

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2017

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT?

PLUS The Bread of Life / Chosen to Bear Fruit / Grace Goes to Zambia / God's Sovereignty
in Missions / God Was at Work / Denver Regional / Sad Day / Hagar's Bad Rap **AND MORE**

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FROM THE EDITOR

Summer is beginning to lose its sting here in North Texas. It is still very hot in mid-August as we send the magazine off to the printer. But it is ten degrees or more cooler than it has been. Temps in the high eighties and low nineties are a positive change.

There are many positive things happening in the Free Grace Movement, and with GES in particular. Grace has been on the go all summer long, as highlighted in this issue.

We had a regional conference in Denver that went very well. You can read about it and see pictures.

Dr. Ken Yates went to Zambia and taught twenty-two pastors. Text and pictures inside. We are looking for more overseas teaching opportunities, and the possibility of sending teams.

We tell you about our September regional in Lynchburg, VA and our May 2018 national conference in Plano, TX. We also have conferences in the planning stages for San Antonio, Southern California, Washington State, South Carolina, Florida, and elsewhere.

In this issue you will find some outstanding articles.

Shawn Lazar writes about election in John's Gospel.

There is an article from Zane Hodges about God's sovereignty in missions (Acts 18:1-28).

Bud Brown shares how God has worked in his life during three major stages.

Marcia Hornok shows that Hagar doesn't deserve the bad reputation she has received.



Grace on the Go

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

There is an article by Ken Yates about the Bema (Matt 24:45-51) and one by me on walking in the Spirit.

There is also a preview of my upcoming book on Calvinism, a chapter entitled, "The Bread of Life: Why Faith Precedes Regeneration (John 6:35)."

There are four questions and answers we think everyone will benefit from reading.

And that's just for starters.

—Peace like a river,

The Bread of Life:

Reg





Why Faith Precedes Regeneration (John 6:35)

A chapter from
*Crushing Calvinism:
Twelve Key Verses*



By Bob Wilkin

One of the main aspects of the Calvinist understanding of total depravity—the T in TULIP—is that regeneration precedes faith. Unfortunately, most Evangelicals do not know what that means and so they are likely to accept the first point of Calvinism, thinking that total depravity means that we are all sinners and that we are not able to save ourselves (Rom 3:23). But total depravity means much more than that.

While most Evangelicals say that one must believe in Jesus in order to be born again, Calvinists say that one must be born again in order to believe.

While most Calvinists say that regeneration and faith occur almost simultaneously, they all say that regeneration must precede faith since they do not believe that spiritually dead people can believe.

It should be noted that there are some Calvinists who freely say that regeneration might precede faith by quite a long period of time. One Calvinist writer tells of a man whom he believes came to faith 65 years after he was born again! The man supposedly was a born-again *unbeliever* for over six decades.

The Bread of Life Illustration

John 6:35 is a showstopper for the first point of Calvinism.

After Jesus fed over 5,000 men (plus women and children), many came to Him and asked Him to give them an ongoing supply of bread: “Lord, give us this bread always” (John 6:34). Sadly, they were thinking

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in purely physical terms. The feeding of the 5,000 was not a lesson about social security, but eternal security.

They had previously referred to the fact that “our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, *‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’*” (John 6:31). They wanted that miracle repeated daily.

Jesus’ first words after their request were, “I am the bread of life.” Clearly the Lord is continuing the illustration of bread, and even bread that comes from heaven, since He Himself had come down from heaven.

But when Jesus refers to *life*, in the expression “I am the bread of life,” He is not referring to *physical* life, but to *spiritual* life, to *everlasting* life. This is clear by what He said next.

The One Who Comes to Jesus Will Never Hunger

He then said, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger.” Remember, they were asking about a continuous supply of bread from heaven. The Lord promises something better. He had promised the woman at the well that one drink would forever quench her thirst (John 4:14). Now He says that one act of partaking of the bread of life, that is, coming to Him, means that a person would never hunger again. As with the living water, the bread of life once received results in everlasting life that can never be lost. The words *shall never hunger* are figurative. They mean that the one who believes in Jesus is secure forever. The life that *the Bread of Life* gives is that kind of life, i.e., everlasting life.

Calvinists agree that coming to Jesus in John 6:35 refers to believing in Him and that *shall never hunger* refers to eternal security.

Coming to Jesus—that is, believing in Him—*precedes* never hungering. One must partake of the bread of life *before* he gets the life. The Calvinist idea that regeneration precedes faith, or that one gets the life and then eats of the bread of life, is contradicted by this text.

The One Who Believes in Him Will Never Thirst

The Lord now picks up a metaphor He used earlier with the woman at the well (John 4:10-14), except this time the Lord strips away the first part of the metaphor.

Instead of saying, “He who drinks the living water will never thirst,” the Lord says, “He who believes in Me shall never thirst.” He interprets for us what it means to drink the living water. It is believing in Him. And we know from John 4:14-15 that the Lord is not speaking of continuous lifelong drinking. The moment a person drinks the living water—that is, the moment he believes in Jesus—he will never thirst again. The words *shall never thirst* clearly mean *shall never die spiritually, shall never perish*. The one who believes in Jesus *has everlasting life that can never be lost*.

Once again, regeneration does not precede faith. You are given everlasting life the moment you believe in Jesus, and not before.

Eternal Security Is for All Who Believe

People like to go to the Apostle Paul to prove eternal security. Although Paul certainly does teach that doctrine (e.g., Rom 4:4-5; 8:31-39; Eph 2:8-9), the Lord taught it first. John 6:35 is arguably the simplest and most powerful eternal security verse in the Bible. It is elegant in its simplicity and power. The one who believes in Him shall never hunger and shall never thirst. Never. Once we partake of the bread of life, we will never need to partake again to be eternally secure. Once we drink of the living water, we will never need to drink again in order to have a secure eternal destiny.

Of course, this too is a contradiction of Calvinism. According to Calvinism, God only preserves (guarantees the eternal destiny of) those who persevere in faith and good works. That is the fifth point of Calvinism, preservation for the saints who persevere. But the Lord of glory promises something much different, to preserve all who simply believe in Him, with no perseverance required.

Faith Precedes Regeneration

I don’t know who came up with the idea that regeneration precedes faith, but I know that Calvinists embrace that idea and proclaim it boldly.

Why Calvinism hasn’t fixed this obvious error I don’t know. I suppose it is because Calvinism is a philosophical construct that hangs together. If Calvinists were to give in on this point, I suppose the whole system would collapse. So they hang on to a position

“The words shall never thirst clearly mean shall never die spiritually, shall never perish. The one who believes in Jesus has everlasting life that can never be lost.”



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that stands in direct opposition to the clear teaching of Scripture.

Don't get me wrong. Their view that regeneration precedes faith is logical in the sense that God *could* have set it up that way (if faith were not a condition of regeneration). But that is not what the Bible teaches.

If what the Bible teaches contradicts my position, then I should submit to the Scriptures. After all, it is also logical for faith to precede regeneration. The only way that idea it would be illogical is if the Calvinist understanding of total depravity were correct. But it is not.

After I graduated from seminary I called myself a Calvinist for nearly two decades. For me the key point of Calvinism was the preservation of the saints. I thought my belief in eternal security made me a Calvinist. But I came to see that I do not believe in any of the five points as taught by Calvinism. Sure, I could manipulate the meaning of all five points and say I believed them, but that would not really make me a Calvinist.

For the last fifteen years or so I simply say I am a Biblicist. I believe the Bible. I am not a Calvinist or an Arminian. The Bible is enough for me.

Faith in Christ is the condition of everlasting life. That means that one must believe in Jesus in order to be born again. And it means that faith precedes regeneration. And that means that the T in TULIP is not correct, at least not as it is explained by Calvinism.

So when you evangelize, call people to believe in Jesus for everlasting life. Tell them that whoever comes to Jesus will never hunger and whoever believes in Him will never thirst. The Lord Jesus guarantees the eternal destiny of all who believe in Him. Because of the cross of Christ, our sins and our works are not the issue. The only issue is whether we believe in Him for what He promises or not. If we do, then we have everlasting life that can never be lost.

John 6:35 crushes Calvinism. 



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX with his wife of 40 years, Sharon. This is an excerpt from his new book, Crushing Calvinism: Twelve Key Verses, available soon.

A Sad Day of Reckoning

(Matthew 24:45-51)

By Ken Yates

At the end of Matthew 24, Jesus gives a parable about a servant. The point of the parable is that a servant can either be a good and faithful servant or an evil and unfaithful one. The good servant does what his master tells him by serving his fellow servants. The evil servant is the one who does not serve his fellow servants but instead serves himself.

