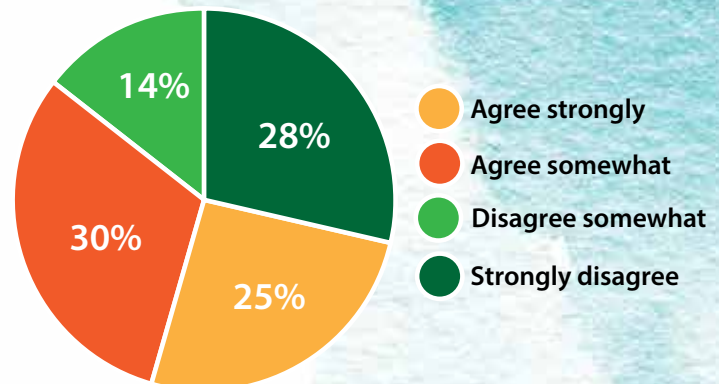
MOST AMERICAN CHRISTIANS DO NOT BELIEVE THE SAVING MESSAGE

The Barna Group released their *State of the Church 2016* report. Here are some disappointing, but hardly surprising, results on the question of salvation by works:

"Among the American population, most (55%) agree that if a person is generally good, or does good enough things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven."

And here are the results of asking respondents to give their opinion of the following statement:

"Good works result in going to heaven."



In other words, **69%** of Americans do not understand that eternal salvation is by faith apart from works.

See <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/>

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By You

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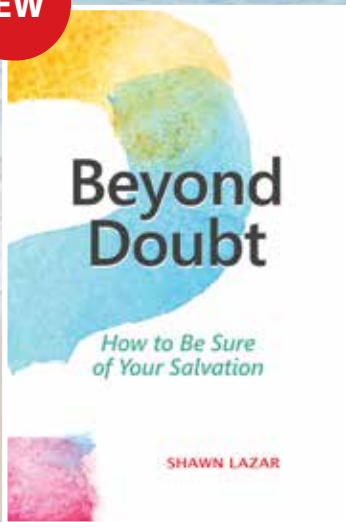
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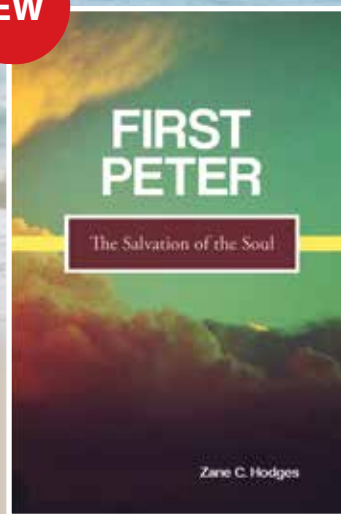
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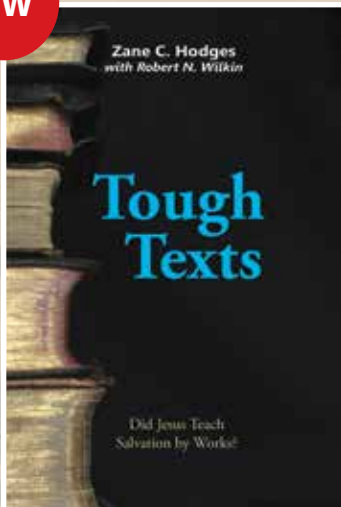
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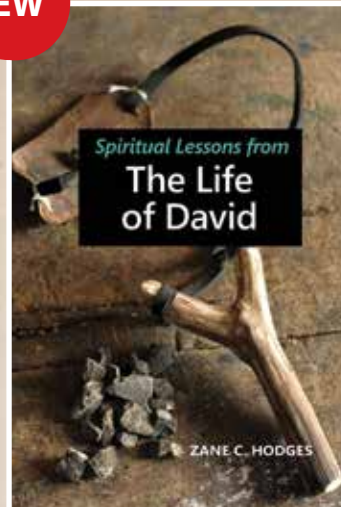
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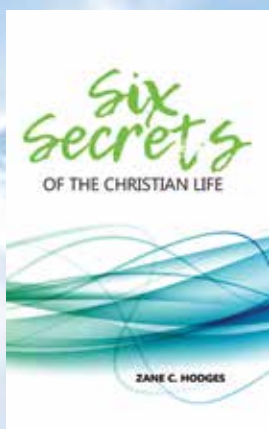


