

GRACE FOCUS

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AN EASY WAY TO SHARE YOUR FAITH

PLUS "Remember Me When" / The View from Mahanaim / Salvation and the Sorcerer /
Repent and Be Baptized / How to Witness to Postmoderns / My Mayberry / **AND MORE**

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FROM THE EDITOR

Here in North Texas July and August are hot, hot, hot. I'm not talking 90 degrees in the shade. I'm talking 100, 105, and even 110 degrees in the shade.

The Free Grace Movement is hot now too. We've been getting some attention. Last year Dr. Wayne Grudem wrote a book against our position. This year Dr. Matthew Bates wrote a book that is a broadside against our view. His book is entitled, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*. I debated him last month on Moody Radio. The book and debate help promote the Free Grace message.

In this issue you will find articles on a wide variety of important Free Grace issues.

Pastor Bryan Threlkeld writes on Jesus' use of Ps 22:1 in His cry from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"

Bill Fiess and Pam Esteven walk through the seven letters in Revelation 2-3 showing how we become victors for Christ.

Ken Yates compares us living on the new earth with Andy and Opie living in Mayberry.

What did the thief on the cross mean when he asked the Lord Jesus to remember him when He comes in His kingdom? I discuss that question.

Shawn presents an easy way to share your faith which he used recently on an airplane flight.

The question of Simon the Sorcerer is discussed by Zane Hodges as he considers Acts 8:9-24.

Marcia Hornok shows that God even uses the evil intentions of others to make us more like Christ.

How do you share with faith with Postmoderns? Steve Dehner gives some suggestions.



Attention, Please!

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

A major car accident and severely broken leg caused Pastor Allen Rea a lot of pain. But God used that pain to cause Christ to shine through him.

Acts 2:38 has long been used by those who argue that repentance and baptism are conditions of everlasting life. Seven decades ago Dr. H. A. Ironside argued convincingly that the issue is the national deliverance of Israel, not individual new birth, in Acts 2:38.

Check out my discussion of saints and sinners. Can a person be both?

And check out the Q & A discussion on the unpardonable sin, Hebrews 6, and Hebrews 10.

**“REMEMBER
ME WHEN”**



123RF

BY BOB WILKIN

It has long been thought that when the thief on the cross said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42) that he was asking for everlasting life. But does that really make sense?

The expression “remember me when” is only found once in the NT, that is, the words of the thief on the cross. (1 Cor 11:2 is similar, but it is not a request: “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.”)

However, that same expression is found several times in the OT with the same idea of a request for a future remembrance of someone for something which he has done. Here are the occurrences:

“Remember me when it is well with you...make mention of me to Pharaoh” (Gen 40:14).

“Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people” (Neh 5:19; see also Neh 13:14, 22, 31).

What Joseph requested of the chief butler and Nehemiah requested of God give us a better idea of what the thief on the cross was asking.

“Remember me” expresses a request for reward based on work done. Joseph interpreted correctly the dream of the chief butler. For that good work he did for him, the chief butler should have immediately remembered him, that is, rewarded him by talking with the Pharaoh about Joseph.

Nehemiah left his exalted position in Babylon and risked his life to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. He was asking God to remember the good work which he had done for the people of Israel and to reward him with blessings in this life. While Nehemiah does not specifically say “Remember me *when*,” it is clear that, at the least, he is thinking of the coming times when the enemies of Israel will seek to hurt or even kill him. He wants God to reward him then. But it is also likely that he, too, has the coming kingdom in mind. While Nehemiah is not mentioned in Hebrews 11 as one who was looking forward to eternal reward, he surely could have been.

Likewise, the thief on the cross did a good work for which he wished to be rewarded. He alone confessed Jesus while He was on the cross when he rebuked the other thief who was mocking Jesus (Luke 23:40-41). Not even the disciples confessed Jesus at the cross!

Indeed, even his request was a confession of Christ, for in the request he said, “Lord, remember me *when You come into Your kingdom*.” He was confessing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel who would soon return to set up His kingdom. Indeed, he was even confessing that Jesus would rise from the dead, for a dead man could not return to set up a kingdom. In light of the promise in Matt 10:32-33, reward is appropriate in this case.

Clearly the thief already believed in Jesus and already knew he would be with Him in the kingdom. But like Joseph and Nehemiah, he wished for God to reward him in light of the work which he had done.

Let’s apply this. It is appropriate for you and me to pray and say something like these three men did. “Lord, remember me when You return to judge the Church according to all that I have done in your name.” Or we could be more specific. Say you’ve undergone major suffering for your testimony for Christ: “Lord, remember me when You return to Your kingdom in light of the suffering I have experienced for confessing you.”

It is not carnal to ask, “Remember me.” It is actually a spiritual request. Only as we live by faith can we pray such a prayer. When we ask Him to remember us, we are praying in light of His soon return, which is always a good thing. ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX with his wife of 41 years, Sharon. His latest book is Tough Texts: Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? (co-authored with Zane Hodges).

The View from Mahanaim

By Marcia Hornok

Wherever the Patriarchs had a significant encounter with God, they gave that place a name. Some of the names are familiar, such as Jacob's naming of Bethel (= house of God) after his dream of a ladder (Gen 28:10-22), or his naming of Peniel (= face of God) after his wrestling match (Gen 32:24-13).

But others are not so familiar. We tend to gloss over another God-encounter in Gen 32:1-2: "So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, 'This is God's camp.' And he called the name of that place *Mahanaim*."

Mahanaim means *two camps*.

We forget Mahanaim. Yet this experience probably determined the literary structure of the last 14 chapters of Genesis. What could Mahanaim have meant for Jacob? For Joseph? For us?

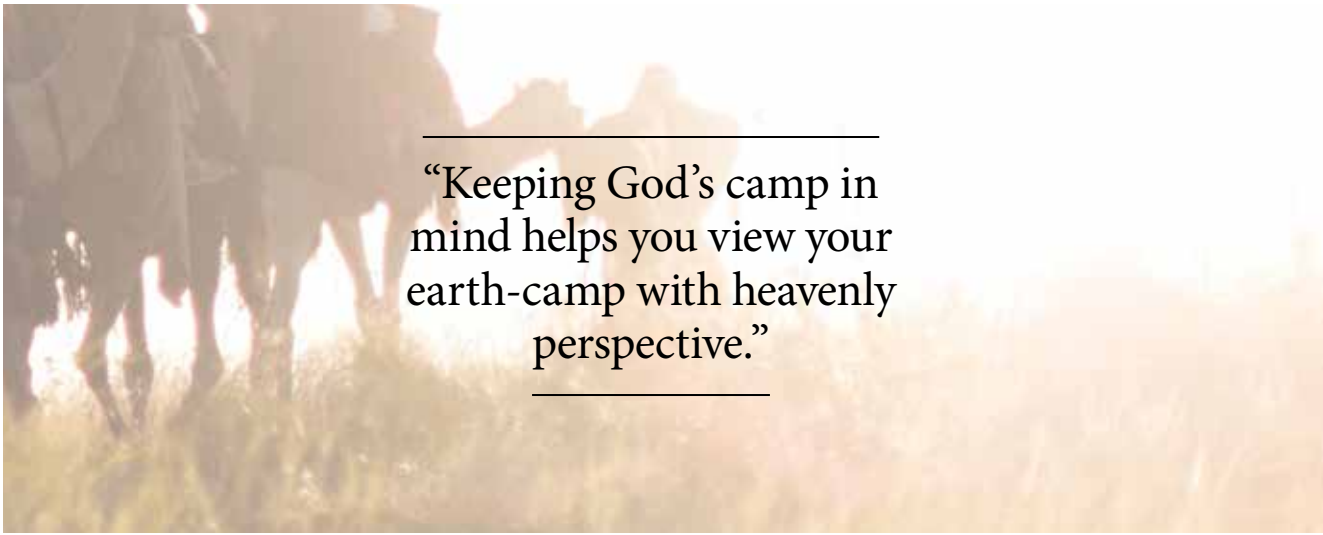
TWO CONFLICTS

This point in Jacob's life occurred between conflicts. He had settled the one with Uncle Laban (Genesis 31), but would soon meet Brother Esau and the 400 men coming with him (Gen 32:6). So when God gave Jacob the experience of Mahanaim, he learned *the two-camp perspective*.

His family's camp was not alone. God's camp surrounded his. Jacob had God's presence, protection, and promises for whatever the future held. Surprisingly, the meeting with Esau resulted in reconciliation, not confrontation.







“Keeping God’s camp in mind helps you view your earth-camp with heavenly perspective.”

LITERARY PARALLELISM

Did Joseph have the two-camp viewpoint? Interestingly, his life story is told from Genesis 37-50 as a series of twos.

Chapter 37 begins with two occasions of trouble between Joseph and his brothers (the bad report to Jacob, and Jacob’s favoritism which caused the brothers’ hatred).

Joseph had two dreams.

Jacob gave two instructions to Joseph when sending him to his brothers.

Joseph went two different places to find them (Shechem and Dothan).

And the brothers devised two plots to get rid of him—death or deportation.

The next two chapters (38-39) present two accounts of sexual temptation—Judah gave in but Joseph did not.¹ Mrs. Potiphar even falsely accused Joseph twice.

In prison, Joseph interpreted two dreams of prisoners and, after two more years, he interpreted Pharaoh’s two dreams (chapters 40-41).

Need I mention how many sons Joseph had?

In chapters 42-44 the brothers came to Egypt to buy food two times, and Joseph tested them by returning their money both times.

In the next two chapters, the brothers learned of Joseph’s identity and had a reunion with him. Later, Jacob also learned Joseph was alive and had a joyful reunion with him too.

Chapter 47 tells about Joseph providing for his family’s welfare and also for the nation’s welfare during

the famine. Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons, and then he blessed all his sons (Genesis 48-49).

Finally we read of Jacob’s death after twice giving burial instructions (Gen 47:30-31 and 49:29-33), and Joseph’s death after giving the same instructions.²

Why might God have used dualism as the distinctive literary structure for Joseph’s life? Could this unique pattern showcase the importance of Mahanaim?

The answer may lie with the city of Dothan, meaning “two wells.”

ELISHA’S TWO CAMPS

Dothan appears only twice in Scripture—with Joseph in Gen 37:17 and with Elisha over one thousand years later in 2 Kgs 6:13-17.

Elisha had witnessed “God’s Camp” as the supernatural chariots and horsemen of fire taking Elijah to heaven (2 Kgs 2:11-12). So when a strong enemy force surrounded Elisha’s hometown of Dothan to capture him, he told his servant, “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” God opened their spiritual eyes and they saw God’s army camping around the city of Dothan to protect them.

Could it be coincidence that Dothan was where Joseph’s brothers had put him in a pit, plotted to kill him, and sold him into slavery, exiling him to a foreign country? His adversities had started in Dothan. Perhaps God recorded Joseph’s life dualistically to help us remember something important about our Dothan-like struggles: Mahanaim, the reality of two camps.