Of course, the Lord is giving this parable to Christians. A believer can either be a faithful servant of the Lord, or an unfaithful one. Regardless, a day of reckoning is coming. We call that day the Judgment Seat of Christ. The faithful servant will be rewarded. The unfaithful one will be rebuked. The Lord describes this rebuke this way:

“the master of that servant will come....and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

A WEeping HYPOCRITE

Instead of being rewarded for faithfulness, the unfaithful servant is designated as a hypocrite. Of course he is a hypocrite. He claimed to be a servant of his lord. Instead, he was anything but. He served himself when he was supposed to serve others.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, many Christians will be exposed as hypocrites. They had the title of being a servant of the Lord, but instead they have served themselves. They will be in the Kingdom of



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God, but their reward in that Kingdom will be what a hypocrite deserves. Certainly such hypocrites will not hold positions of exalted honor in eternity.

No doubt, on that day, the Lord's verdict on the hypocrite will be like words that “cut him in two.” The words will cut like a knife because they will indicate a life wasted, and therefore, a loss of eternal rewards. In human terms, such an experience would be described accurately as a time of “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

A REAL LIFE ILLUSTRATION

In the military there are two kinds of soldiers. Some are officers, and some are enlisted. On the enlisted side, the highest position a soldier can obtain is a Command Sergeant Major (CSM). A CSM is the commander's right hand man. His primary job is to take care of the enlisted soldiers in the unit. He looks out for their well-being. He is a very highly respected person in the Army.

A good friend of mine was the commander of a large unit. He had a CSM that was known as one of the best. He had obtained his rank after many years in the military. He had distinguished himself in many different environments.

If one looked at his official military records, that person would see an unusual and accomplished soldier. Unlike most soldiers in the Army, this CSM had served in the Marines. In that capacity, he had been involved in dangerous situations in Beirut, Lebanon.

As a result, he had medals from the Navy. His records also recorded his heroic exploits in Grenada. On that island he had become one of only a few soldiers that had participated in a parachute jump in combat. In a career that spanned decades he was authorized to wear a chest full of awards and medals.

Not surprisingly, he quickly rose through the ranks. Whenever it came time for another promotion, he was promoted ahead of his peers. At each step, his promotion meant that one of his contemporaries would not receive a promotion. But nobody begrudged him for his success. Based upon his exploits and experience he deserved everything he received.

And, like a good CSM, he constantly gave speeches and told the enlisted soldiers coming up through the ranks, that they must take care of their soldiers. He could give himself as an example of such care, using illustrations from many of his different experiences.

There was only one problem. All of it was a lie. He had never been to Beirut. He had never been to Grenada. He had lied and forged his military records. Many of the medals he wore on his uniform were bogus. Unfortunately for him, however, as he neared retirement, his deception was discovered.

All this meant that he was not what he appeared. He presented himself as a man that used his position and experiences to help those soldiers under him. In reality, he had cost the promotion of others by his lies. His speeches were full of falsehoods. What he claimed to be was a lie. He was a hypocrite.

APPEARING BEFORE THE JUDGE

When his deception was found out, the CSM had to go to a military trial before a military judge. Before all this happened, his future was bright. He would receive the retirement pay of a CSM for the rest of his life. His experience as a CSM would have earned him a lucrative job in the civilian world. He would have retained the respect of the military community for his service to his fellow soldiers.

At the trial he paid a heavy price. He lost three of his promotions, which meant his retirement pay was significantly reduced. He went through the public shame of telling the court that he was a fraud. He was sentenced to six months in military prison before he could retire. He lost whatever high paying civilian job he would have obtained upon retirement.

I saw a picture of him being led out of the courtroom after receiving his punishment. It was a sad

picture. His head was bowed in shame and he was crying. At a time in his life when he should have been going through the honor of a retirement ceremony as one of the highest enlisted soldiers in the Army, he was being led away by two military policemen to serve his six months in prison.


A FEARFUL EXPECTATION

When I remember this man, I can't help but think of how horrible it must have been for him to live all those years with the fearful expectation that he would be found out. He knew that the possibility of this discovery was a reality and he would suffer serious loss in so many ways.

The same is true for Christians. The only difference is that we *know* a day of reckoning is coming. We *will* stand before the Judge. Jesus said it in his parables, including the parable of the faithful or unfaithful servant. As Christians, we carry the title of a servant. That is what we are supposed to be. We are to serve others.

But do we? The Lord said on the day of reckoning some believers will be shown to be hypocrites. They did not do what their title said they should be doing.

The story of the CSM is a sad one. What loss and shame he experienced for not doing what he claimed. Think of the shame the unfaithful believer will have when he stands before the Lord. Think of the loss of eternal rewards such a believer will experience. It will certainly pale in comparison to what the CSM lost.

The wonderful news is that no believer has to live as a hypocrite. With the power that the Holy Spirit provides, we can be faithful servants of the Lord. Our day of reckoning can be one which results in the approval of the Lord. It should be the prayer of every Christian the he or she would be the wise and faithful servant of the Lord's parable in Matthew 24. 



Ken Yates is Editor of the Journal for the Grace Evangelical Society and GES's East Coast speaker. He lives in Columbia, SC and pastors Little River Baptist Church in Jenkinsville, SC.



CHOSEN TO BEAR FRUIT

ELECTION IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

LIGHTSTOCK

A chapter from
*Chosen to Serve:
Why Election Is for Service,
Not for Eternal Life*



BY SHAWN LAZAR

Do you remember when it was time to give oral presentations in class?

It was always nerve-wracking for me.

When the teacher picked up her list of names and started randomly choosing who would go next, I would begin doing my best to avoid being noticed, but never knew how best to be inconspicuous. Should I stare at the ceiling or look at the ground? Should I look busy going through my notes or look her in the eyes very calmly?

Any which way, it was nerve-wracking.

I wonder how the disciples felt to have been chosen by Jesus.

Were they nervous?

Were they excited?

Was it amazing, humbling, or awesome to have the Son of God come to you, look you in the eyes, point His finger, and say, “Follow Me”?

John’s Gospel records four examples of Jesus’ speaking about choosing people (John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19). Not a single one refers to being individually elected for eternal life or death. Each is an example of Jesus’ choosing someone, usually an apostle, for service.

DID I NOT CHOOSE YOU?

In John 6, Jesus declared that He had chosen the twelve apostles:

Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70).

This was clearly not an individual election to eternal life, because one of the Twelve—Judas—was a devil, and that’s hardly the kind of language used to describe the regenerate (cf. John 13:10-11, 18). And yet Jesus is affirming that Judas was just as chosen as the others.

Moreover, the Lord chose Judas, knowing that he would betray Him. In his own way, Judas was chosen to serve, too. In this case, to fulfill Scripture. He would betray the Lord just as Ahithophel had once betrayed David and later hanged himself (cf. 2 Sam 16:20–17:3, 23; Ps 41:9).

CHOSEN TO BEAR FRUIT

In John 15, the point is repeated that the apostles were chosen by Jesus for a mission.

“You did not choose Me, but I *chose you* and appointed you *that you should go and bear fruit*, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16, emphasis added).

Notice that Jesus compares and contrasts His choice of the apostles with their choice of Him. That's significant because it suggests those choices happened on the same plane, that they're the same kind of election. As Lenski explains,

The negation, "you did not choose me," is proof that the affirmation, "I did choose you," cannot refer to predestination but must refer to the choice of the disciples as the friends whom Jesus selected for himself (middle voice) for the apostleship.¹

The apostles, Judas included, obviously did not choose Jesus for eternal life because the Lord doesn't need it—He *is* life, the very source of eternal life (John 1:4; 11:25; 14:6). Rather, the apostles accepted the invitation to follow Jesus on His Messianic mission.

So what did Jesus choose the apostles for? Not for eternal life, but to complete a mission in His service.² As Jesus says, they were chosen to "bear fruit" for Him in preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

CHOSEN OUT OF THE WORLD

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but *I chose you* out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:19, emphasis added).