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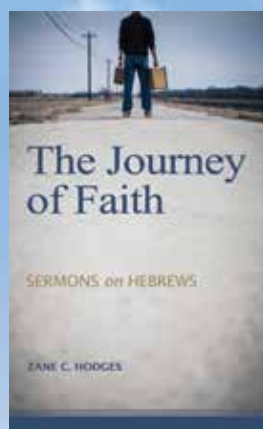
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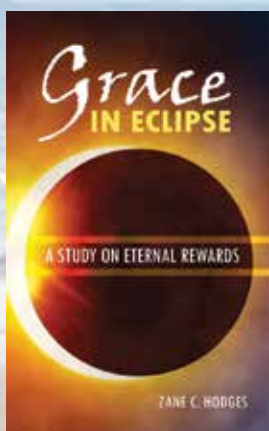
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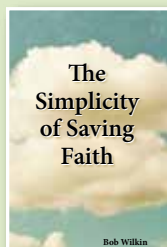
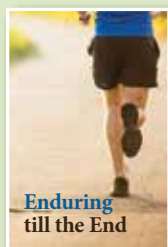
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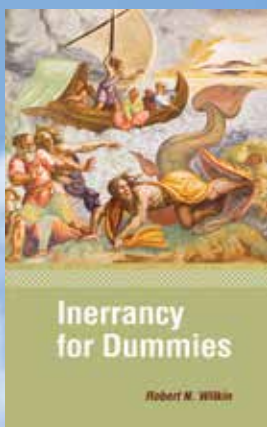
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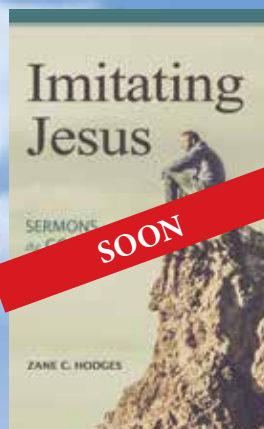
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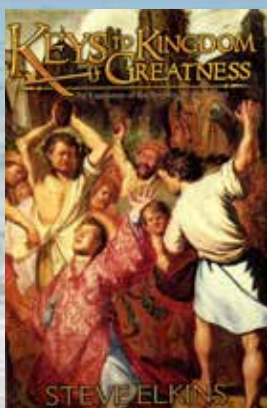


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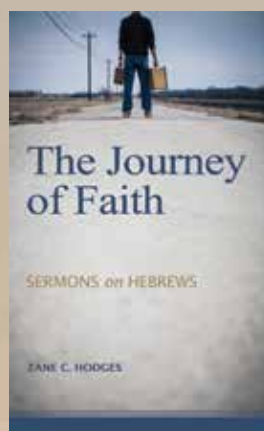
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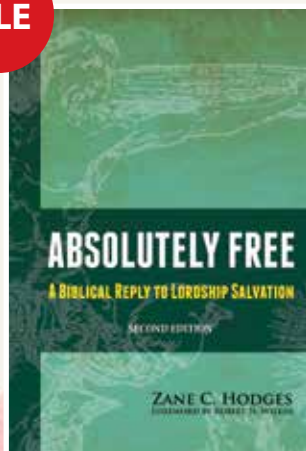
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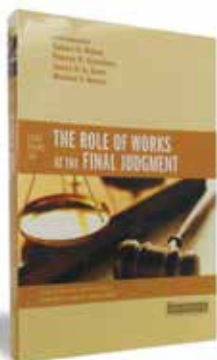
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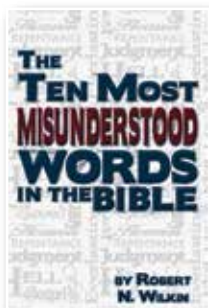
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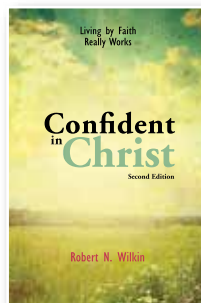
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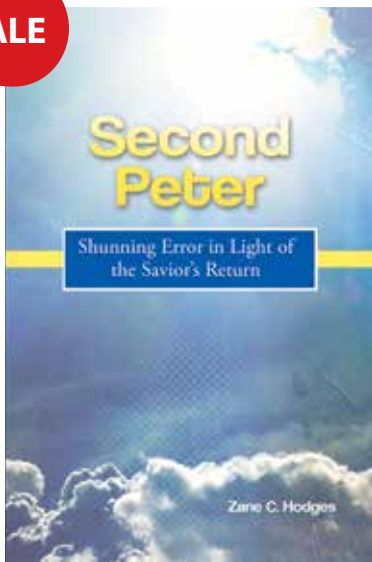
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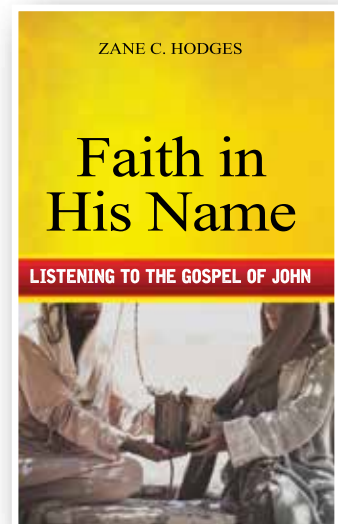
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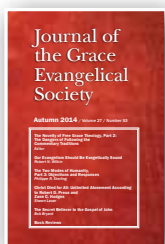
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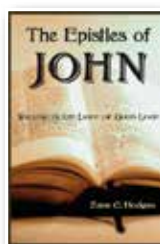




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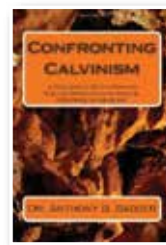


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What City Did Abraham Wait For? (Hebrews 11:10)

By Bill Fiess

For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10).