You may only be able to feel the pit, or see prison walls, or dread the enemy at your door, but God has the satellite view of your location and destination. Reversals, road blocks, and detours all advance your spiritual journey when accepted as God's assignments. Keeping God's camp in mind helps you view your earth-camp with heavenly perspective.

JOSEPH'S PERSPECTIVE

Joseph was aware of this and told his brothers, "It was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen 45:8).

Joseph looked beyond his brothers' mistreatment to remember³ a powerful truth. Four times in Genesis 39 the text states, "The Lord was with him," while describing Joseph as a slave and a prisoner.

After thirteen years of adversity, he stood before Pharaoh (who considered himself a god) and referred to "the God" five times. Then this ex-con boldly offered Pharaoh advice! Soon Joseph faced a new set of problems—ego-popping power and the stress of managing a nation's economy during famine.

Nine years into his rule, Joseph suddenly confronted his past. His ten brothers bowed to him. Joseph may have thought God was giving him the perfect opportunity for justice, and what we refer to as closure. His life verse must have been Gen 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (NIV).

From ages 17 to 30, Joseph had lived in the camp of "You intended to harm me." He survived and even thrived because he stayed aware of the other camp: "God intended it for good."

Derek Kidner states, "This biblical realism [is] to see clearly the two aspects of every event—on the one hand human mishandling...on the other the perfect will of God—and to fix attention on the latter as alone being of any consequence."⁴

VICTIMIZATION AS PREPARATION

In his human camp, Joseph was a victim of his brothers' wickedness, Mrs. Potiphar's lust, and the butler's memory lapse.

But with Mahanaim in mind, his life's drama was God's story, and Joseph played his part with integrity.

In the pit he gained humility.

As Potiphar's slave he learned to run a large household, handle money, and resist sexual temptation.

Prison taught him to manage difficult people. And patience came during the butler's two years of forgetfulness.


This God-designed training program landed him in the palace, where he saved the world during famine (Gen 41:57) and preserved the family of Israel.

Likewise, God's training regimen for you involves a tale of two camps.

God uses even the evil intentions of others to develop you into the image of Christ and prepare you for service, when you submit and let perseverance finish its work.

Like Jacob, Joseph, and Elisha, you live in Mahanaim.

The co-existing physical and spiritual realms work together to accomplish divine purposes, whether your circumstances involve a pit, a prison, or a palace.⁵

Mahanaim! 



Marcia Hornok is the managing editor of CHERA Fellowship, a quarterly print magazine for people who have been widowed. Her articles have appeared in 70 different markets, in a dozen devotional books, and in the Journal of Dispensational Theology. She is the wife of a retired minister and mother of six.

1. Chapter 38 is more than an interlude. Its juxtaposition with chapter 39 invites several comparisons and contrasts between the players. For example, Tamar showed evidence, giving Judah a choice—he could lie and have her killed, or confess, which he did. On the other hand, Mrs. Potiphar had false evidence and lied, but Joseph had no choice.

2. Amplified from David A. Dorsey's synopsis in *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), p. 59.

3. The first person in Genesis of whom it was said that God was with him was Ishmael (21:20). Joseph's caravan ride to Egypt with his distant cousins the Ishmaelites makes one wonder if they discussed details of what we know as Genesis 21. If so, Joseph could identify with Ishmael, who was loved by his father but because of sibling conflict was cast out of his home around the age of 17; yet God was with him.

4. Kidner, Derek, *Genesis: Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), p. 207.

5. This thought is reinforced in 2 Cor 5:7, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Compare 2 Cor 4:17.



**An Easy
Way to
Share
Your Faith**



BY SHAWN LAZAR

My good friend, Dr. Steve Lewis, President of Rocky Mountain Seminary, recently told me of an easy way to evangelize and I tried it out on a plane ride back from Portland.

Here's how it works.

First, you have to meet someone who professes to believe in Jesus, or who goes to Church, or has some sort of connection to Christianity. If they're born-again, you'll be teaching them how to do evangelism. If they're not, they might be by the end of your conversation!

Either way, you both benefit.

The man sitting next to me on the plane introduced himself and mentioned he was a Christian because he saw I was reading a Christian book.

That's your opening.

At that point you ask him, "Would you like to know an easy way to share your faith with others?"

They'll probably say, "Sure."

You then ask, "Are you familiar with John 3:16?"

"I think so," they'll probably say.

So you take out your Bible—or a copy of the Gospel of John—turn to John 3:16 (or another favorite evangelistic verse, such as John 3:36, 5:24, or 6:47) and start going through it with them.

"If you're going to evangelize someone, you might do what Jesus does here, and tell them about God's love for them."

"Sure!"

"And then tell them about who Jesus is, and why He was sent. You know, that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sin debt."

"That's right."

"And now for this next part, it can get tricky."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yes, because you really need to make sure they get this. What's the one condition Jesus mentions here to be saved? What's the one thing they must do? And, by the way, when you ask most people that, they're going to give all kinds of answers—you have to do good works, give to the poor, get baptized, etc. So be prepared for that, and point them to what Jesus says here. So what is Jesus' one condition, according to John 3:16?"

Hopefully they'll answer, "It says, 'Whoever believes in Him.'"



“Right, so is the condition *works*?”

“No.”

“Is it *baptism*?”

“No. It’s *believing*.”

“Right! Believing is the only condition. Make sure they understand that. Now what do they *get* if they believe? This is really important too, because people believe in Jesus for all kinds of things, without understanding the ‘big picture’ of what He offers. So ask them what believers get according to John 3:16. If they hesitate, point to the words ‘everlasting life’ to help them out.”

“Oh. They get everlasting life.”

“Right. And then you tell them what that is—eternal salvation, life with God forever, life that can’t be lost, etc. Make sure they understand they’re not just believing in Jesus for a good job, or a pay raise, or a physical healing, or something temporary. They are believing in Him for everlasting life. That’s what He offers. Life forever.”

“Oh yeah, yeah,” they’ll say.

“And now, this is really important. Make sure the person you are witnessing to understands *when* they get everlasting life.”

“When?”

“Yes. Because most people just don’t know. They think they might get it after they die, or sometime in the future. But when does Jesus say a believer gets everlasting life?”

“Umm...I don’t know.”

“Well, what does Jesus say right here? Does it say they’ll get everlasting life in the future? Or does He say believers ‘have’ it.”

“Oh. He says they ‘have’ it.”

“And what does that mean? If they have it, when do they get it?”

“...Umm...When they believe?”

“Exactly! In other words, it’s a *present possession*.

The moment you believe in Jesus for everlasting life, you have it. You’re born again forever. Isn’t that great? So many people go to church all their lives, and they miss those simple things, right?”

“Right.”

“So you’ve got at least three things there you need to make clear to anyone you are witnessing to. The *condition*: believe in Jesus. The *consequence*: everlasting life that cannot be lost. And the *when*: believers have everlasting life as a present possession. And that’s all from one simple verse. Easy, right? And then you do one more thing.”


“What?”

“You ask them a question to make sure the message has sunk in. You ask, ‘If Jesus promises that believers have everlasting life as a present possession, and you believe that, then what do you have?’”

“I have everlasting life!”

“Exactly. Now, isn’t that an easy way to evangelize someone?”

“Wow,” the guy on the airplane exclaimed. “I’ve never heard it explained like that. Thanks!”

It’s simple. It’s non-confrontational. It’s inductive. Give this simple way of sharing your faith a try and watch your evangelism opportunities take off! 



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

*This article first appeared as a blog at our website. Sign up to receive our daily blogs at faithalone.org.



The National Conference

By Staff

The theme this year was eschatology, the last days. We had lots of great messages. It was truly an eye-opening conference.

Attendance was about the same as last year. The conferees were very enthusiastic.


Next year's dates are April 23-26. The theme will be "Evangelism and Discipleship." However, those dates and the location may change as we are looking for a new venue. The costs of holding the conference at the Riley Center will be more than double next year.

Here are some of the comments from the conferees: "Spot on!" "Full of hope + GRACE!" "Wonderful!" "Great." "Thoroughly enjoyed it." "Excellent." "Great topic." "Best ever!" "Outstanding!!!" "AWESOME!" "Wonderful!" "Timely, pertinent, focused." "An amazing time of teaching and fellowship." "Wonderful time of strengthening and challenge." "I learned more than I expected." "One of the best." "Very useful and enjoyable." "Highlight of the year for us!" "As a first timer,

it was excellent." "I learned more about the end times in these few days than I have in the last 10+ years."

"I feel more motivated than ever to live according to God's Word and to know Him more." "Great fellowship." "Terrific conference + Unbelievable resources + Lots of Fellowship + Irresistible arguments for grace + Practical Application." "I felt a renewed joy in my salvation."

If you plan on coming next year, we recommend getting a room wherever it is held. The fellowship during conference hours is outstanding, but the fellowship outside of conference hours is deeper. People eat out together, or sit in the lobby and talk until the wee hours, and renew friendships year after year.

We'll have info on where the next conference will be held by the end of summer. 

For updates on conferences go to faithalone.org/events/

“But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great...”

BY ZANE C. HODGES

SORCERY IN SAMARIA

8:9-11. But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city. Samaria and Jerusalem are to be contrasted in that, despite her rebellion and unbelief, Jerusalem was not afflicted with superstitious adherence to sorcery (cf. John 4:22). In ignorant religion, superstition and magic tend to prevail. But where the truth is *known*, even if it is not *obeyed*, it tends to drive these things back into the shadows.

Hence, these verses show the density of the spiritual darkness in Samaria. The delusion knew no bounds of class or status (**from the least to the greatest**), and it had proved itself tenacious and enduring (**for a long time**).

8:12-13. Here is seen most strikingly the liberating power of the gospel. **The kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ** are mightier than the kingdom of darkness or any earthly name (like Simon's).

When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning *the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*, **both men and women were baptized**. Baptism was a decisive step for these Samaritans in renouncing their former superstitions and linking themselves with this name (cf. v 16).

Moreover, not only were the deceived liberated (v 12), but so was the deceiver himself (**Simon himself believed**). His experience with the truth was no different from the others, for he too, believed and **was baptized**. For there are no special conditions for even the worst of sinners, Satanic tools and blasphemers though—like Simon—they may be.

8:14-17. These verses complete the picture, bringing into sharpest contrast the present state of the Samaritans with their former one. Whereas in Simon they imagined they found “the great power of God,” now, in the Holy Spirit, they really did find it (cf. 1:3)! And whereas they had given heed to Simon's deceits, now they possessed One to whom by giving heed they could be taught in the things of the truth (cf. 1 John 2:27). The Christian finds true deliverance from both Satanic power and delusion, by the indwelling Spirit (cf. 1 John 4:4).

The unusual method by which the Samaritans received the Spirit (**through the laying on of the apostles' hands**) prevented schism and rivalry at the very first. Samaritan religion rejected the claims of Jerusalem, but by receiving the Holy Spirit through the hands of the Jewish apostles, the Samaritan converts are now made to sense their indebtedness to it. Jews despised Samaritans, yet here they both lay hands on and pray for them.



Salvation & the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24)

Had the Spirit been given in Samaria exactly as it had in Jerusalem, this fact might have been distorted to prove the Samaritan error of down-grading the place God had put His name. The wisdom of God prevents all this.