When were the apostles chosen "out of the world"? It wasn't during a moment before time and space in the predestining mind of God. Rather, it was a this-worldly election, in time, not in eternity past. As Lenski argues, "The context forbids that we think of an act taking place in eternity; this choice occurred when the disciples were drawn to Jesus."³ When they were drawn to the Lord, they left their mundane vocations behind in order to pursue an evangelical mission.⁴ As Moulton and Milligan comment, this choice had

"*nothing to do with eternal predestination, but only with choosing them out of the world after they were in it. He had 'appointed' them, and put them into the position which they were to occupy on their post of duty... This can be nothing else but their going out into the world to take His place, to produce fruit to the glory of the Father, and to return with that fruit to their Father's house*" (emphasis added).⁵

They were apostles chosen to serve, to bear spiritual fruit,⁶ and to share the gospel promise as ambassadors for Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:20). And Jesus warned them that the world would hate them for it. They would represent Christ, and would be rejected for it, because so much of the world hates the light, and loves darkness. So the apostles had to be prepared to suffer for His service.

JESUS DRAWS ALL

In addition to the verses above, John 6 contains some sayings of Jesus that have been interpreted to teach individual election to eternal life.

If you'll recall, a large crowd had followed Jesus, and He miraculously fed them with a little boy's humble lunch. After that sign, they continued to follow Him, though, perhaps, not for the right reason:

Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled (John 6:26).

Given the thousands of people who were seeking Him, Jesus said:

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44).

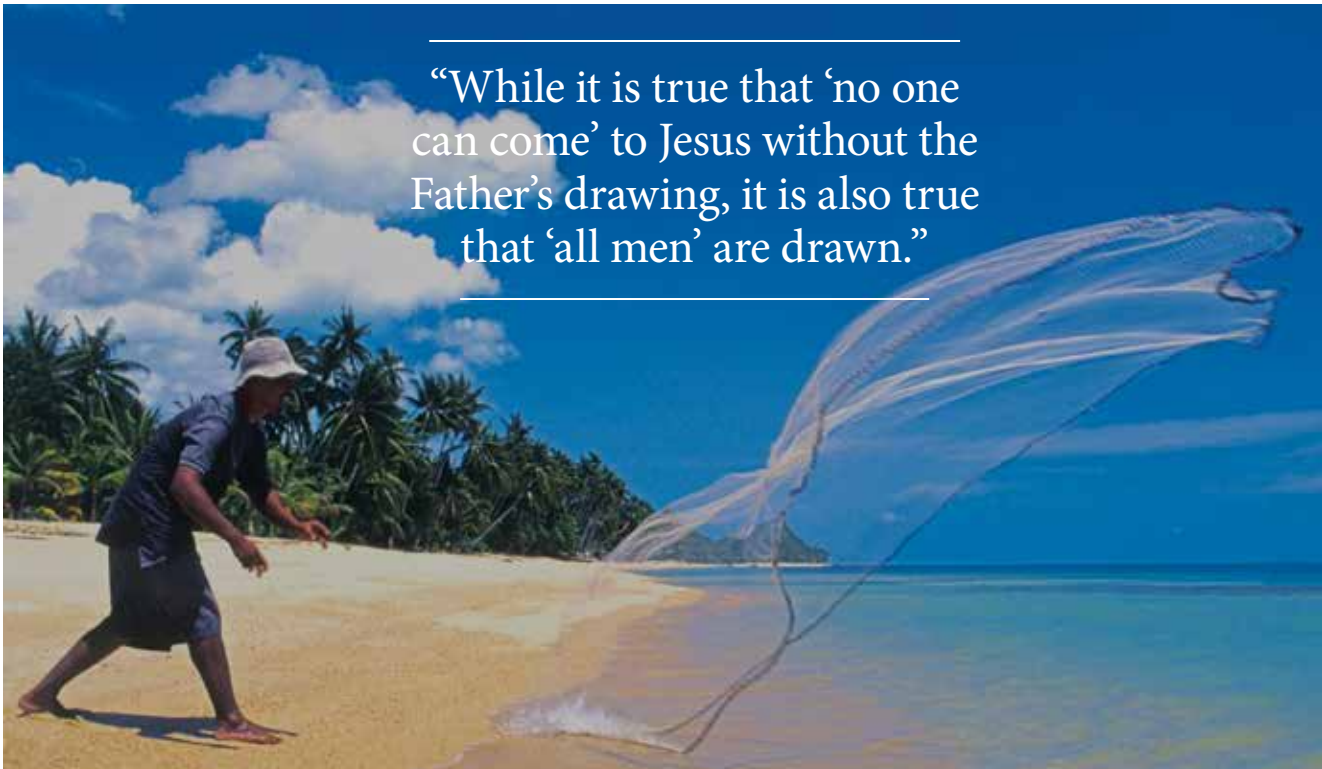
The problem with taking this verse as teaching that God only elects *some* individuals to eternal life, is that

John's Gospel makes very clear that God is drawing *all men* to Jesus.

Jesus is the "Light of men" who "enlightens every man" so that "all through him might believe" because God loves "the world" (John 1:4, 7, 9; 3:16). Jesus is very clear that *all men* are being drawn:

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* to Myself" (John 12:32, emphasis added).

So while it is true that "no one can come" to Jesus without the Father's drawing, it is also true that "all men" are drawn. No exceptions. In other words, Jesus is teaching that God is the One Who always takes the initiative in salvation. You might have thought that God was silently waiting for you to find Him of your own accord, but the truth is God was drawing you long before it ever occurred to you to start looking.



“While it is true that ‘no one can come’ to Jesus without the Father’s drawing, it is also true that ‘all men’ are drawn.”

LIGHTSTOCK

However, that drawing is *resistible*. Just because everyone is drawn does not guarantee that everyone will actually *believe* in Jesus for everlasting life. Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms that some people do not believe, not because God has not drawn them, but because they were unwilling to come.

“and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life” (John 5:40).

As George Bryson argues,

Here our Lord specifically tells us why these men did not have the Father’s Word abiding in them. It was not because they were not elect or that they were not irresistibly or effectually called. It was not because they had not been subjected to irresistible grace. It was because they inexcusably did not believe in God’s Son. Here our Lord tells us why they could not have eternal life. It was not for any of the reasons Calvinism suggests. Rather it was because they were not willing to come to God’s Son in faith.⁷

In sum, John 6:44 does not teach individual election to eternal life. Rather, Jesus is teaching that before you came to faith in Jesus, God was already drawing you and all men to His Son. But that drawing is *resistible*. Those who do not finally come to faith in Jesus have no one to blame but themselves.

ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVES

If Christ’s drawing is resistible, why, then, does Jesus also say in John 6, “All *that* the Father gives Me *will* come to Me”? In that case, the giving seems irresistible and unconditional. And it is. But this is not about individual election to eternal life. To see why, consider the whole passage.

“All *that* the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one *who* comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all *that* He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise *it* up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that *everyone who* beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise *him* up on the last day” (John 6:37-40, emphasis added).

Notice that I emphasized the pronouns. In his article, “Is John 6:37-40 ‘Frankly Predestinarian?’”⁸ Randy White points out there is a grammatical difference between the neuter pronoun *that* (*ho*) and the masculine pronoun *who*. John correctly and consistently uses *that* to refer to *things*, and *who* and *whom* to refer to *people*. Hence, White believes the switch in gender, from neuter to masculine, is deliberate, and essential to properly understanding the passage.

So what do the respective pronouns refer to? White argues *that* refers to the nation of Israel, whereas *who* refers to individual believers.

Remember the individual/corporate pattern in election we explored in chapter 3? [See *Chosen to Serve*, forthcoming.] We saw that God can unconditionally elect a corporate body, but an individual's participation in that body can be conditional. That same dynamic is at play in this passage. As White says,

Jesus is teaching something both about the national inheritance He has in Israel *and* something about the individual in the crowd who would not reject Him but come in faith then and there.⁹

White points out that, according to the Bible, the inheritance that God gives to Messiah is the nation of Israel (Deut 7:6, 14:2, 26:19; Exod 19:5-6; Ps 50:5; Jer2:3; Amos 3:2; Mal 3:17). The neuter *that* refers to Israel as a corporate body, which Jesus will unconditionally receive as His inheritance.

However, individual participation in Israel depends upon a person's faith. The masculine *who* refers to those believers.

When Jesus said, "All *that* the Father gives Me will come to Me," He was speaking about Israel and saying that He will receive Israel as His unconditional inheritance as Messiah.

When Jesus went on to say, "and the one *who* comes to Me I will certainly not cast out," He was speaking about individuals coming to believe in Him. If they did, they would be born again, and eternally secure, from the moment of faith. As White summarizes:

even though the nation (God's inheritance) was rejecting Jesus, that nation would not be lost. Rather, Christ would "raise it up on the last day." As Paul says, in the end "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). But what of the individual in Christ's day who believes? Is this individual going down with the nation? Jesus gives great assurance to that individual also that the one who sees Jesus and believes, "I will not cast out."¹⁰

CONCLUSION

When Jesus spoke of choosing people in the Gospel of John, it was in reference to an evangelistic mission, and a vocation to serve.