I believe that the city which Abraham waited for in Heb 11:10 is Jerusalem/the New Jerusalem (in the Millennium and on the new earth, respectively).

A key to seeing this is that the author of Hebrews goes on to say that “he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” There is only one such city mentioned in Scripture and it is repeatedly called the city which God founded and the city whose foundation God placed.

For example, Ps 48:8 says, “As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God; God will establish [or has founded] it forever” (Ps 48:8). So too Isa 14:32 says, “The Lord has founded Zion.”

Of course the New Jerusalem is the only city on earth mentioned in Rev 21–22. It is where Messiah will set His throne. All the kings of the earth will bring their treasures (glory and honor) to Him there (Rev 21:24).

What Abraham waited for/expected/anticipated is essentially what we should watch for as well in the Church Age. We wait for the return of Messiah to establish His righteous kingdom. That is what Abraham waited for as well: “Abraham rejoiced to see My day” (John 8:56).

Abraham knew about the reign of his Heir. He knew Messiah would rule forever from Jerusalem. And Abraham “waited for” that rule. That is, Abraham knew he would be raised from the dead and that he would share in the rule of Messiah in the Promised Land and in the Promised City.

The doctrine of eternal rewards is not some new teaching. Abraham knew that Messiah rewards faithfulness. So did Moses (Heb 11:25–26). All of the Patriarchs sought “a homeland” (Heb 11:14) and a city (Heb 11:16). ■

Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia.



A person is shown from the side, holding and reading a Bible. They are outdoors on a green lawn, with a brick building visible in the blurred background. The title 'Salvation Worked Out' is overlaid in large, bold, olive-green letters, and the subtitle '(1 Peter 1:13-21)' is in white below it.

Salvation Worked Out

(1 Peter 1:13-21)

By Zane C. Hodges



{ This is Chapter 3 from the new book }
{ *First Peter: The Salvation of the Soul* }

The transforming work of God by which our “souls” are transformed and prepared for glory will touch every area of our earthly experience. The first such area, and the core area of all Christian experience, is the area of our relationship to God.

Through Obedience (1:13-16)

1:13. The word **therefore** draws up into itself all of the elevating content of the prologue (1:3-12) and makes it a basis for the admonition to follow.

The figure **gird up the loins of your mind** is drawn from the Oriental (Eastern) practice of gathering up the long folds of the outer garment and tucking them under the belt so as to facilitate vigorous activity. So the mind, like a flowing garment, tends to distract us from our major objectives unless it is strictly controlled to that end. “Gathering in” our wandering thoughts, we are to focus our attention upon the great consummation of our experience in the coming of Christ. We could say, “Don’t let your mental skirts drag!”

The aorist **hope** (*elpisate*) with **to the end** (*teleiōs*) might be captured by: “Fix your hope completely.” We are to be absorbed by the eschatological consummation of our experience.

The phrase **the grace being brought to you** (*tēn pheromenēn humin charin*) picks up the idea of **the grace toward you** (*tēs eis humas charitos*) of v 10 and refers to the consummation of our lives in the glory of the Messianic unveiling. It is essential that we get a clear grasp of the glory which by the grace of God we are being prepared for now, and then set that glory before us as the all-consuming expectation of our hearts. Does your basic objective in life lie within the bounds of time or on the Holder of eternity? Do we live for this age or the one to come?

“Our wandering thoughts and pre-occupations of heart are to be carefully drawn in, like the robe of a garment, in order that in a spirit of sobriety they may be fully fixed on the hope of sharing Messiah’s glory.”



Verse 13, then, teaches that our wandering thoughts and pre-occupations of heart are to be carefully drawn in, like the robe of a garment, in order that in a spirit of sobriety they may be fully fixed on the hope of sharing Messiah’s glory.

1:14. Both the Nestle-Aland text and TR place a period after “Christ” of v 13. This is dubious. A semicolon might better present the idea that Peter continues to unfold in v 14. Peter’s mind in speaking of **not fashioning yourselves** (*mē suschēmatisomenoi*) was probably not a truly independent construction (e.g., an imperatival participle), but was subordinate to (or, continuous with) “hope” (v 13). If so, it indicates a process that is to go on contemporaneously with the fixing of our hope on future glory.

Indeed, it is only as our hope is so fixed that we can truly avoid those lusts associated with the ignorance of our unsaved days. Bear in mind that pride, worldly ambition, rivalry, and jealousy are such lusts and can only be truly escaped as our souls are liberated from them by the vision of a higher goal and a greater glory.

It is hope in the future glory then that motivates us to be **obedient children**. And this is the basic principle of our relationship to God. Eschatology, properly conceived, is the primary NT motive for obedient living. Not what we gain now (for here we suffer), but what we gain hereafter is what encourages us to live for God.