Typologically, we might suggest that Simon pre-figures the man of sin who likewise will claim to be “someone great” (v 9; 2 Thess 2:4), supports his claims by miracles (2 Thess 2:9; Revelation 13), and will be an object of wonder and admiration to the world (v 10; Revelation 13). As the ignorant worship of Samaria (John 4:22) begat a Simon, so the ignorant perversion of Christian truth by the world will ultimately produce the man of sin.

PERISH THE THOUGHT

8:18-19. Simon was truly saved. Verse 13 does not give Simon’s words, but the words of Luke under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, “Simon himself also believed.” This report is in no way distinguishable from that of those new believers in v 12. But as so many do, Simon brings into the Christian life the erroneous outlook of his past.

He offered them money. Doubtless, in the past, money could have secured the exercise of Simon’s powers, so he naturally thought it could also secure God’s powers.

8:20-23. “Your money perish with you.” The sharpness of Peter’s rebuke at this offer was designed to bring Simon to repentance, and it did (v 24). These words may be applied to any Christian whose heart places an undue emphasis on the value of money.

Perish (eis apoleian) occurs only once more in Acts (25:16) where it clearly does not refer to *hell*, but to *ruin*. Here it merely warns of the ruin of life and soul which such an attitude could bring (cf. Luke 6:49). Peter actually wishes the destruction on *the money* (thus highlighting his attitude toward it). This was a warning to Simon as to what he was heading for.

“Your heart is not right in the sight of God.” The elevation of money in the heart makes it crooked before God (cf. *eutheia*) and shuts the soul out from “part and lot” in eternal things which count.

The verse should read: **“For I see you being for [destined to] the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.”** The heart enamored of the influence of money will ultimately taste the galling sorrows and disappointments which it can bring (cf. 1 Tim 6:9-10).


The LXX also renders *cholē* as *poison* (Acts 8:23).¹ Love of money is poison for the soul. The heart enamored of money’s influence also is easily caught in a bond of sin, entangled and enslaved by the wickedness which accompanies money-seeking.

REPENTANCE

8:24. “Pray to the Lord for me.” Simon’s quick repentance was a sign of a tender conscience. Though “simony” has become a name for a corrupt practice, and Simon has been since earliest times regarded as unregenerate and evil, yet men have thus testified to their blindness to divine grace. It is even possible that, contrary to tradition, the remainder of Simon’s life was fruitful, for if Peter prayed for him, it is likely God answered that prayer.

Three references are found in this context to prayer (vv 15, 22, 24). Simon had missed the fact that prayer lay behind the giving of the Spirit and saw only the external laying on of hands (vv 18, 19). Yet his greatest need was prayer (vv 22, 24). The heart enamored of money is blinded to prayer, while the heart controlled by prayer is blinded to money.

Men usually feel that money can obtain most of what they want or need (as Simon did here, v 20). The man of God realizes that prayer alone can obtain what is really needed and worthwhile. Simon is brought to realize the triviality of money in the things of God, and the transcendent importance to the soul of prayer.

He begins by seeking to buy; he ends by asking for prayer. 



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

1. The NKJV translates it as “gall,” a word that can refer to something which is bitter or severe.

Repent and Be Baptized (Acts 2:38)

By H. A. Ironside

...Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]... (Acts 2:37-38).

This brief portion of the book of Acts is one that required very careful and thoughtful examination. A great deal of controversy has raged around it, and very many serious misconceptions have been drawn from it, so I ask that you fix your attention very particularly upon the text as I seek to expound it.

The Apostle Peter had just preached his wonderful sermon setting forth the life, the death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had particularly emphasized the fact that the Lord Jesus came to the nation of Israel in accordance with OT prophecy as their Messiah, the One they had been looking for down through the centuries, but they failed to recognize Him when He came. They rejected Him and delivered Him over to the Gentiles to be crucified, but Peter concludes with the triumphant word. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, who ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

We need to remember that the word "Christ" means "The Anointed" and is the equivalent of the Hebrew term *Mashiach* or Messiah. Our Lord Jesus is God's anointed King. Men said, His own people said, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). But God has raised up from the dead the One whom the nation rejected and He has confirmed His Messiahship to Him in resurrection. He has declared Him to be Lord and Messiah.

Now the effect of Peter's message was tremendous. We are told "there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men." He was addressing himself not to the ribald crowd that had been in front of Pilate's



judgment hall who cried, "Crucify Him, crucify Him"; but addressing primarily the devout Jews who were awaiting the coming of the Messiah, also a number of proselytes from the nations who had the same sincere expectations. And when these honest men heard Peter's proclamation, we read, "They were pricked in their heart." This was the work of the Holy Ghost. He so carried the message home to their hearts that they were deeply stirred.

There was no attempt to deny what Peter said. On the contrary, they accepted the message. Let us be very clear about that. Having accepted the message we can be very sure of this—they were already born of God. The Apostle Peter tells us in the first chapter of his first Epistle, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever... And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you." These people had heard the gospel. They were pricked to the heart, they were deeply exercised; they believed the message, and that implies necessarily they had received divine light and were regenerated. They turned to Peter, and the rest of the apostles, and cried out in sore distress, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"


Now, I want you to notice this. Their cry was not the same as the question of the Philippian jailor of which we read in the 16th chapter of this book. These brethren did not say to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what must I do to be saved?" That was not in their mind at all; but they said, "Men and brethren" (and you will see from the very term of address used that they recognized their brotherhood with the men who had been preaching)—"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

What is involved in that question?

I think it is very easy to understand. These, as I said, were devout men. They had been waiting earnestly,

believingly, for the Messiah. Peter has just shown them the Messiah has come. What has happened? The nation has rejected God's anointed King. They have refused Him whom God sent to deliver them. When Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" they answered, "We have no king but Caesar." These men were troubled—the King for whom they had been waiting had come; He had been rejected. They expected Him to set up His kingdom; but He had gone away to heaven. God had seated Him on His own throne; but what about this nation He was to reign over? What were they to *do*? They really meant to ask, "Men and brethren, in view of the fact that our King has already come and our people did not realize it and He has been crucified, rejected, what, then, are we going to do?" Do get the point. It was not a question with them simply of their individual salvation. They were not considering that alone. It was a question as to the fate of the nation to which they belonged. What was to happen? What next? What shall we do? Is there any way the Christ who has been rejected can appear again and the people be given another opportunity? Is there any way by which the sentence can be revoked? What shall we do?

Peter said, "One thing you can do is repent." Repent! What does that mean? "Repent" means literally a change of mind—a change of mind that involves not

only looking at things differently from an intellectual standpoint, but involves complete moral reformation, complete change of attitude. And so Peter says, "Repent, change your attitude." They showed what their attitude was when Christ was presented to them and they spurned Him. Now he says, "Change your attitude." Instead of spurning Him, instead of rejecting Him—receive Him! It is true He has gone away from earth, that He is not here to establish His Kingdom, but He still lives and is exalted at God's right hand. Repent. Right about-face! Instead of going on as a part of the nation that rejected Him, change your mind, and separate from the apostate group by taking your stand for Christ. 



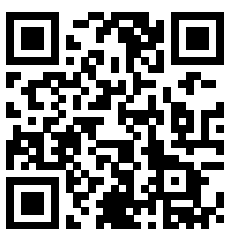
Henry Allen "Harry" Ironside was a Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, pastor, and author who pastored Moody Church in Chicago from 1929 to 1948.

* This is an excerpt from H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Pasig City, Philippines: Lifeline, 1943), 63-68.

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How to Witness to Postmoderns

By Steve Dehner

Jesus possessed a genius for powerfully communicating truth to everyone. He used the language, customs, and everyday realities of his listeners' lives in his teaching. Jesus and the apostles shaped their message in a way that would be understood by a culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse world.

In our day and age, wouldn't it be wise to follow their example?

In the last fifty years or more, the West has undergone a major historical shift, comparable to the one that took us from the medieval to the modern era.

We have entered the *postmodern era*.

We're not all of the way in, but that is only a matter of time.

So what do we mean by postmodernism, and why should we care? At its root, it is a shift away from belief in universal objective reality toward a reliance on personal subjective perception.

Recognizing that shift should change the way we witness.

A few years ago Canadian author Bryan Fraser wrote a book called *Winning a Generation Without the Law: Essentials of the Gospel for a Postmodern Culture*. Fraser says insisting on notions of absolute, natural, or divine morality in our pre-evangelism is a non-starter with people who do not accept anything as absolute.

How then do we communicate the good news to postmoderns? Here are five suggestions.



Everything Old is New Again

First, think of postmodernism as an opportunity, not as a catastrophe. Fraser points out that if we are surrounded by a religiously diverse culture that shares little if any of our worldview, we are operating in an environment very similar to one we find in the NT.

If the good news prospers in a hostile society, why do we complain about it so much? Because it makes life tougher for us! We are less at home, less popular, and forced to adjust the way in which we communicate our message in order to be understood. Eventually, we will face persecution. But we are meant to be light shining in the darkness, are we not? Our role is not to curse the darkness or light a candle, but to *be the candle* (Matt 5:14-16). When we encounter the darkness, answering not only with Biblical truth but also as servants of grace will matter most.

If we live in a society that worships the creation rather than the Creator, then we live in the same world as Paul (Rom 1:18-23).

If the world asks, “What is truth?” then we live in the same world as Jesus (John 18:38).

If the world considers everything it reads to be a matter of personal interpretation, then we live in the same world as Peter (2 Pet 1:20-21).

In other words, we are living in a society that is becoming more like the one that God chose to invade 2000 years ago, and where the good news about Jesus spread like wildfire!

Life, Not Law

Second, emphasize the free gift of life instead of sin-guilt.

Perhaps this is controversial for some of us, but it shouldn't be, given our reading of John's Gospel, and our rejection of repentance from sin as a condition for receiving eternal life.

Uncertainty and fear are still the prevailing post-modern attitudes toward death, and the victory of Jesus is the great and consoling answer (Heb 2:14-15; John 8:51; 11:25-26). Jesus is Life, has defeated death, gives life to those who believe, and is our life! (John 14:6; Acts 2:24; Rom 6:9; 2 Tim 1:10; John 5:24; Col 3:4a).

You need not convince someone they are a sinner if they are already haunted by death.



In other words, postmoderns should already be open to the promise of everlasting life.

Translate from Christianese

Third, learn the language—the cultural lingo—of postmoderns.

Remember that we Christians speak a different language, with words like grace, redemption, justification, whose meaning can differ for non-Christians. And they use different words and meanings as well.

Instead of showing *contempt* for their language, *learn* it, and then *speak* it with them. This is making an effort to step out of our bubble and enter theirs—which is nothing more than becoming “all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:19-23). Paul displayed this kind of accommodation at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), referring to their religious beliefs and monuments, and quoting from their literature.¹

If I want to know how a friend is using a word or phrase, I simply ask. This is how you avoid talking past one another.

Storytime

Fourth, tell stories—about yourself, others, and Jesus.

Stories are personal, meaningful, well remembered, and can't really be argued with.