Even Judas was chosen to serve, if only in the sense that his betrayal was used by God to bring Jesus to the cross.

John's Gospel never speaks of individuals being chosen from all eternity for eternal life or death. As Forster and Marston summarized,

All too often "election" has been viewed as an irresistible ticket to blessing, rather than as the bestowal of an office. Thus, for example, the words "You have not chosen me but I have chosen you" have been made into the assertion about God selecting who should be saved. This is unjustifiable, for the whole passage is addressed specifically to the apostles. The choice Jesus mentions is linked specifically to their "appointment," i.e., to apostolic office.¹¹



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. Look for his new book, *Chosen to Serve: Why Election is for Service, Not for Eternal Life*, available soon.

1. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (St Louis, MO: Augsburg, 1963), 1051.

2. Edwin A. Blum, "John," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1983), 326.

3. Lenski, *John*, 1055-56.

4. John F. Hart, "John," *The Moody Bible Commentary*, eds. by Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2014), 1651.

5. Quoted in Samuel Fisk, *Election and Predestination: Keys to a Clearer Understanding* (Bicester: Penfold Book and Bible House, 1997), 105.

6. John F. Parkinson, *The Faith of God's Elect: A Comparison Between the Election of Scripture and the Election of Theology* (Glasgow: Gospel Tract Publishers, 2007), 77.

7. George Bryson, *The Dark Side of Calvinism* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2004), 202-203.

8. See <https://randywhiteministries.org/articles/john-637-40-frankly-predestinarian/>. Accessed July 28, 2017.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1974), 119-20.

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God's Sovereignty in Missions (Acts 18:1-28)

By Zane C. Hodges

Introduction

This section (Acts 18:1-17) concludes the second missionary journey. The first missionary journey (13:5-14:28) gave prominence to *the worker*; the second (16:6-18:17) to *the work*. In the first, we are occupied with God's *choice* for His work; in the second, with God's *control* of His work. That is, in 13:5-14:28, we have the rise of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and His vindication as an Apostle in the course of actual ministry on the field (14:27 and 15:4 and 12 are keynotes to this). But in 16:6-18:17 we are at once conscious of the sovereign guidance of the Spirit. Verses 16:6-10 shows how He both hinders and directs; 16:11-40 shows how He operates in individuals; and 17:1-18:17 shows how He operates in localities.

Three cities give us three different responses to the gospel.

First, Thessalonica is where Jewish opposition drove the apostolic witness not only from Thessalonica but from Berea as well (17:1-15).

Second, Athens is where Gentile pride in wisdom and indifference to the gospel, resulted in no maintenance of apostolic witness there.

And third, Corinth is where the Jewish opposition was frustrated, while Gentile interest was aroused by the gospel, and many people were aimed at the Lord.

Corinth (18:1-17) furnishes the climax of the lessons drawn from the second missionary journey. Here the sovereignty of God (with which the section began, 16:6-10) emerges prominently again.

Sovereign Provision

18:1-3. After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila. Virtually the first event at Corinth is Paul's location of a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who furnish him with both a lodging and a place to ply his trade. Though Paul did not know it at the time, this is a premonition of the comparatively lonely stay he will have in this city. And yet, lodging and maintenance are provided by a sovereign Lord.

God's sovereignty is even further manifested in that Aquila and Priscilla only recently came from Rome. Thus, they are just in time for the Apostle himself to arrive.

Moreover, they were driven to move by a decree of Claudius (**because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome**), behind whom was a decree of the Kings of Kings who was providing for His gospel in Corinth (cf. the decree of Caesar Augustus at the birth of Christ).

18:4-8. Paul's usual procedure of evangelization is followed—a procedure that, as a rule, often led to his expulsion from a city.

He evangelized in the synagogues and, after the arrival of Silas and Timothy, did so with unusual fervor (**compelled by the Spirit**). Once again we see the sovereign hand of God bringing the Apostle personal comfort through his companions in the work (Paul did not like to work alone, cf. 1 Thess 3:1, though he could). In connection with that comfort, the Lord compelled Paul to give an inward burden leading to solemn witness.

The Jewish reaction (**they opposed him and blasphemed**) is typical, and Paul separates from them with a solemn act (**he shook his garments**) and a solemn assertion hardly likely to arouse their good will (**"Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean"**).

Here, under the circumstances of separation from the Jews—**"from now on I will go to the Gentiles"**—we surely find every reason for him to anticipate intense persecution (cf. vv 9-10 which imply he did).

The sequel to the separation (vv 7, 8) is also fraught with danger. He occupied a house right next door to the synagogue! No less a person than the ruler of the synagogue defected to Christianity and many of the Corinthians were believing and being baptized (imperfect tenses).

Also note the mention of baptism here, an act implying Gentile proselytism, well calculated to arouse Jewish hostility. Based on all past experiences, an anticipated Jewish uprising was fully to be expected.

A Divine Vision

18:9-11. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision. The sovereign Lord encouraged His servant to continue witnessing in view of His gracious purposes in Corinth.

Once again human responsibility and divine sovereignty merge. There is human responsibility (**"Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent"**) and there is Divine sovereignty (**"for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."**)

18:12-17. Paul's faith was tested, and God's faithfulness was proved. God had promised *no harm*, but He did not promise *no danger*. However, as Paul is about to open his mouth (but not even that much effort is required), the mouth of Gallio becomes the instrument of God's deliverance. The charge (**"This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law"**) was one which might well have been effective under Roman law, but Gallio's judgment is that Christianity and Judaism are not legally distinguishable. This judgment (given in full by Luke) may have set the tone for Roman tolerance toward Christianity under Claudius (cf. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 375-76). Gallio was no less than a proconsul in rank and had prestigious family connections at Rome.

Thus, again, the sovereignty of God over the affairs of earth—the supremacy of an exalted Lord—is vindicated. The Lord's people in Corinth are called to Himself. But more (for He does more than we ask or think), a significant legal decision affecting the spread of the gospel throughout the empire was handed down. When the Risen Lord so wishes He can bend a Caesar's decree (v 3) and a proconsul's pronouncement (vv 14-15) to His sovereign purposes in grace.

Back to Ephesus

18:18-23. Ephesus was passed by previously (16:6) because of divine hindrance, and it is again passed over by Paul because of a vow he has taken (18:18).

At this point the focus of the inspired narrative is distinctly upon Ephesus. Luke only in the most hurried fashion is concerned at all with other places (cf.

vv 22-23). And this is only to show how Paul gets back to Ephesus.

We observe that God is still sovereignly controlling the choice of a time to labor in the Asian harvest field. When His servants were inclined to labor there, the Spirit hindered. When His servants were not inclined to labor there, the pleas of the Ephesians themselves did not avail (vv 19-21). God has divine ways of timing the movements of His Word. He may turn aside by His leading a well-intentioned desire in His servants or He may remove the desire itself.

Here, while Paul obviously is not unwilling to impart the gospel (he preaches on at least one sabbath day), yet at present his heart is toward Jerusalem. A Jewish vow is in the background (“**He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow**”), while a Jewish feast is in the foreground (“**I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem**”). His heart cannot rest at Ephesus now, so he goes on. Thus the Lord overruled again. This becomes the keynote of his attitude toward Asia.

The vow and the desire for the feast anticipate Paul’s attachment to Jerusalem and its ancient customs, attachments that later will draw him there again with far-reaching consequences. That Paul was by no means an “apostate” from Judaism as was supposed at Jerusalem (cf. 21:21) is shown here. His conciliatory actions at Jerusalem are no more than what he himself would do on his own initiative.

However, a need becomes apparent to Paul at Ephesus. But first he retraced the steps led him to the borders of Asia earlier (cf. 15:40–16:6 with vv 22-23) and this time he is able to enter the territory unhindered and for the fullest blessing.

Life, as well as history, is so overruled by a controlling hand that its various repetitions and parallelisms are a proof of the sovereign control lying behind them.

Prelude to Paul

18:24-28. Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. A further striking evidence of sovereign “timing” is seen in the incident of Apollos. Everything in this section is a masterful interlocking of events.


It is clear that the ministry of Apollos at Ephesus had a preparatory value for Paul’s later ministry. It was not as developed as Paul’s teaching, but it was accurate, as well as fervent. While such a ministry

can obviously have no place *after* the full Pauline revelation, it is a useful *prelude* to it. Like the ministry of John the Baptist himself, it has a preparatory character.