1:15-16. Peter reminds us that God calls us to His own kingdom and glory. If the eye is fixed on our future calling (cf. 1 Thess 2:12), we will find motivation to be like Him who called us, namely, to be holy.

Through Godly Fear (1:17-21)

The division suggested by the outline may be somewhat artificial; there is little basic difference between obedience to God and fear of God. Yet obedience is more the external aspect, while fear of God stresses the internal, i.e., the disposition that issues in obedience.

1:17. The verb **you call on** (*epikaleisthe*) meant either (1) to name, or surname; or (2) to call upon (someone for aid); to appeal to (esp. in a legal sense).

The latter sense is used here and perhaps with a flavoring from the world of jurisprudence in which it indicated a legal “appeal” (cf. Acts 25:11-12).

Such connotations are most appropriate in a context of suffering, even if—as is probable—the word here has the broad sense of “to call on (for aid).” The point is that in all the exigencies of life you ask God for help. But remember that your appeal is to a Judge Who is utterly impartial and rewards according to one’s work. So fear Him.

The reference to **the time of your stay here** refers once again to the thought of our status as aliens in a foreign land (cf. 1:1). Such a reminder is also appropriate here. Possessed of this sense of “strangeness” to the world, our eye is ever on our true homeland. Conscious of our destination, we are conscious also of the impartial judgment that awaits us there. This instills godly fear.

1:18-19. The participle **knowing** (*eidotes*) is circumstantial (adverbial) and causal and can be understood as “since you know.” It introduces the first rich doctrinal section of the body of the epistle. It is Peter’s technique to motivate by doctrine and to select his doctrinal content so that it is appropriate to his admonition. We shall see this repeatedly. Here, *knowing* is grammatically subordinate to “conduct yourselves” (*anastrophēte*) at the end of v 17. We live because we know.

The first feature of the motivation revolves around the awesome price of our redemption (vv 18-19). The verb **redeemed** would probably suggest to Peter’s readers (Jew and Gentile alike) the experience of release by purchase from slavery. Our fear of God and conformity to His will, ought certainly to arise from, and be sustained by, a realization of the costliness to Him of our redemption. Our lives will be judged by this impartial God and Father (v 17) in the light of that price.

The phrase **tradition from your fathers** (*patroparadotou*) means “inherited from one’s fathers.” The use of this word implies a Gentile audience. While it may not be impossible so to describe the manner of life of an unconverted Jew, this way of doing so seems foreign to the NT. The *fathers* and their legacy to Jewish life are usually regarded positively (cf. Acts 22:3; 24:14; 28:17; 2 Tim 1:3; Rom 11:28). This is not to ignore an indictment like Stephen’s (Acts 7:51), but the basic Jewish way of life as an inheritance from the fathers is never condemned. When it might be condemned, this is

only as a failure to measure up to the inherited traditions. Thus, the phrase is more natural as a description of Gentiles and their inherited modes of conduct.

1:20-21. The word **foreordained** (*proegnōsmenou*) seems clearly to denote more than prescience (foresight). Why should we be told merely that God knew about this beforehand? The implication in the word is one of purpose (cf. Rom 11:2). Christ’s death as a sacrificial lamb was part of an eternal purpose, and carries implications for the significance of the phrase “according to the foreknowledge of God” in 1:2.

Observe that here the Apostle’s stress falls on the awesome purpose of God in our redemption, a purpose stretching back into eternity past, but finding fulfillment at **the ends of the times**.

Peter’s message in 1:18-21 is that, having fixed his hope firmly on the Second Coming, the believer is to become an obedient and holy child. He is to maintain a reverent fear of his impartial Father in the light of so magnificent a redemption. The Christian fear of God springs from the awesome *price* of redemption (vv 18-19), the awesome *purpose* of foreknowledge (v 20), and the awesome *principle* of faith in a God of resurrection and glory (v 21). The price is infinite (or incorruptible), the purpose is eternal, and the principle is divine.

Note as well that the stress of this section falls on the child-father relationship (cf. “obedient children” in v 14 and “Father” in v 17). Thus, having been born again (cf. 1:3), the first area of life in which we ought to experience the *salvation of the soul* is that of the child-Parent relationship which the new birth creates. ■



Zane Hodges taught New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary. His book, *First Peter: The Salvation of the Soul* is available now.

Churches Should Plant Churches

By Randy White

It's time for someone to say, "The Emperor has no clothes." That emperor is the church planting movement, and this article is about the failure nobody wants to talk about.

Church planting has been the rage of North American mission work for this generation. Almost every North American mission agency has given priority to church planting in urban and suburban areas. This movement began in the 1980s, probably spurred on by the "success" of Willow Creek in Chicago and Saddleback in California. The ones who pay the bills for this movement are the pew-sitting Christians of solid, traditional churches around the nation and their pastors, who continually (and rightfully) promote generosity to missions.