For postmoderns, who value experience and use it as a guide to personal truth, story looms large. After



listening to their stories, and speaking their language, you will have an opportunity to tell *your* Jesus story.

Authentic Love

Fifth, love like Jesus (Eph 5:2). Postmoderns will judge how “true” you hold your Truth to be by the extent to which they can see you living it out.

If Jesus is your Truth, the greatest validation of that will not be apologetics, it will be His character shining forth from you in love. So carefully look upon Jesus and His example (John 13:15). Empathize, listen, and find common ground. James tells us to be quick to listen and slow to speak (Jas 1:19). Share yourself. Be open, generous, and available. Treat people in your life as persons, not projects. If you’ve ever been someone’s project, then you know how it feels, and wouldn’t choose to treat someone else like that.

A good test of your attitude is to answer this question honestly: Will you remain their friend if they do not respond to your witness?


What the Spirit has taught me over the last ten years is that my mission is not to dismantle a person’s worldview but to show them the Way, to be the candle, and to represent Jesus to them. If they come to believe, the Lord can adjust their worldview in due course.

So I ask, “Lord, if you were standing right here, what would you say to my friend? What do they need to hear?”

Guess what? The answer has never been a canned recitation of *The Four Spiritual Laws*.

Instead, like Philip and the Ethiopian, it’s a message for that person. It is a message of life, everlasting life that can never be lost.

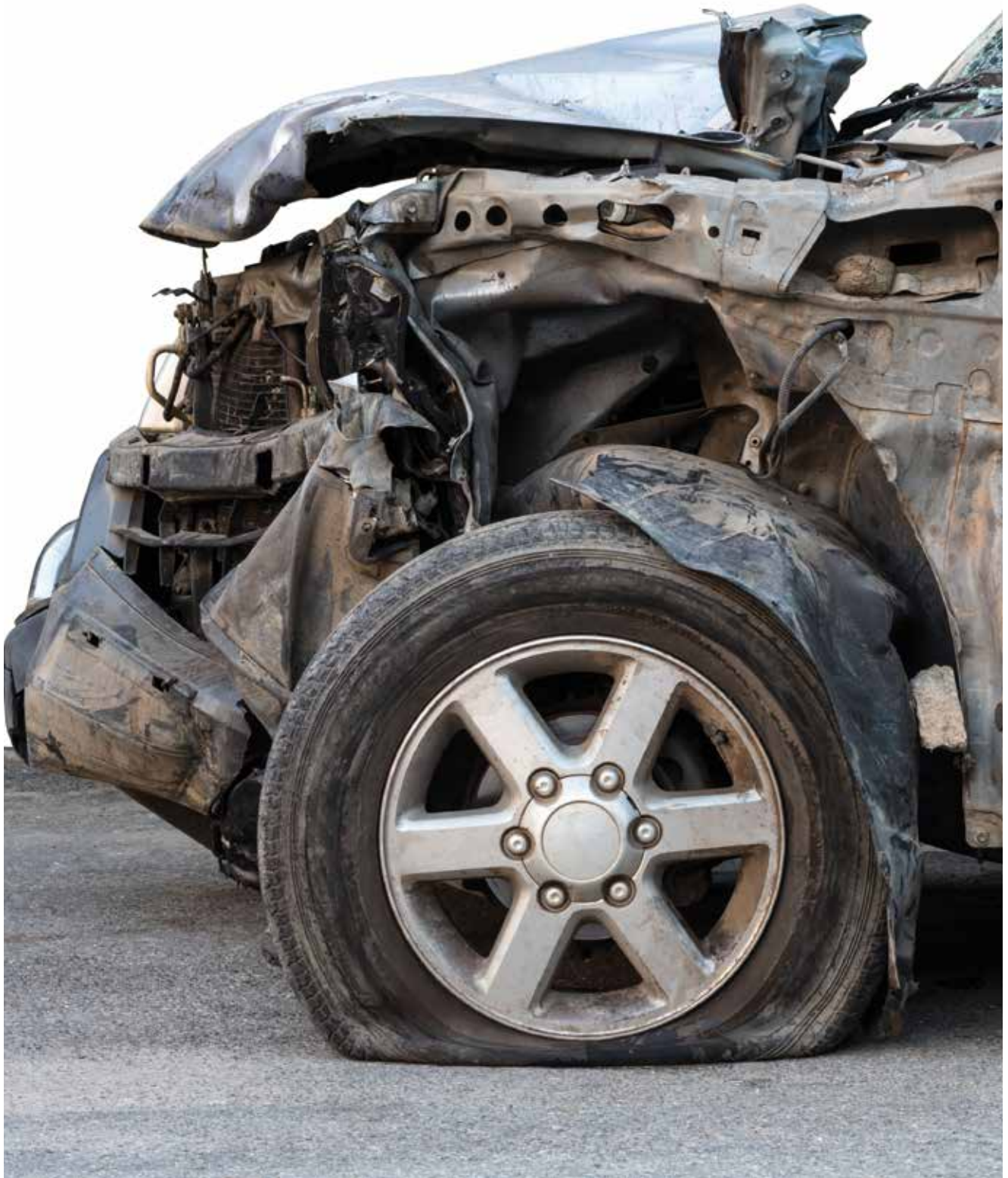
Conclusion

We are ambassadors of Jesus, bringing an appeal for peace with God, not a threat of war (2 Cor 5:20)—and by God’s grace, the gates of postmodernism shall not prevail against it. That is because a person’s foundational beliefs do not make it impossible to reach them, if we take the trouble to adapt our approach (our language and emphasis), but not the content of the saving message, to their worldview. For that reason, we don’t need to defeat postmodernism in order to reach our generation for Jesus. 



Steve Dehner is a writer and photographer. He lives in Forest Grove, OR.

1. At the Areopagus Paul does not quote the Hebrew Scriptures, and quotes Epimenides and Aratus, both pagan poets, in v 28. Also, before the Gentiles at Lystra (Acts 13:15-17), no quotations from the Scriptures were used. Yet in both cases, a clear Biblical message was presented.



Not Pain Free

By Allen Rea

The sixth of February is always a difficult day for me.

On that day, during my freshman year of college, I was riding with a car full of friends to a local restaurant when a drunk driver hit us head-on.

There were five of us in the car, and two more in the car behind us.

I remember hearing the sounds and screams and the impact of the airbag.

I also remember everyone beckoning me to get out of the automobile.

They had all walked away, but I could not. My right femur was snapped in two.

I kept drifting in and out of consciousness.

I remember the Jaws of Life cutting me out of the car, the pain of being put on the stretcher, the agony of having the bone set and putting on a temporary splint.

I remember the ride from one hospital to another and hearing words such as “lucky,” “blessed,” and “second chance.”

I recall having a discussion with the firemen about Christ.

Early the next morning, I had a titanium rod inserted through my femur. It runs from my hip to my knee. The pain of the accident developed into the pains of recovery and rehabilitation.

Those were dark days for me spiritually.

In the confusion of trying to understand what had happened, I grabbed onto Calvinism. I heard so much about it at college that it seemed right. I had been preaching in churches since I was twelve. I was a firm legalist (I would not have called myself that then). I did not deserve this tragedy and I was angry. Calvinism was the lifesaver that I grasped onto.

I comforted myself with the idea, “God caused this.”

As I continued on in Lordship Salvation for many years, the anniversary of the accident became a type of progress report or performance review. I would sit down and make a list of all my failures and see if I had wasted my second chance at life. I used it as a day to beat myself up. When I looked at how little I had accomplished in the past year I questioned my own salvation.

In those days I did not realize that I could not live the Christian life.

I have since learned that only Christ could live the Christian life through me (John 15:4-5; Gal 2:20).

The psychological stress caused by the accident was enough to endure without me putting such an enormous burden on myself.


However, since coming to Free Grace Theology, I can now use this anniversary as a time of praise and

devotion. I am thankful for the grace shown to me. *I am not called to prove I'm born again; I am called to abide in Him and in the certain knowledge that I have everlasting life and can never lose it.*

I know that every day is a gift from God and I must strive to live in light of eternity.

My days of limping and weakness are the avenue for the strength of Christ to shine through (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Those early days and years following the accident were many days and nights of wrestling with God. By His grace, I want my days to end like Jacob. “By faith Jacob, as he was dying...worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.” Limping and leaning has made me to see the grace of God in a way that I would be blind to without it.

My days are not pain free, but they are freeing because of grace. 

“Those early days and years following the accident were many days and nights of wrestling with God.”



Allen Michael Rea is Pastor of Higgston Baptist Church in Ailey, GA.

The Mailbag

By You

We love hearing from y'all. Send us your mail!

"Bob, I just wanted to say thanks for the illuminating articles that you and Shawn did in the last two issues of *Grace in Focus*. Much helpful clarification." ~J.T., Memphis, TN.

"I enjoy your articles very much. Keep on teaching God's Word in truth!" ~D.S., Allison, GA.

"Shawn Lazar wrote an excellent article on 'A Backloaded Gospel.' Much of this is happening today. A good example is when a Baptist pastor told me, 'Baptism doesn't save, but if you're saved, you'll be baptized!'" ~K.K., LaCoste, TX.

"I really enjoyed the San Antonio conference." ~S.C., Brenham, TX.

"Your ministry is like a lighthouse to warn believers from being shipwrecked on the rocks of Calvinism and Arminianism." ~H.L., Ocean Park, WA.

"I read a publication by Bob Wilkin giving me a better understanding of Matt 7:21-23. Thank you very much. I look forward to reading more." ~K.S., Inbox.

"I really appreciate being able to listen to the audio files you have provided on your website. Kinda like




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"Just want to say I found some more videos on YouTube from the 2017 Conference. Just watched one. Great job!" ~C.C., Dekalb, MS.