But just as Apollos was preparatory at Ephesus, so he is confirmatory at Corinth (vv 26-27). Between these two points he receives additional instruction from two believers (**When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately**) who had doubtless learned the most from Paul. Their presence in Ephesus at this time (cf. vv 18-19) is another point of the divine “timing.” Thus the Risen Lord sovereignly orders that Apollos’ ministry should precede Paul’s at Ephesus, and Paul’s should precede Apollos’ at Corinth, and that two humble believers, Aquila and Priscilla, should at the appropriate point bridge the gap. We are told (vv 27, 28) that Corinth was stronger for Apollos’ coming, and we do not doubt from what we subsequently see that Ephesus was a better field for Apollos’ having been there. Thus all is worked together by the Risen Lord of the Church.

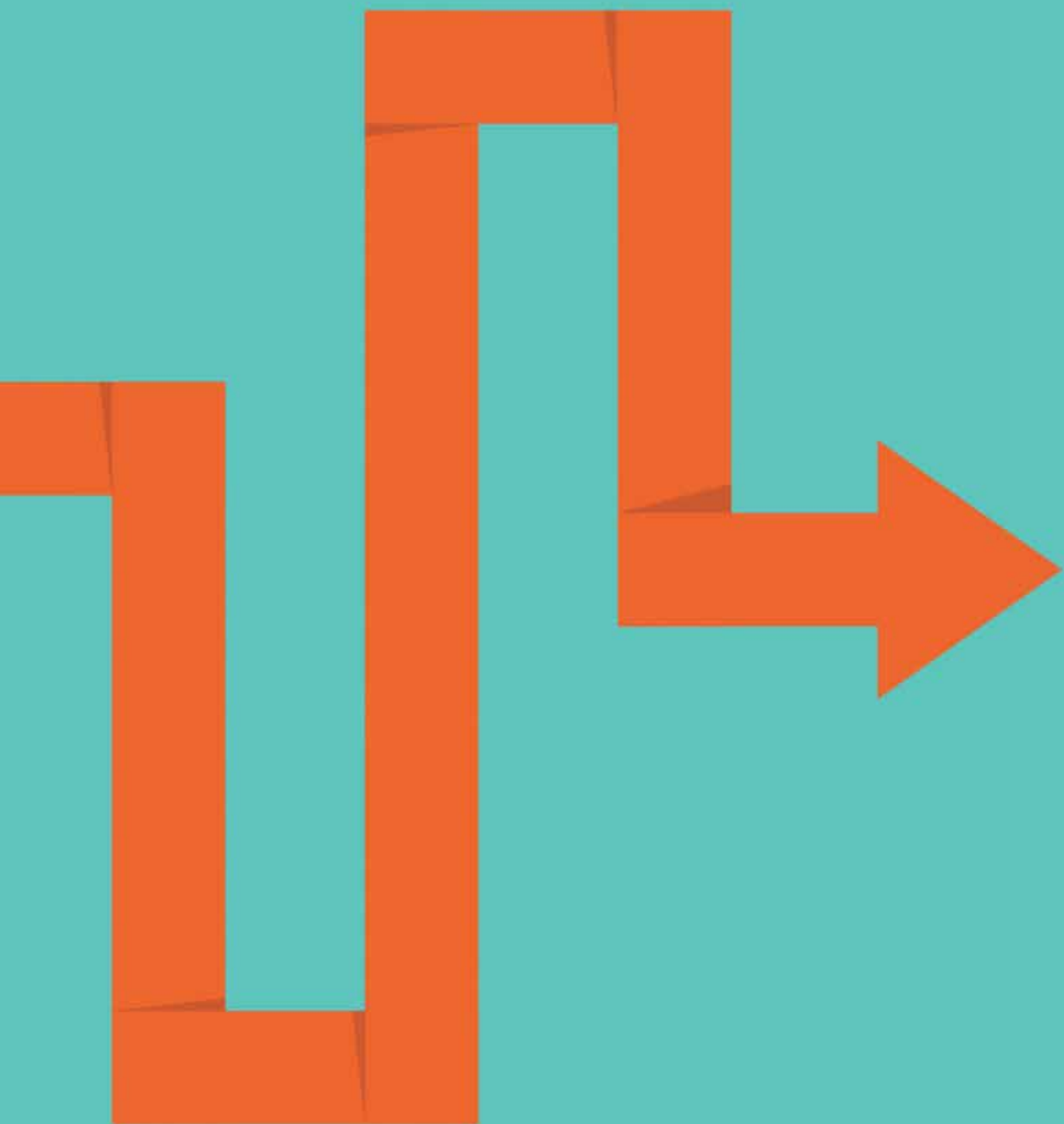
We already begin to see that, great though Paul was as an instrument of divine service, his work can be continued by a sovereign Lord even when Paul is not present to do it. (The next section of Acts, 19:21ff, presents the removal of the Apostle from active missionary labors.) Here in 18:24-28 we see how simple believers whom Paul has trained can be used to perpetuate Pauline truth through gifted men other than Paul. We see how a greatly gifted man, helped by such believers, can then himself help others to whom the Apostle has ministered.

All this occurs, without Paul, under the direction of the Lord. Thus the truth advances totally apart from the direct efforts of one of its greatest instruments.

God is sovereign and His Word is not bound! 



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



God was at work

BY BUD BROWN

I was born again in my twenty-fourth year on this planet. That moment concluded the first leg of my spiritual journey and marked the beginning of the next. The journey began many years earlier.

THE FIRST LEG

Ours was not a Christian family, but I occasionally encountered church as a child. I recall being in a Christmas play when I was a pre-schooler. A few years later my brothers and I made occasional forays to Sunday School as youngsters; we were drop-offs at the front door. I recall sitting with other kids I didn't know, staring at a map of some unknown place, trying to tune into a lesson I did not understand. That was the sum of my religious experience until High School.

But God was at work, bringing salvation to me.

My High School girlfriend attended church, so I went with her. I don't know if I was trying to impress her or if I wanted to know more about who God was; it was probably a little bit of both. My initial effort at dabbling in church ended with that relationship. It started up again when I met the girl I would marry. She was a church-going girl, so I started attending again. Church still didn't make much sense to me, but I kept at it.

Through it all, God was at work, bringing salvation to me.

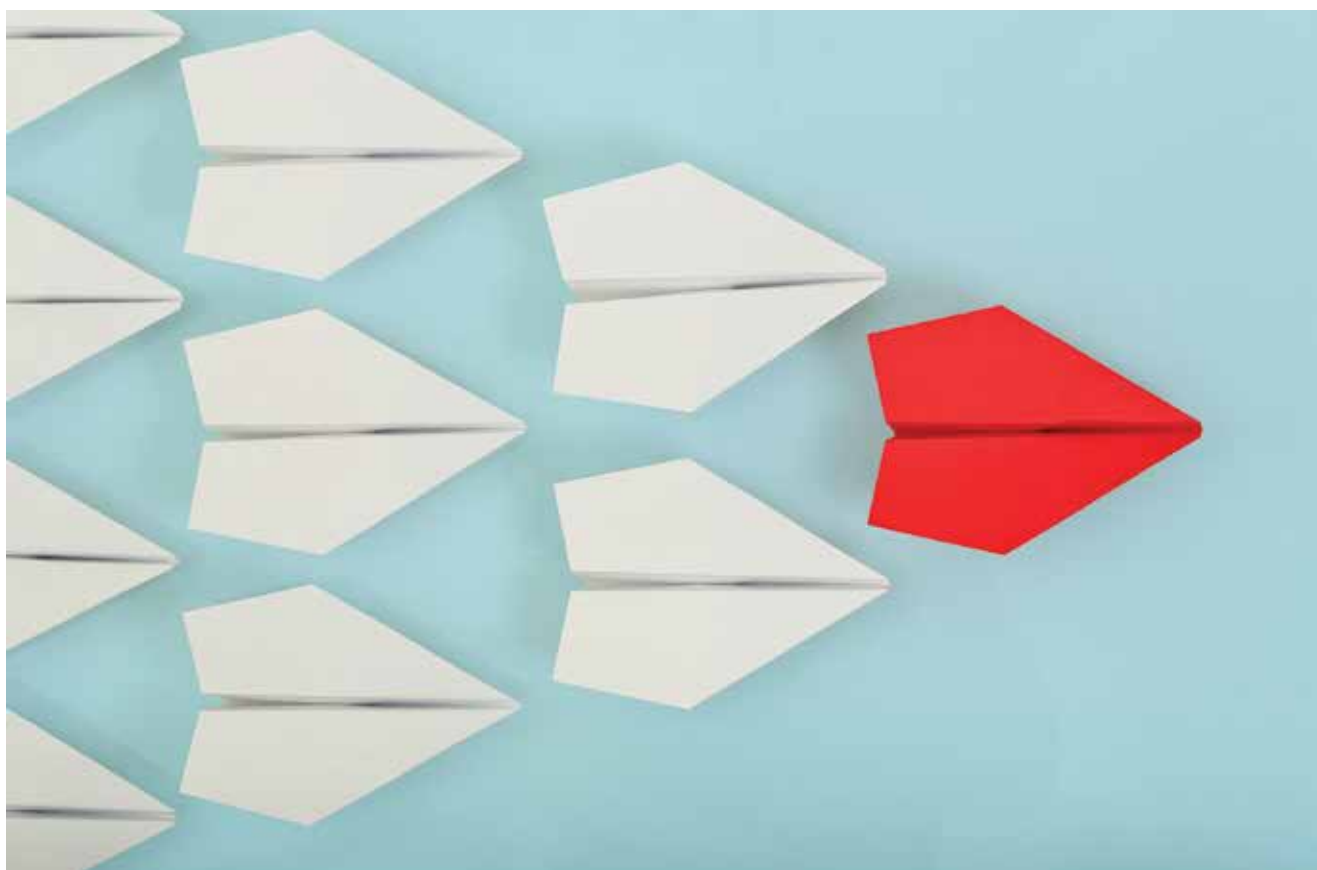
After we married, I joined the Catholic church and attended regularly. It still was something external, something outside of my "self" but God was at work. I hit a milestone when a parish priest said in his homily that good people read their Bibles. We had one of those big, white Bibles with the embossed leather cover and red and black lettering sitting on the coffee table. I didn't know what I was doing, but I started reading it because I wanted to be "good."