Personally, I think it is time to quit paying the bills, at least as we've been doing it.

The Problem with Church Planting

Church planting has been presented as the cure for all that ails our sick and dying world. New churches, we were told, grow faster than old churches, baptize more people, and are more effective at bringing positive change to hurting communities.

What we are not told is that new churches have an unbelievably high failure rate, often do not survive the loss of the founder or those with the founding vision, and cost far more per member than established churches. We are not told that existing churches could stretch the same dollars many times more than the quick-spend of church planting money. We are not told of the multi-millions of dollars that have been squandered on ill-conceived church plants. We are not told that existing local churches could start new ministries that would be far more effective than church planters starting new churches. We are not told that billions of dollars of real estate are available



in existing churches and that these buildings could be refitted for a new generation at less cost than plopping an unproven church planter into an area, hoping he can find a core group, find a place for that group to meet, and developing that core group into a church. We are not told that the majority of church planting is done in areas that are filled with existing churches that could begin new ministries and new churches at a much lower cost and much higher success rate than carpetbagger church planters swooping in for their chance at fame.

We are also not told that the church planting movement has come at the cost of almost all missionary activity in poor and rural areas. The same mission boards that are starting churches at a feverish pace used to send missionaries to work with Native Americans or poverty-stricken Appalachian communities or ministry in the vast areas of the American west that have a half-days travel between small towns and no missionary presence. These mission boards used to send missionaries to work in community centers in blighted neighborhoods, or to work with Spanish-speaking communities in mountain towns, or to develop spiritual leadership in rural farm communities. These ministries have almost totally disappeared from the mission boards. Mission agencies in America are almost exclusively church-planting agencies.

Churches Won't Start New Churches?

We've been told that existing churches in areas targeting church planting are against starting new churches and ministries. "These churches are filled

with old mossback members who are resistant to change. If they were going to do something they would have already done it!" This is what we were told, and we believed it.

And in believing it, we threw an entire generation of faithful believers under the bus. We also fostered an environment in which young church planters have a tremendous animosity toward existing churches. The only thing they want from established churches is cash.

The truth is, established churches have been faithfully serving the Lord in some of the hardest areas of the nation to do ministry. They are in rural areas, urban areas, and suburban areas. They serve poor people, country people, and—might I say—ugly people (the kind that church planters loath because they don't enhance the sexy image of church planting). My belief (having worked with established churches for 25 years) is that these churches would gladly step out of their comfort zone and establish new ministries, new preaching points, and even new churches



if they had access to the multiple millions of dollars made available to church planters.

For example, if my church had a \$100,000 grant, (the average contribution to a new church plant is \$172,000) we could start at least a half-dozen sustainable preaching points in the mountain villages of Northern New Mexico, in addition to conducting Bible Schools throughout the region. The chances of a denominational missions agency or church planting network starting a church in this spiritually dark region are nil, but if one did invest \$172,000, it would be unlikely that a self-sustaining congregation would exist five years from now. But my church (which is representative of thousands of established churches) does its ministry on less than \$60,000/year and could start untold ministries if it only had access to the church-planting gold-mine.

Here's how it works: spending decisions made by local churches are far more cost-effective than spending decisions made by denominational entities, church planting networks, and inexperienced church planters.

The Failure of Church Planting

With billions of dollars spent, denominations and church planting agencies have little to show for the church planting initiatives of the past 25 years. There is anecdotal evidence that is used to show the success of church planting, but the overall record simply will not support the claim. Gathering the statistical evidence to prove my point would be next-to-impossible because the church planting lobby is so strong that real data is not

made available. Ask any denominational church planting board or non-denominational planting network for information, and you'll get nothing but a slick funding brochure. This brochure will tell you, for example, how many churches were started last year. Call the agency and ask for a list of those churches, and you will not be able to get it. The number of church plants is often very specific (972, for instance) but there is no list of 972 names, towns, or locations. To give such a list would enable one to do the simple google searches that show dismal failure.

Need another example? Find a church-planting initiative from the past 25 years and do the research. You'll find lots of articles about the *launch* of a program, and no articles about the *success* of a program.

For example, look at the Strategic Cities Initiative of the SBC. I've searched and searched and searched for the *success* articles (or any follow-up articles at all) on this particular program. The closest I can find is one that mentions that the Strategic Cities Initiative had started 174 churches in six cities over a five-year period.¹ The cost of those 174 churches was staggering. And, not knowing which churches these are, it is impossible to know how many of these churches exist today. My best hunch is that less than 25 of these churches exist today.

In the end, while I cannot prove it, I think we've been sold a bill of goods on the value of denominational or network based church planting. But I'm not against church planting, as I'll show next, I'm just against the denominational funding board or network

sending organizations. If they were in business, they would go out of business. They are closer to government bureaucracies than successful church-planting organizations. (By the way, I hope I'm wrong. If a denominational or network agency can show me verifiable proof of church planting success, I'll write an article about it.)