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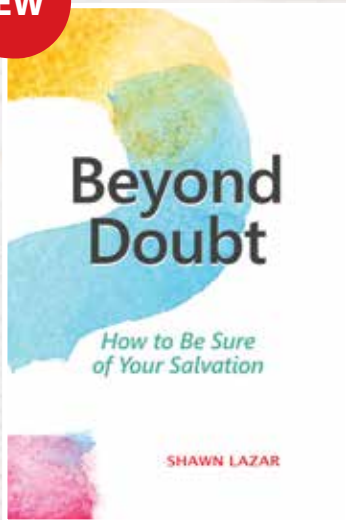
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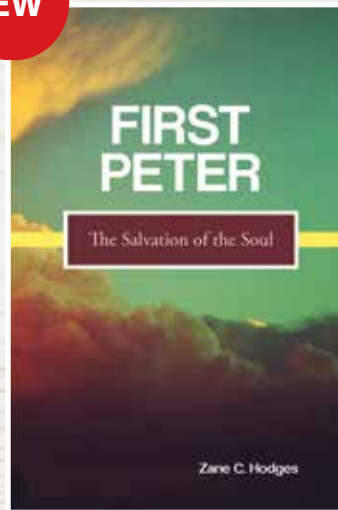
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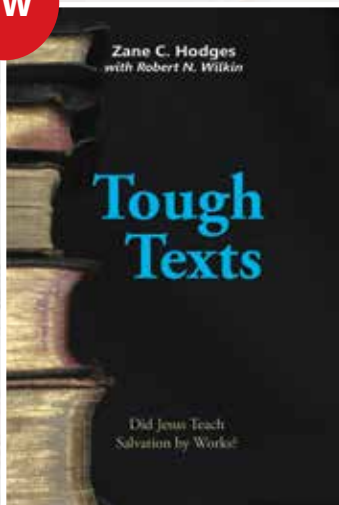
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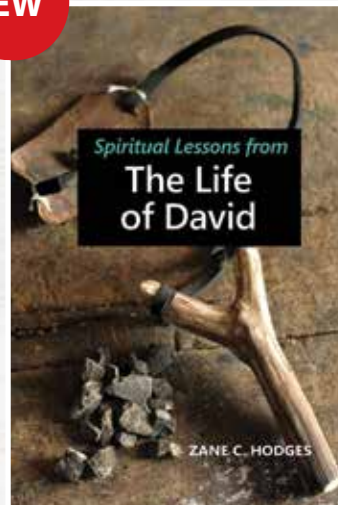
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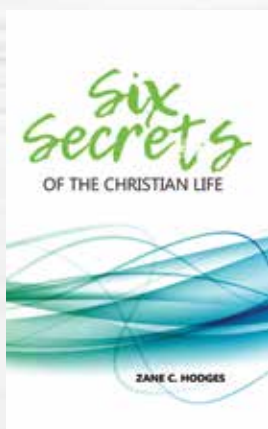


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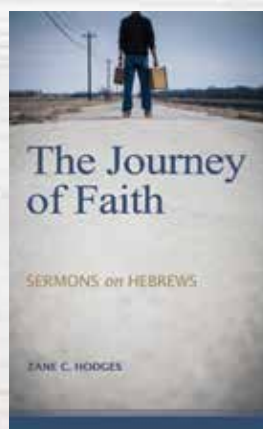


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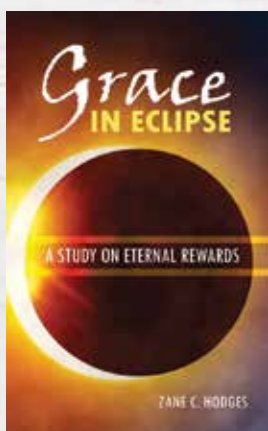


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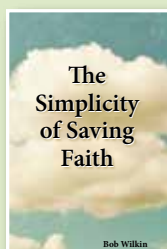
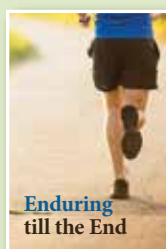


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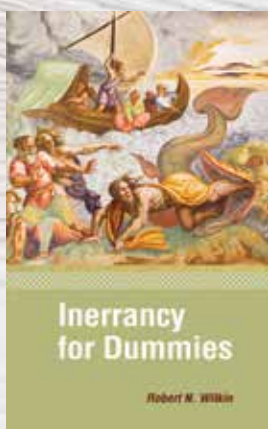
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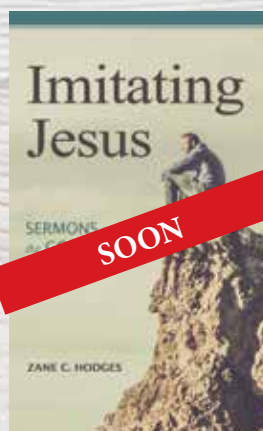
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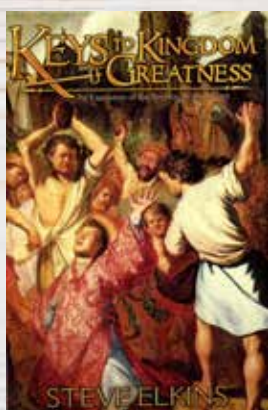


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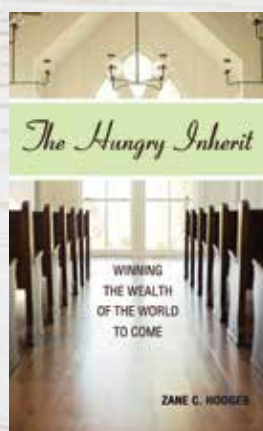
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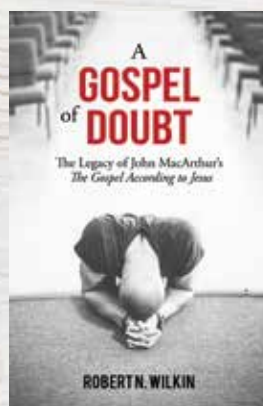
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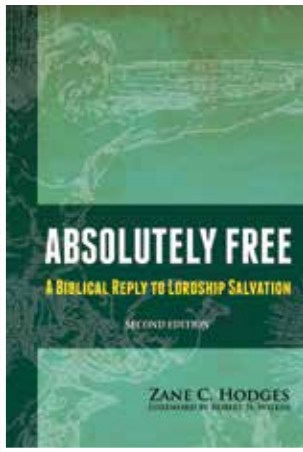
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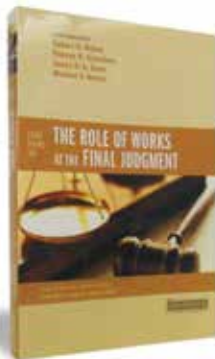
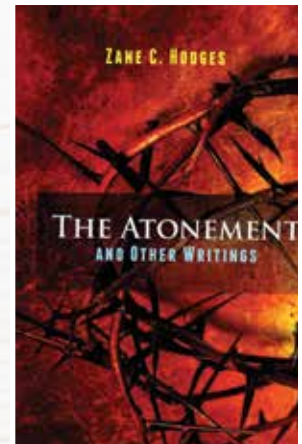
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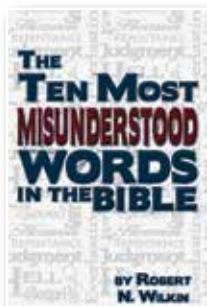
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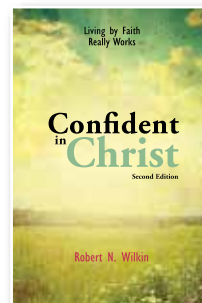
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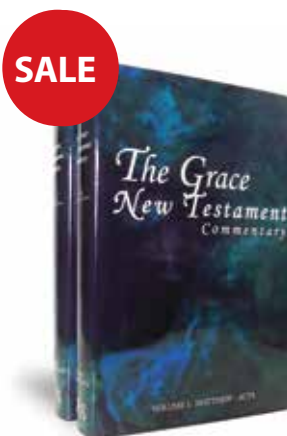
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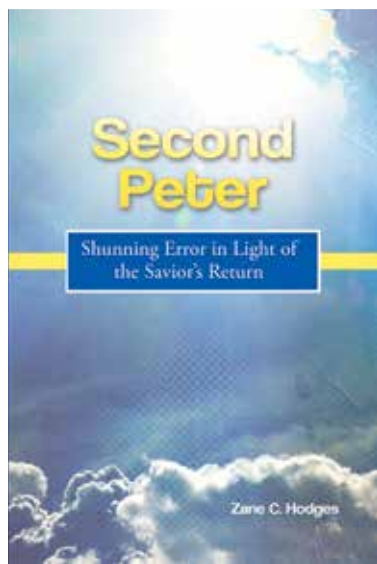
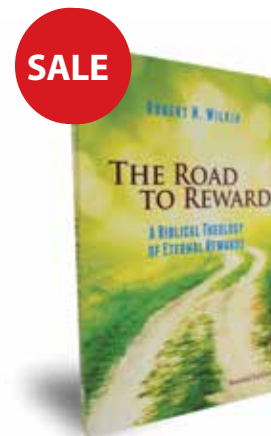
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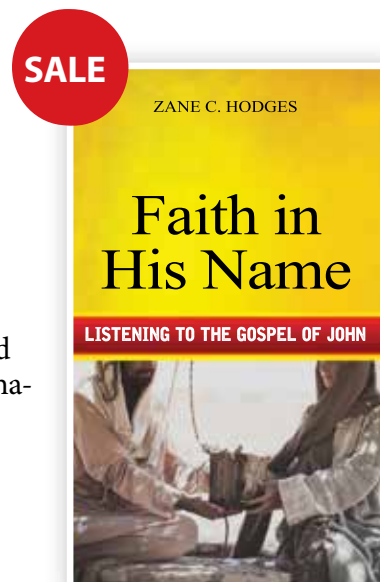
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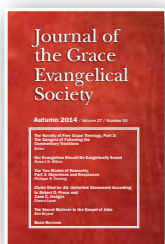
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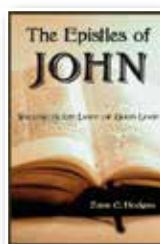
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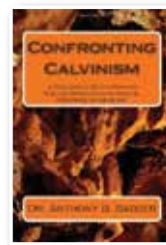


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WHAT IS GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY?

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

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

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

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

For more information about our ministry please visit

FAITHALONE.ORG



The Portland Regional Conference

By Bob Wilkin

This was our first regional in Portland. We met at Multnomah University. I had not been there since 1986-87 when I taught Greek and Bible there. It was great to be back.

I went with Shawn and his wife Abby.

Abby ran the book table and registration.

Shawn and I spoke twice each and served as emcees.


We had a small turnout of about 30 people, but everyone was enthusiastic. Included were Dr. Radmacher's wife, Ruth, son, Tim, and even his nephew. The speakers did a great job including Shawn, Steve Lewis,

Joe Lombardi, Brad Congdon, Gary Glenney, and me.

The subject of the conference was on salvation and discipleship, a subject we will be returning to at the National Conference.

My thanks to Steve Dehner for putting me up Friday night, for putting up Shawn and Abby for three nights, and for helping with audio-visual equipment.

The audio from this conference on salvation and discipleship should be up on our website by the time you get this.

We plan on returning to either Oregon or Washington State sometime in 2018. 

For more info on upcoming conferences visit faithalone.org/events

Becoming an Ultimate Victor for Christ





By Bill Fiess with Pam Esteven

The Victors

Revelation 2-3 contain Jesus' letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. These letters are filled with our Lord's expectations for His people and are rich in rewards teaching. He repeatedly uses the Greek term *ho nikōn* (literally, "the one overcoming, the victor") in these seven letters. Each time Jesus uses this term, it is in connection with the promise of a particular reward.

(Some readers are already aware that Nike, the athletic goods company, derived its name from the Greek word for "victory" which is in the same Greek word family as the term *ho nikōn*.)

Revelation 3:21 makes it clear that the victor or overcomer (*ho nikōn*) will receive the high privilege of ruling with Christ in the Kingdom: "To him who overcomes [*"ho nikōn"*] I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." I believe that the composite picture presented in these seven letters of Revelation 2-3 shows us what Christ desires of those who will ultimately rule and reign with Him. We will consider each of the seven churches, the characteristics of a victor or overcomer, and the rewards our Lord promises to qualifying believers.