Then something happened. I started having serious questions.

What I read in the Bible didn't match the Church's teaching, so I met with the priest to ask him about it. I don't remember my questions. Neither do I remember his answers. The upshot of his answer was, "Because I said so." I've always been an independent thinker who recognizes when someone pulls rank. Not to put too fine a point on it, I can say that his response didn't cut it with me.

In that process, God was at work, bringing salvation to me.

I started asking around. I read more and dug deeper. Soon I was running into people eager to tell me about Jesus and the Bible. While my search was underway my two younger brothers became believers.



123RF

My youngest brother was an ardent witness; he and I engaged in many long discussions. He invited me to a study group he attended. I started finding answers to my questions.

God was at work, bringing salvation to me.

The moment I said, “this stuff about Jesus is true” came on the third night of a prophecy crusade in 1972. That evening’s presentation concerned the Great Tribulation, the mark of the Beast, and various other eschatological horrors. On the ride home I asked my brother, “What do I have to do to bypass all travail?”

He handed me a gospel tract and left it up to God. My wife was asleep so I read the tract, alone. I still see that place in the living room where I knelt and prayed. The rocker recliner I knelt before was clad in plush, grey velour; a matching grey floor lamp stood beside it. The carpet was a high low cut. It was at that spot the first phase of my journey came to an end when I told God I was convinced. I believed in Jesus for my salvation.

Looking back over more than 40 years I see God was at work. “The grace of God has appeared,

bringing salvation for all people (Titus 2:11).” God graciously brought salvation to me.

THE SECOND LEG

The first leg of my spiritual journey took fifteen years. The next leg lasted seven. The Holy Spirit was at work, showing me the root of my sinful behaviors so I could begin to live the eternal life I’d received that night.

I was pretty rough when the second leg started. I was arrogant, self-willed, highly competitive, and I was focused on gathering wealth. I still enjoyed various mind-altering substances, and I was a ruthless business competitor. I was conformed more to the world than to Christ’s image.

At first the only change in my life was church on Sundays. I gave up hunting and competitive shooting. During the week I was still a mess. I was consumed with building a business that would one day be all mine. I was still angry, arrogant and proud.

But God’s grace was at work, transforming me.

In time I left the business for Bible college. Some ungodly behaviors had fallen away, but others still

remained. Nobody saw this because now I was striving for academic rather than financial success. I overachieved in my studies. I sprinted through college in three years as a working man. I graduated at the top of my class and became the first from that school to be accepted at Dallas Seminary. I blew through my first year with perfect grades. I had exchanged one idol for another.

But God's grace continued to work, transforming me bit by bit.

We were out of money at the end of that first year in seminary. Since we would not borrow money for education, I sat out the next year. Instead, during that sabbatical, God carried me to the destination for this leg of my spiritual journey.

One day, while I was at work framing a house, the Lord impressed upon me, "Why are you so driven?" Reflecting on that question led to a sudden "Aha!" moment of clarity and insight. It was a revelation that led to a revolution.

Virtually everything I did was driven by the fact that I didn't like myself. I didn't like myself because I didn't think that anyone else did, either. At some point, no doubt very early in life, I had decided that those who did not like me would either respect or fear me. That is why I had to excel at everything. Business associates would admire me or fear me as a competitor. In school people would respect me or would fear having me in the same class lest I be the "curve wrecker."

How had I become my own idol? Why was my ego and self-worth at the center of everything I had ever done? The Holy Spirit revealed that my dislike for myself, based on the belief that no one else liked me for me, had grown out of a variety of meaningless events in early childhood!

By seven years of age I was on a journey that took over twenty years. I spent those years trying to fit in, to be good enough. Success, respect, and fear were the coin I used to buy my way in. I had spent my life up to that point as an idolater. I was compelled by the need to feel that I mattered.

But the grace of God was at work, leading me away from the idol of works-based self-worth.

I read Scripture with fresh eyes. It taught me that my worth is intrinsic. I am valuable simply because we are made in His image (Gen 1:26-28). God values us because an attack on our lives is an attack upon him (Gen 9:6). If you establish our value by the price God paid for us, you could not calculate the sum (1 Pet 1:18).

The grace of God helped me understand we do not acquire value; it is intrinsic. I was freed from the need of being "good enough." I already am. I can't describe the sense of lightness, well being, that experience

of *shalom*. I was released, renewed, set free.

That leg of the journey lasted seven years. It had been God's work, leading me as declared in scripture. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions (Titus 2:11-12)."

THE THIRD LEG

The current leg of my spiritual journey has been underway for over thirty years. Although I will not arrive at the final destination in this life, God graciously grants continued progress toward the destination.

I am not driven by the need to serve the idol. Most of the anger, ambition, and the need to impress have fallen away. I live simply, I don't want much, and one of my delights is throwing away stuff I used to collect. It drives my wife crazy, but it's where I'm at today.

I haven't arrived—yet. I still stumble. I lose my temper occasionally. I'm still overly focused on tasks rather than people. There are still a few people I want to think well of me. When you criticize me, I listen for God speaking in that. If your criticism has merit, I deal with it. If not, I try make things right with you. But if you don't want to be right with me, it no longer bothers me.

Law had nothing to do with any of this. Arriving at the place of comfort in my own skin had nothing to do with someone's version of the law. All of my Christian life I have known law, but it did me no good. It did not illuminate the reason for my behavior. It gave me no freedom from my idolatry. It only heaped guilt by reminding me that all I did was wrong.

Only the grace of God, poured out on my life, helped me grow in Christ.


It was the grace of God that brought salvation to me on the first leg of my spiritual journey. It was the grace of God that transformed me during the next leg, and it is the grace of God that has produced within me a great longing for his Kingdom. It is becoming ever more the most important thing in life. I regularly look forward to and long for that day. Paul's plea, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus" is always in the back of my mind.

Oddly, perhaps, the threat of being caught doesn't deter me from sin. Neither does a fear of punishment. I am deterred by the fact that one day I will have to explain myself to Jesus at the Bema Seat, and by my desire to have the richest experience of the kingdom possible to me.

SO FAR

This has been my journey. God has graciously worked in and through me, as he promised. I can testify that indeed, this is true:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

When our journey has finished, we will all look back and say, "Indeed, it's all grace." 