A further disclaimer, I was involved as the pastor of a funding church for a church in New York. This church plant was part of the New Hope New York funding, which was part of the Strategic Cities Initiative I mentioned above. Our church contributed over \$250,000 and the North American Mission Board contributed an additional \$250,000. There were also other churches that also put hundreds of thousands into this work over the past 10 years. That church is doing well today and I'm glad I was involved.

But, on the other hand, if every church that runs 200 people, 10 years after plant, and costs in the neighborhood of \$750,000 in cash (and over \$3 million in the value of a donated church building), then church planting cannot survive. The simple fact is that the church plant that I was involved in was a rare case of exceptional funding and is not an example of what can be done on a sustainable basis.

The Best Method of Church Planting

When I was a child, my family was involved in a church plant in Albuquerque, NM. In those days we talked about "mother churches" and "mission churches." My dad went to be the pastor what was called the "Monterrey Baptist Mission" in 1974. The "mission" had



a core group of lay leaders who came out of the Highland Baptist Church in Albuquerque. These lay leaders were having church before they ever had a pastor. They first met in a mobile home park community center, then later met on Sunday afternoons in a neighborhood church of another denomination. A few years earlier, the local Baptist association had purchased some land in a growing area of town and held the land, waiting for a future church. The little group of laymen were having weekly

services, midweek prayer, and had organized a leadership base and searched for a pastor, whom they would call to be the “Mission Pastor.” The congregation was not called a church until it was self-sustaining and fully constituted. At that point, the sign was changed from Monterrey Baptist Mission to Monterrey Baptist Church. I still remember the excitement of those days, even though I was only an elementary student.

The Monterrey Baptist Church is now 43 years old and is a healthy,

Bible teaching church in Albuquerque. The Highland Baptist Church is also still ministering in its neighborhood and serving the Lord.

This experience is the way churches were started before the 1980s. In short, church planting may have been encouraged by the denomination and even blessed by associations that gathered together to purchase property that would one day have a church, but—make no mistake—*churches were planted by churches.*

Churches starting churches is the best method of church planting.

Today, church planters start churches. The planter receives the “vision,” calls himself to plant, goes to a funding organization and passes all the tests, then finds other churches to “catch the vision” (i.e., give some money). Then he moves himself, his family, his buddy who plays a guitar, his seminary friend who is awesome, and his three-years of funding, and off they go to the rich-white-fast-growing neighborhood to be obedient to God. Three years later, they are out of money, short on people, and worn out. They move back to their hometown, join a church plant of somebody who had more success and work as the golf pro at the local country club.

I am convinced that the biggest problem with church planting movements today is that church planters are starting churches rather than churches starting churches.

But What If There Is No Church to Start a Church?

This is most likely a false dilemma. Almost every community in America has some kind of evangelical church within a 50-mile radius. Furthermore, there are thousands of churches far away that would gladly be a “mother church” given the opportunity to have direct involvement in their “child’s” life.

In fact, the “old churches won’t start churches” is part of the anti-establishment spirit of the church planting movement. Many church planters are so anti-establishment that they have said for years, “I would *never* be the pastor of an

established church.” When they say this, you can also know they would say, “I would never *attend* an established church.” But you can also know that they would *love* to have the *money* of an established church...provided that money doesn’t come with any strings.

Church Planting Needs to Be About Church DNA

One of the biggest problems with denominational or network based church planting is that it fails to reproduce the DNA of the parent church. Just a few years ago, I checked the list of one church planting map and found two discoveries.²

First, many of the church plants were not part of the denominational funding mechanism, though they were on the map (and presumably on the list of churches “we” started).

Second, and more disturbing, I found that a website of the new churches quickly proved that 1) these churches didn’t want to be associated with the denomination that claimed to start them, based on a total absence of any network connection on the website, and 2) the statements of faith and the stated or apparent values were not in agreement with the “run of the mill” churches of the denomination. That is, our DNA was not being reproduced. We were giving away the store.

When a church plants a church, the transfer of DNA is almost assured (provided the planting church ignores church planting manuals from the denomination and other networks).

Conclusion

I think there is a need for church planting in the United States, Canada, and Europe. My region needs new churches, and yours probably does too. But I’m convinced that if we think we are going to reach our nation by funding denominational agencies or church planting networks, then we have simply “drank the kool-aid.” What we need to do is defund the planting organizations and foster an environment in which churches want to plant churches.

Denominations can help by using resources to purchase or otherwise secure land (or just buy up dead liberal churches), then making the land, houses, and buildings available to established churches that will plant other churches without further denominational support. **GFH**



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1. <http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2002/09/sla1>

2. <https://www.namb.net/send-cities/denver/map>

I stared at that sign for awhile. I simply did not know what it meant. In a room full of men without clothes and who showered together, how could somebody be *disrespectful*? In 40 years of using such facilities I never knew it was a potential problem and I had never seen a sign like that.