Love

The first quality of a victorious life is found in Jesus' letter to the church at Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7). These believers had persevered and had done works in Jesus' name,

yet He admonished them because they had left their First Love (see Rev 2:4-7). Christ should be our First Love if we desire to be victors.

Compare what Jesus says in Matt 6:24: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (cf. Luke 14:26).

Consider what Paul writes in Rom 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Believers whose top priority is to love Jesus will find themselves living victorious lives and will enjoy the privilege of eating from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God (Rev 2:7). Make sure Jesus is your First Love.

Endure

The second characteristic we should desire is that of endurance in times of testing, just as faithful believers in Smyrna demonstrated (Rev 2:8-11). Persecuted believers can find comfort in the fact that Jesus, Who “was dead and came to life” (Rev 2:8), can relate to their persecution by evil men. Those who overcome during times of testing will receive the crown of life (Rev 2:10; cf. Jas 1:12-14).

Confess

The third quality of a victorious life is found in Jesus’ letter to the believers in Pergamos (Rev 2:12-17). We are to continue to confess Christ. To deny Him is not the way to rule with Him (2 Tim 2:12). But we must avoid “the doctrine of Balaam,” which is sexual immorality. We must be victors over sexual

immorality if we are to rule with Christ in His coming kingdom (see 1 Cor 6:9-10 and Eph 5:5). But the victorious believer will have the promised privilege of eating hidden manna and will receive a white stone engraved with a name known only by himself.

Persevere

In Jesus’ letter to the church at Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29), we see the fourth characteristic He desires in His people: persevering to the end in obedience to Christ (cf 2 Tim 2:12 and Heb 3:6, 14). In Rev 2:25 Jesus exhorts those faithful believ-

“What a comfort it is to know that in the midst of persecution, Jesus loves us and that love will be on display in eternity.”

ers in Thyatira (there were apparently a few) to hold fast what they have till He comes. Every believer should have as his goal to finish the race of life well (see 2 Tim 4:7). And the reward? Ruling with Christ over Gentile nations in the kingdom and receiving the Morning Star (Rev 2:26-28).

It is noteworthy that the two churches with the most severe problems (Thyatira and Laodicea) receive the greatest motivation from Christ: overcome, and rule with Him. Ruling with Christ is the greatest form of service in the kingdom. Do you want the privilege of serving Him in this tremendous way? Persevere in obedience to Christ for your remaining days.

Spotless

Jesus’ letter to Sardis (Rev 3:1-6) contains the fifth characteristic of a victorious life. The believer’s life should be spotless and above reproach (cf. Rev 16:15 and 19:8 with Rev 3:4 in which a spotless garment symbolizes a spotless life).

Many believers in Sardis were not watchful, i.e., they were not vigilant with regards to Satan’s attacks on their morals. Compare Peter’s warning in 1 Pet 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant [watchful]; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Victorious believers must keep watch; we must watch ourselves, and we must watch out for Satan. Victors are promised not only the reward of having their names read publicly on the “Dean’s List” (see Rev 3:5) but also the privilege of wearing white while walking with Christ.

My friend, do you long to have this kind of close fellowship with Christ? Be watchful, and live a spotless life.

Set Apart

The sixth characteristic is found in Christ’s letter to the church in Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13): a victor lives a sanctified life, a holy life, a life that is set apart from the world and to God.

What a comfort it is to know that in the midst of persecution, Jesus loves us and that love will be on display in eternity (cf Rev 3:8-9 with John 17:22-23). Even so, Jesus’ warning is clear: “hold fast so that no one may take your crown.” A crown is not a fashion statement but denotes a ruler. The privilege of ruling with Christ may be lost.



Jesus promises the victor that he will become a pillar in the Temple of God forever and that Jesus Himself “will write on him the name of My God and the name of . . . the New Jerusalem . . . and” that He “will write on him” His new name (Rev 3:12, *passim*). It is indeed an awesome privilege to bear the special marks of God. But to receive these, we must live sanctified lives.

Fellowship


And finally, the seventh quality of a victorious believer appears in the Lord’s letter to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-21). That quality is a life lived in fellowship with and obedience to Christ. Christ loves the church at Laodicea (Rev 3:19), but they have made Him sick (Rev 3:16). They are out of fellowship with Him: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20).

Many people mistakenly import the word *heart* into this verse, but it’s not here. The door mentioned is not to the *heart*, but to the *church* itself. Where does church dining take place? In the fellowship hall, of course, not in the cardiac care unit! This verse is not for unbelievers but for believers who need to be reconnected with their Savior.

Consider Jesus’ words about fellowship in John 14:21-24; He says He and the Father will make their home with the one who keeps His commandments; this is rich fellowship with the Father and the Son. Like Thyatira, the church in Laodicea is promised the magnificent reward of reigning with Christ if they become zealous (instead of lukewarm) and repent. This is without a doubt a gracious promise. Do you want to sit with Christ on His throne in the Kingdom? In this passage He is teaching us what is necessary to do just that.

Live By Faith

To experience a victorious life, we must live by faith in Jesus Christ. First John 5:10 emphasizes the involvement of the Holy Spirit (the “Witness”) in the believer’s life, and John 16:33 addresses the benefits of abiding in Christ (“in Me”). It becomes clear that “overcoming” and “abiding in Christ” are equivalent expressions.

First John 5:5 sums up the victorious life nicely: “Who is he who is living victoriously [*“ho nikōn”*] over the world, but he who is believing that Jesus is the Son of God?” Believer, are you striving for Nike (victory)? 

Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia. Pam Esteven is a former school teacher and homeschooling mom who lives in Baton Rouge, LA.

“Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?”

By Bryan Threlkeld

A CRY OF DERELICTION

One of the most challenging statements in Scripture was uttered by our Lord Jesus Christ while hanging on the cross. It's sometimes known as the Cry of Dereliction. I want to take us back to that Friday afternoon some 2000 years ago and talk about this.

In Matt 27:45 we read, “From the 6th hour until the 9th hour darkness came over all the land. About the 9th hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which means ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” And then in v 50 it says, “And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit.”

Here Jesus vocalizes the question that was on everyone's mind: *Why was this man of God, this insightful rabbi, this miracle worker, seemingly being abandoned by God?* In the Jewish mind, to die such a death, at such a young age, was the epitome of God-forsakenness.

“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” This statement is one of the most debated sentences in the entire Bible. What exactly did Jesus mean by it? Over the centuries scholars have offered up different explanations and thoughts on this passage—but there can be little doubt that these four Aramaic words are packed with significance.

“DO I HAVE TO?”

First, when Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ many assert that Jesus in His human nature, felt abandoned by God the Father.

Jesus was God in the flesh. John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and dwelled among us.” And in Phil 2:6-7, Paul says that Jesus, “although being in very nature God... was made in human likeness.”

So Jesus was deity in human form. Therefore, you could say that in His humanity, Jesus experienced an emotional separation from His Heavenly Father.

Michael Deaver served as the Deputy Chief of Staff during the Reagan administration. On the morning of President Reagan's inauguration, Deaver was concerned because it appeared his boss had overslept. So he knocked on the President's bedroom door and said, “Sir, it's 8:30 in the morning. In about two hours, you're going to become the 40th president of the United States!” And as the story goes, Reagan sleepily poked his head out from under the covers and said, “Do I have to?”

You know, it's impossible for us to know exactly how “human” Jesus felt throughout the arrest, trials, and crucifixion. But we do know that in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed to God the Father, “Please, Father—let this cup pass from Me.”

But of course, knowing there was no other way, Jesus said, “not my will, but yours be done, Father.”

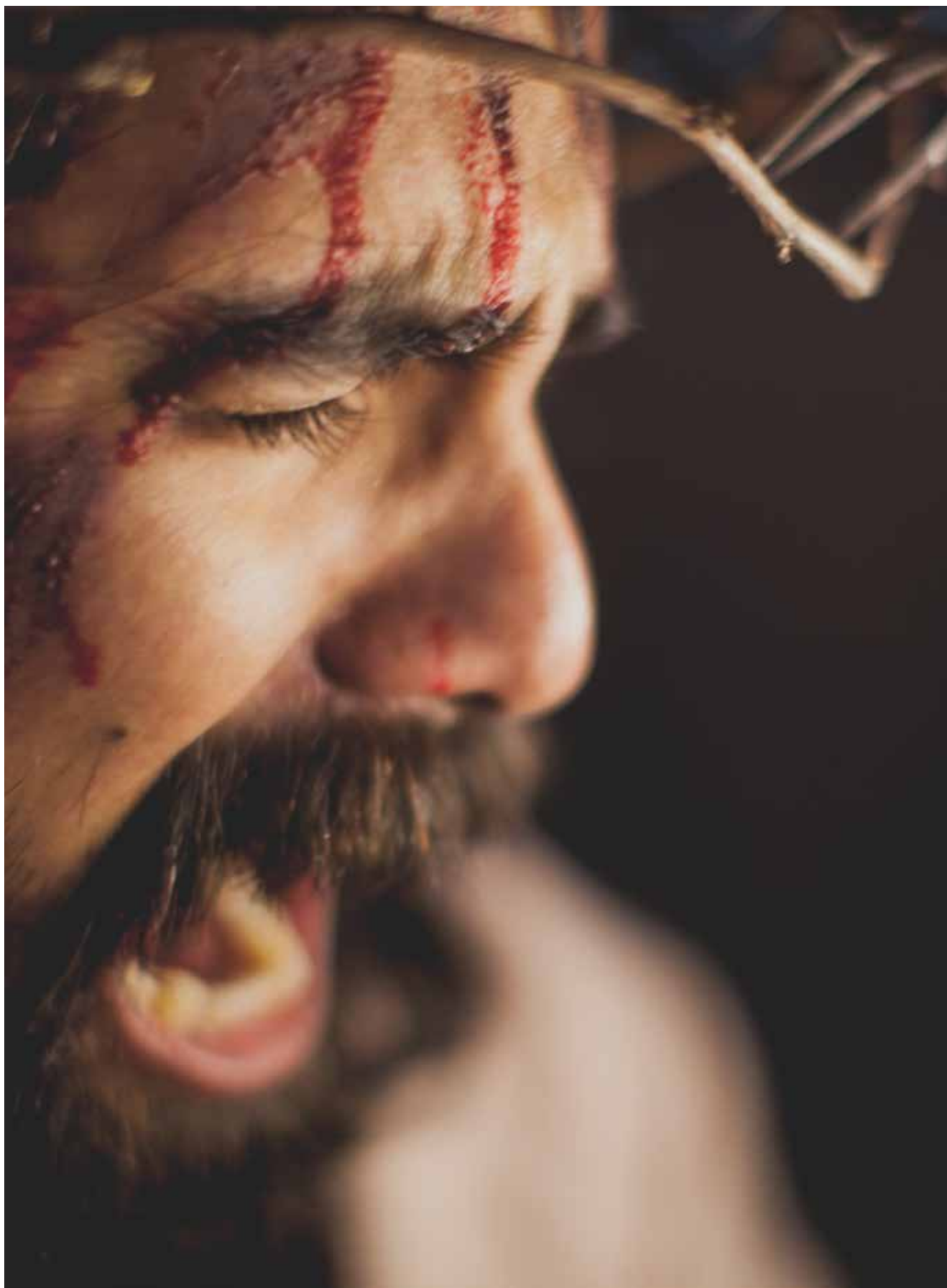
Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”

Can you imagine the emotional suffering that accompanied the crucifixion—carrying all the crud that I've done, and all of the sins you've ever committed, not to mention the sins of billions of people over the years. I believe it's quite plausible that this cry from the cross was the human side of Jesus speaking out. In His pain, He felt forsaken.