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

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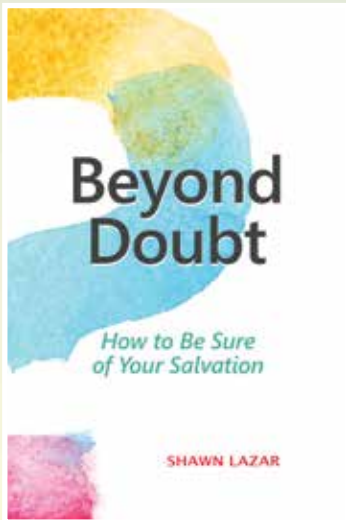
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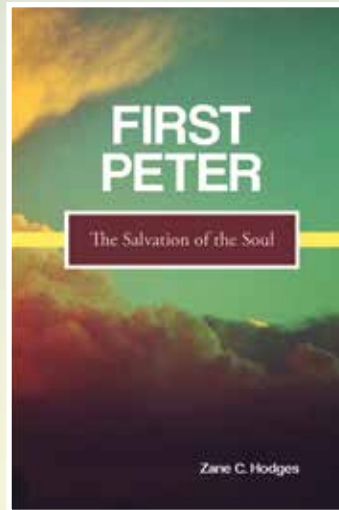


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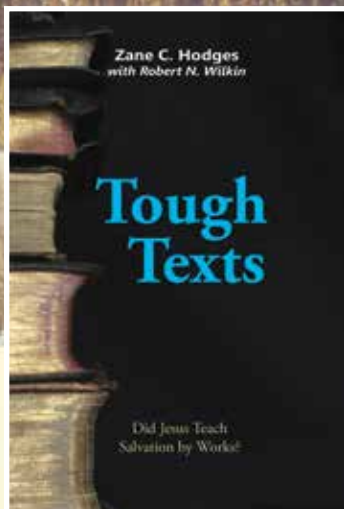


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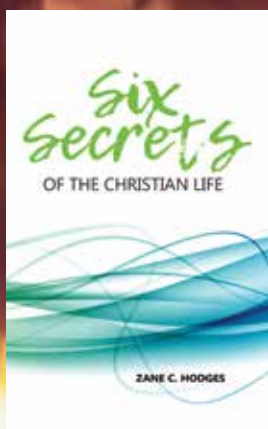


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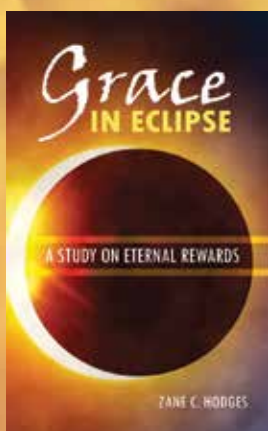


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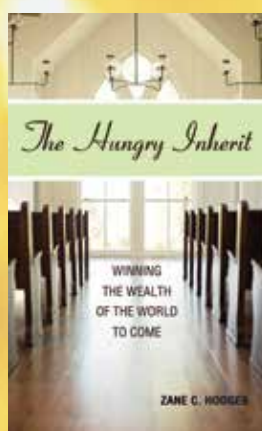


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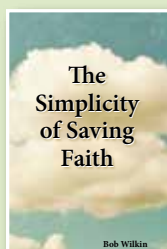
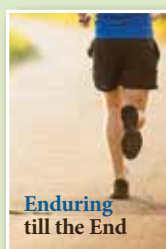


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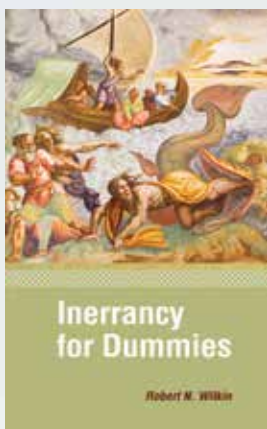
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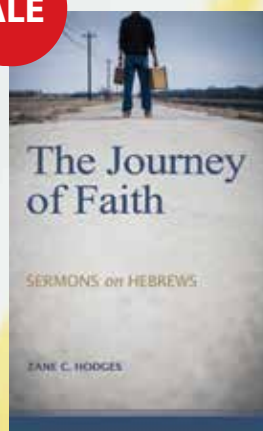
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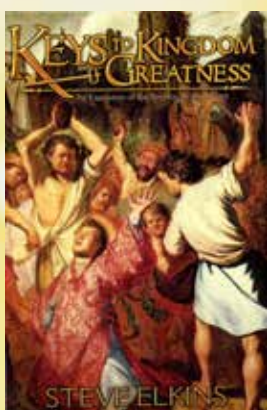


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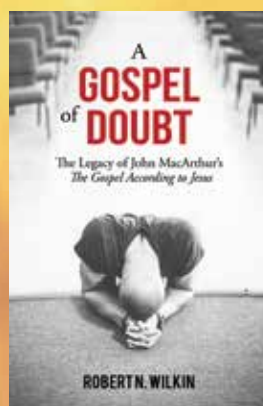


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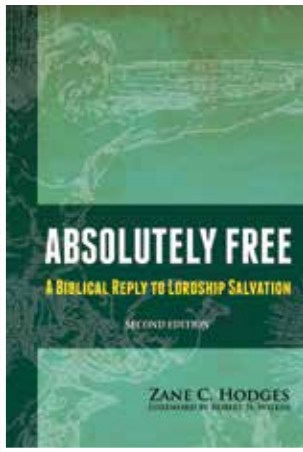


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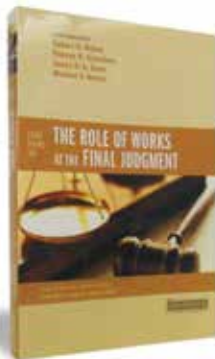
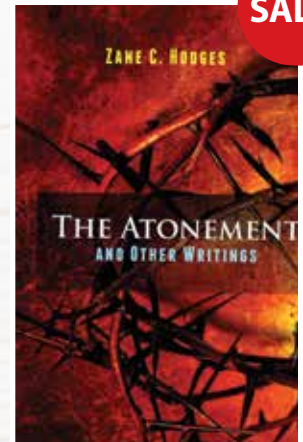
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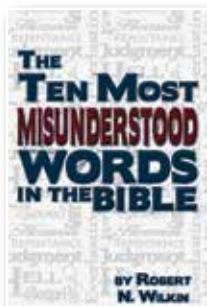
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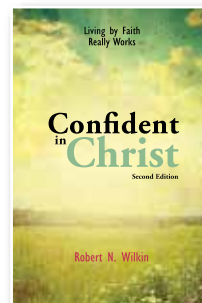
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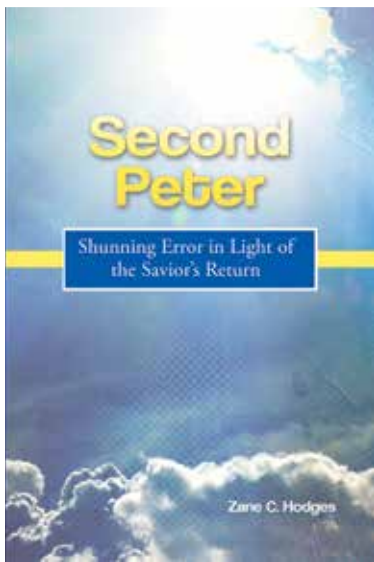
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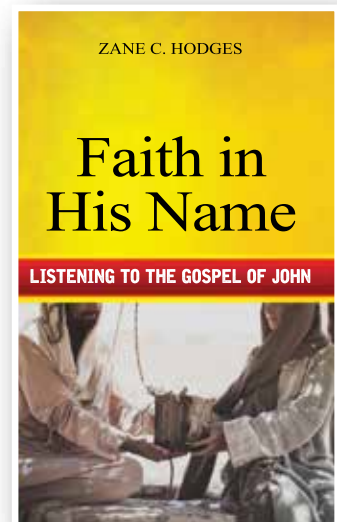
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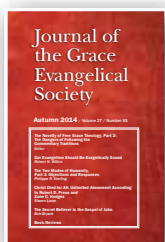
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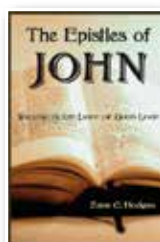




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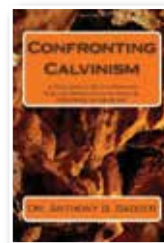


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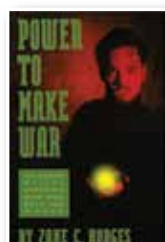


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The Denver Regional Conference

By Bob Wilkin

We have decided to continue pursuing regional conferences across the country. People need them. You have asked for them.

Many of you, our readers, have contacted us expressing how lonely you feel, especially those who do not live close to Free Grace churches. You lack fellowship and good teaching. You would like to go to the National Conference, but it is too far away.

By holding regional conferences, Free Grace people can come together, and be encouraged, edified, and equipped to continue the work of spreading the message of eternal life.

Our latest regional was held in Denver. The Denver Rescue Mission (DRM) graciously provided a wonderful location for us to have the conference. About fifty people gathered for three hours Friday night and six hours on Saturday.