Searching for an Interpretation

Reading those words was like travelling on a highway and seeing a sign that I did not understand. I was changing clothes and there was another guy next to me doing the same. I thought he might be able to assist me, so I asked him what the sign meant. He looked at it for awhile and then said, "I have no idea what that sign means."

I asked a couple more people and the only possible interpretation I got was that some men might be uneasy in such a place because you had to undress and take showers in front of other men and we needed to be sensitive to such things. That was very unhelpful because if a man had issues with changing in front of, and showering in front of, other men, there would be no solution in a men's dressing room at a gym.

A few days later I brought up the sign to some other friends. They pointed out that I had completely misunderstood it because I needed to look at it from a different perspective. In today's world, a woman can claim to be a man and use a men's dressing room. This is true even in the military. The point of the sign was that if a *woman* was using the dressing room the men in the room should be discreet when changing in front of her or showering with her.

I had to admit that I had not thought about it from that angle. However, this did not make sense to me either. I thought the whole point of women claiming to be men and using male facilities was because they were comfortable in such an environment. Why would the men in the facility need to change their routine if such women were comfortable changing clothes in front of and showering with men?

Finally, I asked a friend of mine what the sign meant. He was a recently retired Army chaplain from the military installation on which I saw the sign. He said the issue was indeed women using the dressing room and showering with men. But the problem was not that the men needed to be careful in changing in front of her, but they should not say anything to her, or do anything, to make her feel unwelcomed. The men in the room should respect her right to be there in every way. The men should not act like *they* are uncomfortable with her presence. The situation should be seen as completely normal.

I have to admit, that as a middle-aged Christian male, this all sounded pretty strange to me. But I also realized that my friend was in a much better position to properly understand the sign and was probably


right. As strange as it was, his explanation at least made sense of the sign.

Through this process, I felt a little affinity with Paul. Athens was known as a center of enlightenment and wisdom. They took pride in the fact that they were constantly searching for truth (Acts 17:21). It was a city full of philosophers (17:18). But Paul saw it as a city full of ignorance. The darkness around him disturbed his soul. The altar to an unknown god shouted out this fact.

We live in a day when the sign in the gym is seen by many as a statement of enlightenment. In reality, it's nuts. Even though I may never find myself in a situation where the sign has any relevance whatsoever, I see myself as driving down a highway and seeing a sign that makes absolutely no sense. The world looks at it and understands it. But from the front seat of my car, I get the feeling I am driving down a highway called crazy.

Managing the Trip Remains the Same

Even if I can't understand some of the things I see on my journey, in one very real sense the journey remains the same. Once again, Paul is a great example. In the book of Acts, Paul preached eternal life through faith in Christ (Acts 13:46-48). In the midst of the craziness around him in Athens, he told the people around him about Jesus Christ and how He had conquered death through rising from the dead (Acts 17:18). We don't have all of his sermon, but the point is clear. Because Christ conquered death, He can give eternal life to all who believe in Him.

We are all riding down the highway called crazy. Those we meet on the way need to hear the same message Paul gave in Athens. Even when things around us make no sense, but seem perfectly sane to those around us, we need to tell them the same thing Paul said to the folks in Athens. 



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GET OUT OF YOUR BUBBLE

By Bud Brown

It took me four years to meet my neighbors. Our home sits in a middle-class, working neighborhood surrounded by young families, retirees, and a few career singles. Like those around us, my wife and I were content to drive off in the morning, return in the evening,

and retreat to the enclave. Weekends were sucked dry by a thousand and one different chores, errands, and activities.

Rather than living as intentional missionaries to our neighborhood, we lived in a bubble.

God popped it.

It was unexpected but I'm sure He got a laugh out of it at my expense.

PRAYING FOR EVANGELISM OPPORTUNITIES

I had been assisting a pastor to develop strategies to move an unwilling congregation into the "willing to change" category. The church had been in a long, slow death spiral for more than fifteen years. Things would have to change

if it was to survive. Part of the strategy we devised was to lead the church through a broad, sustained prayer initiative. The plan was to expose the congregation to God's life-giving power by having everyone pray the evangelistic prayers in the Bible. After all, who is going to object to a church-wide prayer movement?

Colossians 4:2-4 was a key text in the strategy.

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

Paul's prayer request is a bit of a surprise. Examples of him finding or creating open doors litter the pages of the NT. Alone in Athens, he went where people gathered to talk (Acts 17). In many cities he went to the synagogues to meet people made ready for the gospel by their exposure to the OT. When the synagogues were closed to him he still found people who had some spiritual interest (e.g., Acts 16:13).

The surprise is even this apostle, gospel activist, and pioneer of relentless innovative personal outreach felt the need to pray for evangelism opportunities. So great was the need that he sought the help of others who would pray with him.

IMITATING PAUL

In the midst of working with my client to develop this prayer strategy I had an arresting thought. "If Paul needed to pray for open doors, and if Jacob's church needs to pray for the same, *maybe I need to pray this for myself.*"

So I began praying for my neighbors. I prayed for the families that lived on either side of us. I prayed for the people who lived in the three houses across the street. Although I was not as faithful and diligent as I should have been, I prayed for all of them. I also asked the friends I met with in weekly small group meetings to join me in these prayers.