But there's more to it than that...

A SIN OFFERING

Second, when He cried: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” many believe that Jesus became a sin offering,



“When Jesus uttered:
‘My God, My God, why
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it wasn’t meant to be a
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listeners to the rest of the
Psalm.”



and for a brief moment God the Father abandoned Him.

There’s no doubt that Jesus did become a sin offering, a sacrifice on our behalf. Isaiah 53:6 says: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” On the cross, God transferred onto Jesus all the sins of the world. First John 2:2 says, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Can you imagine that?

In that pivotal moment in time, Jesus became guilty of Saul’s persecution and murder of Christians, Hitler’s holocaust, Jezebel’s immorality, Elvis’ drug abuse, Stalin’s massacres, Osama Bin Laden’s murders, not to mention our sins. As Paul wrote, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

So it makes sense that the Father would turn His face away from the Son during that time—that there would be a break in the fellowship between God the Father and God the Son.

In Galatians, Paul seems to convey the idea that Christ was forsaken during that precise moment on the cross. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’” (Gal 3:13).

The very type of death that Christ experienced was associated with a curse.

So as Jesus bore our guilt and shame, God the Father turned His head because of the sin He saw on His Son. So it’s quite likely that Jesus, in His human nature, felt forsaken and that God the Father turned His face away while the Son bore our sins on the cross.

PROPHECY FULFILLED

But there’s much more to this Aramaic phrase—although you’d never know it unless you were familiar with the Jewish culture back then.

You see, Jesus was a Jewish rabbi, a teacher who connected with his audience by using the literary devices of that day. And one such literary device was known as *remez*. *Remez* is when a person quotes a portion of literature and he expects his hearers to know the rest of the story.

So when Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” He was quoting the first verse of Psalm 22 and fulfilling a Messianic Prophecy.

Jesus is quoting the first verse of a Psalm, and He expects His listeners to know, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the story.

In that day, the Jewish people had an insatiable love of the Scriptures. In fact, by the time a Jewish boy was

12 years old, he was expected to commit to memory the first 5 books of the OT—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In your Bible, that's probably around 150 pages. And many Jewish boys had that memorized by the time they were 12!

You see, it wasn't until centuries later that Bible scholars added in the chapters and verses. So back then, when a Rabbi was teaching, he couldn't give you a verse reference. Jesus couldn't say, "Psalm 22, verse 7." But he didn't need to. Since they had so much of the OT memorized, the rabbi would just say the first verse of a passage, and the people would fast-forward through the rest of it in their minds.

So when a Jewish person would experience something noteworthy or significant, whether it was a good occasion or a bad occasion, they would immediately quote from an appropriate section of Scripture that fit the moment. For instance, if a person was close to death, a Jewish friend might say to him, "The Lord is my shepherd..." Now we might wonder, What does that have to do with death? But the Jew, in his mind, would fast-forward through the middle and to the end of that Psalm and remember, "...Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me."

So when Jesus uttered: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" it wasn't meant to be a stand-alone statement. It was the opening phrase of Psalm 22. Jesus was using *remez* to point His listeners to the rest of the Psalm.

You ask, "Well what does the middle and end of that Psalm say?" Good question. And before I walk through some of those verse, picture in your mind what those at the foot of the cross were seeing and experiencing when they heard Jesus ask, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?" (v 1).

"All who see Me mock Me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads" (v 7).

"I am poured out like water and all My bones are out of joint" (v 14).

"My strength is dried up and My tongue sticks to the roof of My mouth" (v 15).

"A band of evil men has encircled Me. They have pierced My hands and My feet" (v 16).

"I can count all My bones; people stare and gloat over Me. They divide My garments among them and cast lots for My clothing. But You, O LORD, be not far off; O My Strength, come quickly to help Me" (vv 17-19).

"You who fear the LORD, praise Him! For He has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden his face from Him but has listened to his cry for help" (vv 23-24).


"All those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him. Even he who cannot keep himself alive. A posterity shall serve Him... They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done it" (vv 29b-31).

The One forsaken in v 1 is the One who will rule forever in the last verses of the Psalm. Death would be followed by resurrection and ultimate victory.

Those words were written 950 years before Jesus was born!

When those words were written, crucifixion had not even been invented. It wasn't until centuries later that they began to execute people on a cross. And yet it's a perfect description of what Jesus went through. Piercing of the hands and feet, casting lots for Jesus' clothing—amazing prophecy!

So Jesus was using those words to remind the people of the Psalm they had memorized. He was reminding them that while it may appear as if God the Father had forsaken His Son, this isn't the end of the story. It's Friday; but Sunday's coming! It's the cross; but the kingdom is coming! The end of the story is that one day future generations will proclaim Jesus' righteousness, saying: "He has done it." In other words, He has atoned for our sins.

So therein lies the significance of this powerful question: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" 



Bryan Threlkeld is senior pastor of Hill Country Bible Church, Georgetown, TX.

MY MAYBERRY



By Ken Yates

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1)



SOM. My guess is that these four letters mean absolutely nothing to anybody reading this magazine. But they mean a great deal to me, even though I don't know what the letters stand for.

USOM was the name of the very small military installation I lived on when I lived in Pusan, Korea as a boy of 12-14 years old. My father was in the Army and was assigned there. It was like heaven on earth.

The main installation was about a quarter of a mile away. But about 12 families lived on USOM. These 12 homes, along with some playground equipment, were all that was located on this small base. In this area of the world, there was no crime. Each family had children my age. We all became close friends. We walked to school together. We played baseball together. In the evening we would play hide and seek and other games outside. We visited each other's homes on a daily basis. It was an idyllic world, and it is safe to say that none of us had a care in the world.

It reminded me of the television show *The Andy Griffith Show*. This show was televised in the 1960s. Sheriff Andy Taylor and his son Opie were the stars. It took place in the small fictional town of Mayberry in North Carolina. Crime was non-existent. Even though the war in Vietnam was taking place in the 1960s, it was never mentioned on the show. Everybody knew everybody else in town. All the people took care of each other. Like my experience in USOM, Opie lived the perfect life. The show was very popular and many television critics said it was because it provided a half hour each week for the viewer to escape whatever

problems they were having in their own lives and cities.

USOM was my Mayberry. But it was a real place. It was a very sad day when I had to move and leave my friends in that wonderful place.

A Chance to Return

As you might expect, through the years I told friends and family back in the United States about my time in Mayberry. Of course, they could not relate to the fond memories I had of that place. I always held out the hope of one day visiting the place I knew as USOM.

Thirty years later I got the chance. I was in the Army myself and was stationed in Korea. I was given the opportunity to preach at the chapel on the main installation. I would only be about 400 yards from USOM!

When I arrived on the installation, the first thing I did was walk toward my childhood home. I turned the corner that started the climb up the small hill to my old community. I couldn't believe what I saw.

All 12 houses were gone. The place was overgrown with weeds. Under about 10 feet of weeds I found some of the playground equipment I had played on three decades earlier. It was now a slum of the city of Pusan, Korea. There were some homeless people who lived there and trash was all over the place. It was obvious that it was a garbage dump.

There was a Korean there who spoke some English. I asked him what this place was. He told me that some years ago a woman was murdered on the hill. The

Koreans believe the place is haunted and didn't want to live there. All the buildings were old and falling down so they tore them down and carted them away. The US military no longer has any presence at the place that used to be called USOM. Only the down and out in the large city of Pusan stay there, living in the garbage.

Saturday Night Live

My experience reminded me of a skit I saw on the comedy show *Saturday Night Live*. Ron Howard, who played Opie on the *Andy Griffith Show*, was an adult. During the skit he told everybody how great Mayberry was. He had the chance to return.

But it was nothing like what Opie remembered. When Opie returned as an adult he looked up his old friends. Mayberry had turned into a crime infested town! Main characters of the show had turned into drug dealers and alcoholics. It was not safe to walk around. On the original show, Sheriff Taylor didn't even need to carry a gun. Now, the streets were filled with gun violence.

The humor, of course, was based upon the fact that everybody understood that Mayberry had been the exact opposite of these things. It was shocking to see "goodie two shoes" selling drugs on the corner of Mayberry or packing heat. Imagine seeing a show in which Mother Theresa was presented as a prostitute and you will get an idea of the contrast the skit was showing.

That is an illustration of the contrast I saw when I returned to USOM. But I have to tell you, I found nothing humorous about the situation. Instead, it was depressing and forever changed fond memories of my childhood.

Aren't We All Opie?

Opie's experience was all based on a fictional show and a fictional comedy skit. But when we think about it, perhaps every adult reading this article can relate to that experience. In my case it was USOM.

But all of us know what the comedy skit was saying. Things don't stay the same. We know the truth of the saying, "you can't go back home again." If any of us go back to a place we have fond memories of, we will all find that it is not what we remember. I should have realized that when I returned to Korea. In my mind I thought I was returning to the early 1970s. In my

defense, perhaps the shock was just *how* different it was.

The Bible, of course, tells us why this is the case. The world is cursed by sin. No matter how good a place might be, it will change. In most cases we can vividly see the world we live in getting worse.


In any case, there is nothing permanent about this world. The Lord said, "heaven and earth shall pass away" (Mark 13:31). John says that this world is passing away (1 John 2:17). Peter says the day will come when the elements that make up this world will be destroyed by fire (2 Pet 3:10).

The lesson is clear. We should not place our hearts in the things of this world, due to its changing and temporary nature. We should lay up treasures in the world to come (Matt 6:20). Our hearts should be on those things (Col 3:2).

The Real Mayberry Is Coming

The book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, ends with John describing the new earth that is coming (Rev 21:1). Believers will not live in some misty existence in the sky. Instead, we will live on an actual earth.

In this eternal state there will be no sin. There will be no crime. There will be no homeless people, no murder. Nobody will be living in garbage as a homeless person.

To put it simply, an eternal USOM and an eternal Mayberry is coming. They will not change for the worse. I spent three decades wanting to return and see a place I lived in as a young boy. I was disappointed. I would have been better served by longing to see the world to come. We all would. 



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Saints and Sinners

By Bob Wilkin

Yesterday I received a call from a pastor friend in Nebraska. Someone who attended his church took exception to him referring to believers as sinners. The man said, “Believers are saints, not sinners.” Evidently the man was coming from a Calvinist tradition. He thought that believers cannot stray very far or for very long. Thus, in his mind, it is wrong to refer to born-again people as sinners.

Martin Luther famously quipped that Christians are simultaneously justified and sinners (*Simul iustus et Peccator* in Latin). That is certainly taught in Scripture (Rom 3:23; 4:4-5; 6:23). However, Reformation thought for the most part no longer accepts that believers are both justified and sinners. Due to the influence of Lordship Salvation, most Protestants today believe that one can be both justified a *little* sinner, but not justified and a *big* sinner. If that sounds like Catholicism, that’s because that is essentially the Catholic position on the matter.

In discussing Luther’s famous saying R. C. Sproul says,

And so with this formula Luther was saying, in our

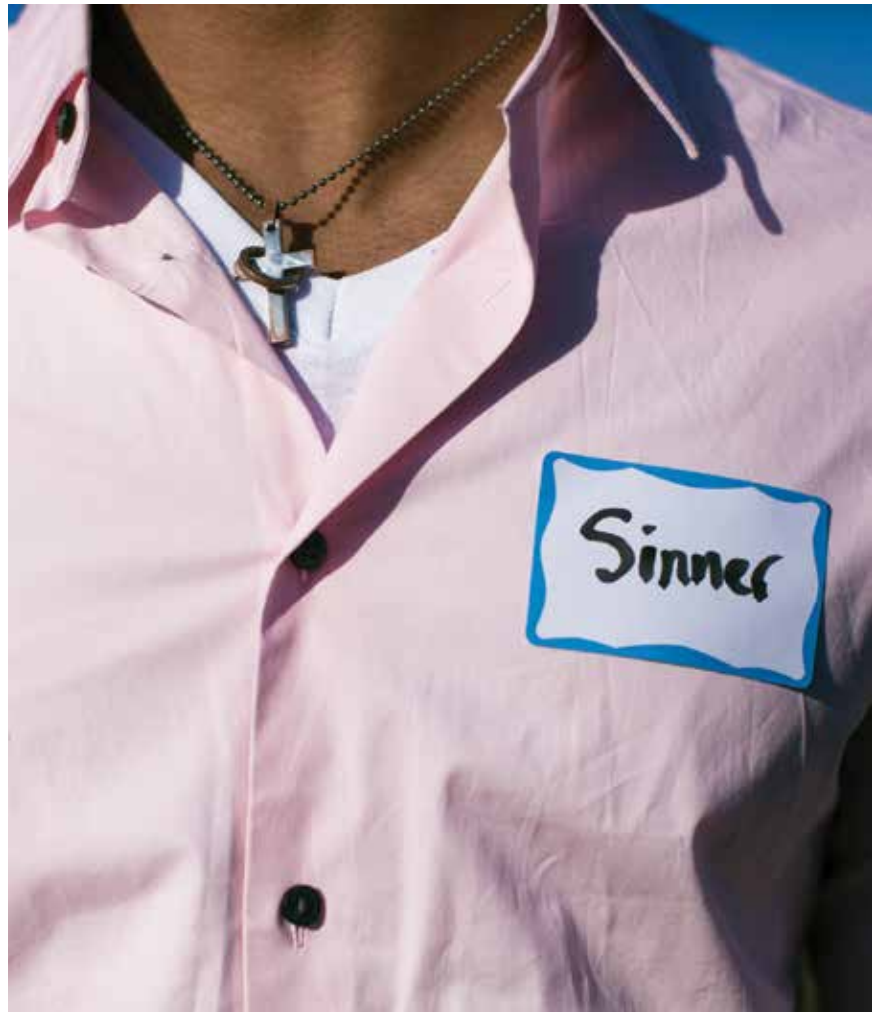
justification we are one and the same time righteous or just, and sinners. Now if he would say that we are at the same *time* and in the same *relationship* just and sinners that would be a contradiction in terms [emphases his]. But that’s not what he was saying. He was saying from one perspective, in one sense, we are just. In another sense, from a different perspective, we are sinners; and how he defines that is simple. In and of ourselves, under the analysis of God’s scrutiny, we still have sin; we’re still sinners. But, by imputation and by faith in Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is now transferred to our account,

then we are considered just or righteous. This is the very heart of the gospel (<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/simul-iustus-et-peccator/>).

Let’s unpack what Sproul is saying. Believers are not saints and sinners in their *relationship* with God. In their relationship with God they are saints. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us, so we are not sinners in our relationship with God.

There is some truth in that. And some error. More on that in a moment.

Sproul also says tellingly, “we still have sin.” That seems rather tame. How much sin? Do some believers become enslaved to sin?



Elsewhere in his writings and speaking ministry Sproul makes clear that he believes that no believer is characterized by sin. No believer is enslaved to sin. Believers do sin. But those sins are relatively rare. Believers in the Reformed way of thinking live transformed lives all the time—except for rare occasions when a believer might fall. But if a believer falls, he bounces back soon.

It is true that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers. That means *positionally* God sees even carnal believers as righteous positionally. However, as the Scriptures make clear, God views believers who are in the spiritual far country as being sinners *in their experience*.

There is no promise in Scripture that all believers will persevere in faith and good works. There is no promise that believers will live righteously or that they will be free from sin's bondage in their experience. Yes, in our position we are no longer slaves of sin (Rom 6:14, 18). Yet we must present our members as slaves of righteousness in order for us to experience freedom from sin's bondage (Rom 6:16, 19).

New Testament Use

Before I close, I need to discuss the concept of *sinner(s)* in the NT. While the OT and NT clearly teach that all sin and fall short of God's glory (e.g., Rom 3:23), the exact expression *sinner(s)* is mostly used in the NT to refer to those who are walking in rebellion against God, whether believer or unbeliever.

In the Gospels the word *sinner(s)* is linked with tax collectors, harlots, and others in rebellion against God (Matt 9:10, 11, 13; 11:19; 26:45; Mark 2:15, 16 [2xs], 17; 14:41; Luke 5:30, 32; 6:32, 33, 34 [2xs]; 7:34, 39;

13:2, 4; 15:1, 2, 7, 10; 18:13; 19:7; John 9:16, 24, 25, 31). And this trend continues in the epistles where most of the time *sinners(s)* does not merely mean *one who sins*. There are only a dozen uses of *sinner(s)* in the NT outside the Gospels. In the epistles it also typically means *one who sins egregiously* (see, for example, Rom 3:7; Gal 2:15; 1 Tim 1:9; Heb 7:26; 12:3; Jas 4:8; 5:20; 1 Pet 4:18; Jude 15).


I'm a sinner and a saint. I'm not a sinner in the sense of being in rebellion against God and straying from the truth. But I do sin.

The few verses which might be exceptions are Rom 5:8 ("while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"); Rom 5:19 ("as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners"); Gal 2:17 ("if...we ourselves also are found sinners..."); and 1 Tim 1:15 ("Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."). But even those uses might have reference to those who are in rebellion against God.

James refers to a believer who has strayed from the truth as a sinner: "Brethren, *if anyone among you wanders from the truth*, and someone turns him back, let him know that *he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul [or, life] from death and cover a multitude of sins*" (Jas 5:19-20, emphasis added). That fits with

the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin (Luke 15:7, 10). The sheep that repented was in the fold before it became lost. The same with the coin. They picture believers who stray.

I'm a sinner and a saint. I'm not a sinner in the sense of being in rebellion against God and straying from the truth. But I do sin. Daily. Hourly. I know that it is possible I might stray. Like the hymnist, I know I'm "prone to wander." I pray that I do not become a sinner in that sense. The last thing I want to do is dishonor the name of my Lord and Savior and soon returning Judge (Jas 5:9). But I know that no matter what happens in the future, I have ever-lasting life that can never be lost. And that motivates me out of love and gratitude, to live a holy life, a set-apart life.

Finally, admitting that I sin is not the same as saying I am an *egregious sinner* in the NT sense. Still less is it an *excuse* for my sin. As Paul said, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Rom 6:1-2). 



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His latest book is *Tough Texts: Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works?* (co-authored with Zane Hodges).

Q&A

By Staff

Q I am a Christian who has struggled with three texts: the blasphemy against the Spirit texts, Hebrews 6, and Hebrews 10.

Regarding the blasphemy verses, they seem to teach that a person could utter blasphemy against the Spirit, repent, and then the Lord would choose not to save him/her. I'm not sure what exactly constitutes blasphemy against the Spirit, but I worry that I may have at some point committed it.

The other texts are from Hebrews 6 and 10, which suggest that after a person becomes Christian, if he sins, he can no longer be saved. I have not been a perfect person since I've become a Christian. In fact, I've even gone through periods of unbelief.

I would be grateful if you could share your thoughts on these texts.

~A.K., Inbox.

A Thanks for your question. Rest assured that many have wondered about the same verses. As far as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is concerned, we must always remember the context. Jesus is talking to the Pharisees (Matt 12:24-25) and they have seen the miracles of Christ. They determined that Jesus is empowered by Satan to do the miracles.

This was a unique situation.

The Pharisees attributed what was going on right before their eyes to Satan, not the Holy Spirit. But the only way God can bring a person to faith is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If a person rejects that ministry then there is no other way for that person to come to faith. If an unbeliever does not respond to the ministry of the Spirit he cannot come to faith. In other words, *only* an unbeliever can commit this sin.

By the way, some feel that this particular sin could only be committed by those who actually saw Jesus' miracles. In any event, if a person believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life, he has not committed this sin because that is what the ministry of the Holy Spirit is about.

If you go to our website (faithalone.org) and click on the search button on the top right (with a small magnifying glass), you will find a 1997 *Grace in Focus* article that goes into more detail on the unpardonable sin.


Hebrews 6 and 10 are indeed directed towards believers, but they both concern temporal judgment, not eternal judgment. That is, God can discipline and judge believers in this life. And we should not confuse that earthly discipline with eternal condemnation.

In Heb 6:1-8, notice the illustration of worthless overgrowth being burned (vv 7-8). The field remains. That's a picture of temporal judgment.

So is the reference to no sacrifice remaining in Heb 10:18, 26. Those are the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law. They no longer were effective since Jesus had already fulfilled them by His death. The issue in Heb 10:26-31, again, is temporal judgment, not eternal condemnation.

In other words, the author is writing to believers who are in danger of leaving the Christian faith. If they do, they will both suffer the loss of eternal rewards, as well expose themselves to the discipline of God in this life. For example, in Hebrews 10 he quotes verses from the OT (vv 27, 30) that refer to how God judged *His people* in the time before Christ. But the punishment did not deal with hell (or the lake of fire). It dealt with how God caused earthly judgments to come, such as sending enemies to destroy their cities, and how even God would use many means to kill His rebellious people.

The bottom line is that the Christian who rebels against God opens himself up to some serious discipline. But in any case, it is not hell. In fact, the author says that once a person is saved, he cannot lose it. He says it right before the warnings in chapter 10 (10:10, 14).

For more information on Hebrews 6 and 10, you can find multiple *Grace in Focus* articles (by Bob Wilkin and Shawn Lazar), a few *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* articles (by Dr. Paul Tanner), and even a video (Can Christians Lose Their Salvation by Falling Away? Hebrews 6:4-8) by searching our website. In addition, our *Grace New Testament Commentary* has a great discussion of both passages by Dr. Paul Tanner. 

Send your questions to questions@faithalone.org.

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