Then the strangest encounters started happening.

A neighbor who lives across the alley behind us (someone I hadn't even been praying for!) came to the back gate. He was curious about the major landscaping project then underway. A large crew had been cutting down trees, excavating,

building terraces, planting, making lots of noise and throwing dust in the air. I opened the back gate, introduced myself, and invited Steve to inspect the work.

Two months later one of the neighbors from across the street came over to ask about a new car in our driveway. Mike was shopping for a new vehicle for his wife, a local realtor.

In December I met John, who lives immediately to the west of us. I was hanging Christmas lights on the house when he came out to do the same. I walked over, introduced myself, and we chatted for a bit. Since then I've met his wife Amy and their three girls; I made it a point to buy lots of Girl Scout cookies from them!

Then in January I met Tyler; he and his family had recently moved in on the other side of us. We talked for a while, and I asked if they would like to join us soon for an evening meal. Two weeks later my wife met Tyler and extended the dinner invitation.

WITHOUT CEASING

My wife and I have continued to pray for open doors. I began finding them open almost everywhere I went.

Cashiers at the local Albertson's, servers at our favorite restaurants, people met at random, and even other business owners inviting me to meet for coffee (no doubt to pitch their services).

A workman we hired to do some repair work on the house responded warmly to attend church and join us for a Sunday afternoon dinner.

Praying for opportunities wrought another change in me.

It occurred to me—perhaps an idea implanted by the Holy Spirit—to rearrange my schedule to join a few community groups. Who knows, maybe I'd find additional open doors?

I found and joined a reading club that discusses literary novels. I was surprised that retired university professors, English teachers, and retired professionals are keenly interested in knowing more about "the human condition," the Apocalypse, love, family relationships, and meaning in life.

WHITE FIELDS

What began as a strategy to help a pastor crack the code for a reluctant congregation, ended up not only transforming a congregation (they have experienced significant growth in the last 18 months), it changed my participation in God's mission.

Doors are opening all around.

People are letting my wife and I into their lives.

We are delighted with the opportunities to develop redemptive relationships with people who need to hear and believe the gospel.

When Jesus declared "the fields are [already] white unto harvest," He meant it (John 4:35). If we ask Him, he'll show us. ■



Bud Brown is President and Co-Founder at Turnaround Pastors.

Q&A

By Staff

Judged According to Works?

Q In Rom 2:6-10, Paul tells us that God will “render to each one according to his deeds” and we will be sent to “eternal life” or “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish” based upon those deeds. How, then, can you teach that salvation is by faith apart from works?

A Romans 2:6-10 is in the midst of Paul’s discussion that nobody is justified by their works. The section goes from 1:18–3:20. You are right to note that, in Romans 2, Paul is saying that if anybody does good they will inherit life. This is true for both Jews and Gentiles. The problem is that *nobody does good* (Paul’s conclusion of the whole section is 3:9-20—“there is none good”). Therefore, justification before God is only through faith (3:21-28).

The bottom line is that Romans 2 is saying that, *hypothetically*, if somebody could keep the Law he would be justified before God, *but nobody does it*. That is why our only hope is to be justified by faith, apart from works.

~Ken

Did They Know?

Q Paul says that if Jesus was not resurrected then we would be believing in vain (1 Corinthians 15). Does that mean, if Nicodemus and Martha were believers, they had to know that Jesus was going to die and be resurrected?

A The passage in 1 Corinthians 15 is simply saying that if Jesus did not rise from the dead then the Christian faith would be a lie, because it is based on the claim that He did rise from the dead.

But does that mean Nicodemus and Martha know (or had to know) that fact in order to be born again? No. They did not know that Jesus was going to have



to die and be resurrected. In fact, they had no idea of that whatsoever. They understood Him to be the Christ—the promised Messiah—who would bring in the Kingdom of God. And Martha knew that all who believed in Jesus would be raised from the dead and never die (John 11:25-27).

~Ken

Repentance for Forgiveness?

Q How can *repent* mean *turn from sin* in Acts 2:38 when the result is forgiveness of sins—the same result when Cornelius believed in 10:43?

A The forgiveness of sins allows *fellowship* with God. It happens at the moment of faith, but is a *benefit* of salvation. All Free Grace people agree that turning from one’s sin is not necessary to have eternal life.

In the case of Acts 2:38, the vast majority of FG folks are Dispensationalists and see this verse as directed towards the Jewish people of the first century. In order for them to have fellowship with God *after* coming to faith (2:37), they needed to turn from the sin of crucifying Jesus by publicly confessing Him in the act of baptism.

That is not a requirement for anybody today. And it wasn’t a requirement for the Gentile Cornelius.

The repentance and baptism of 2:38 are what God required of first century Jews if they wanted to avoid the discipline that was coming upon the nation in AD 70.

~Ken 

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