The messages were excellent. Speakers included three people from DRM: Lon Gregg, Steve Walkup, and Steve Swihart.


Other speakers included Drs. Jody Dillow, Dix Winston, Steve Lewis, John Niemelä, and me.

Messages were on eternal rewards, the outline of Matthew's Gospel, Mark 16:16, Joseph of Arimathea, Matt 4:17, Heb 10:26-39, Salvation in James, Why Faith Isn't a Personal Encounter, and Col 1:21-23.

We are still learning how to organize these conferences efficiently. Costs can easily get out of control. But we're improving, and you guys keep giving. So far, it has usually been one or two donors from a particular region who help defray the cost of the whole conference. Are you that person in your neck of the woods?

We have at least one more regional to be held in 2017 (Sept 8-9 in Lynchburg, VA).

There are at least six regionals in the planning stages for 2018—in San Antonio, California, Florida, South Carolina, and either Oregon or Washington. Maybe St. Louis, MO.

We want to hear from you. We want to go where we are wanted. Where to next? 

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



*Hang
Out
in the
Light*

By Ron Rosso

The Apostle Paul said, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim 1:15).

Notice Paul used the present tense (“I am”), as opposed to the past tense. Thus, his being “chief among sinners” *was his current reality*.

Paul was appointed by God—even before birth—to be an apostle (cf. Gal 1:15). By the time he wrote these words to Timothy, he had been an apostle for decades, with an extraordinary ministry. Yet, he was still chief among sinners! That was Paul’s sober judgment.

And was anyone more aware than Paul of the extraordinary and rampant evil present in the world? No.

When Paul said he was the chief of sinners, he was not divorced from reality, but being the quintessential realist.

After all, it was Paul who also said, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for I have the will within me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Rom 7:18).

Later in Romans, Paul made clear that this is the universal plight of all Christians.

The point is this: *we all possess the same fallen-nature*. It is no less fallen and depraved in one person than it is in any other. Of course, God has granted us the resources to gain victories over it, but it never changes or leaves us on this side of the grave.

Those who spend the most time, in the brightest light, are often most aware of their blemishes. For example, I hate going to my dentist because he has the ultimate lighting system. It shows every flaw possible. I much prefer the dimly lit mirrors at home!

As believers, we are to make a lifestyle of hanging out in the ultimate light—the Word of God. In so doing, we, too, will become spiritual realists.

I have discovered that the folks who are most in touch with truth, are the most aware of their own sin. They are quick to admit when they’re wrong, and slow to focus on the sins of others.

I have found that, like Paul, believers who admit they are the chief of sinners turn out to be the most fruitful! ■■■

Ron Rosso is a businessman and Bible Study teacher. He lives in Atlantic County, NJ.

DO YOU MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION?



By Bill Fiess

The Greek word *typos*, from which our English word “type” derives, is an interesting term. *Typos* comes from a root which means “to strike,” and thus the Greeks used the word to denote an impression made by a blow in wax or metal. They also used *typos* to refer to a form, an imprint, an image, a footprint, a model to be imitated, an example or pattern. The typewriter got its name because the user strikes a key which in turn strikes an ink ribbon which leaves an impression on a sheet of paper.

Note how we, like the Greeks, use these concepts not just literally, but metaphorically as well. We may say, for example, “Sally strikes me as friendly. Her sunny nature impresses others.” We believers should

strive both to model behavior which pleases God and to strike others with the right impression. In other words, we should set a good example to other believers and to the world.

NEW TESTAMENT USES

The word *typos* is often used in the NT and is frequently translated as “example” (“ensample” in the KJV). Let’s look at a short list of verses containing the word *typos*; we will see why it is so important that our lives impress people the right way and that we follow in the footprints of Our Lord. What we do matters; great rewards are at stake.

The NT writers use *typos* in both a negative and positive sense. For example, the Apostle Paul uses it in a negative sense in a warning to the Corinthian believers:

“Now these things became our examples [*typos*], to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted” (1 Cor 10:6; see also 1 Cor 10:11).

The consequences of sinful behavior in a believer’s life, according to this passage, are far reaching and can be experienced in the here and now. We know from other passages, such as 1 Cor 3:10-15, that behavior not pleasing to the Lord results in serious loss of reward in the life to come.

In his epistle to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul exhorts all believers to strive for reward and to follow his example in godly living:

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, *I press toward*

the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern [*typos*]” (Phil 3:12-17, emphasis added)

The Apostle Paul defines what is included in setting a godly example for others: “in all things showing yourself to be a pattern [*typos*] of good works; in

doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you” (Titus 2:7-8).


Not just individuals are responsible to set an example, but entire congregations are exhorted to do such: “so that you became examples [*typos*] to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe” (1 Thess 1:7).

The Apostle Peter specifically addresses church elders and the necessity that they in particular model behavior that pleases the Lord: “nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples [*typoi*] to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet 5:3-4) There is a special reward for church elders who faithfully and responsibly lead the people of God.

CONCLUSION

When Charles Barkley played in the NBA, he famously said more than once that he was not a role model. In reality, though, he was, whether he wanted to be or not.

Likewise, every single Christian is an example to others, both believers and unbelievers, whether he realizes it or not.

The question is, will we be a good example, a good role model for others? Will we be faithful to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Will our lives strike people with a favorable impression? If yes, then we will gain full reward at the Bema and will rule with Christ in the next life. That is good motivation. Let us type well, friends. 



Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia.

The Mailbag

By You

Send us your mail. We love to hear from you. We want to know what's going on, what questions you have, what objections you have, and how *Grace in Focus* has blessed you.

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"Thank you for your recent article, 'Not Pain Free' by Pastor Allen Rea. I read with interest. Though I haven't had an accident like Pastor Rea, I have had my dark days spiritually. I am thankful that the Lord has brought me through that through counselling, the Truth of the Word, and the prayers of others." ~L.W., email.

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Hagar Does Not Deserve Her Bad Rap

By Marcia Hornok

HAGAR THE HEROINE?

Christians don't usually think of Hagar as a Bible person to emulate. Rather than submit to Sarai, she became antagonistic and ran away like a rebellious teen—a pregnant one. Yes, she brought some of her suffering on herself, but consider that she had been exiled from her people and her homeland of Egypt.

As a slave she had no privileges; as a woman, she had no rights.

She was not a Hebrew, and thus had no status.

As a maidservant, her owners used her.

That was her life.

But she had obviously become a believer in the God of Abram, and she has a place in God's Holy Word. So much so, that her life story can be an example for us.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

First, it must be noted that God had promised Abram a son, but God never said Sarai would be the son's mother until Ishmael was thirteen years old (Gen 17:25). God's plans were not thwarted by Ishmael's birth. In fact, God's promise to Hagar to multiply



Ishmael's descendants so they cannot be counted parallels His blessing to Abraham. Both would beget twelve leaders and become a great nation (cf. Gen 16:10; 17:20; 21:18; 25:16). Thus, Abraham's descendants through both Ishmael and Isaac exist today.

Second, Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as his wife (Gen 16:3). This may have been bigamy, but it was not adultery. (Later, God used maidservants to produce four of the twelve tribes of Israel.)

Third, God did special things for Hagar. Both times in the wilderness (Genesis 16 and 21) God conversed with her. In fact, Hagar is the first Bible person God favored with His appearance as "The Angel of the Lord" (Gen 16:7). He told her what to do about her problems with Sarai. Amazingly, He sent her back to the place of conflict and told her to submit¹ to the source of her suffering. No rescue for Hagar—what kind of solution was that?

GOD'S PROMISES TO HAGAR

Like Hagar, we often try to run away from our problems. We trust in God to fix them, but His solution for

us may similarly be “return and submit” to your pain (Gen 16:9). Like Hagar, we can do this because of God’s promises. What were they?²

1. Her son Ishmael would be like a wild donkey. Donkeys were valued animals—the Dodge Ram trucks of that day—but a wild donkey implies a free-roaming or nomadic existence. God told Hagar that Ishmael would live free and independent, not be a slave like herself.

2. Ishmael would have a powerful hand. He would be strong and prevail, meaning he would not run away from conflict like she did.

3. And Ishmael would have a place of his own in the presence³ of his brethren, not be exiled from his family like Hagar was.

These promises for her son were so wonderful, Hagar did something no one else in all of Scripture had the privilege of doing—she gave God a new name.⁴ He is the “God who sees.” Her son’s name will remind her that “God hears.” Hagar’s wilderness experience gave her new insights about God. She is not abandoned—God sees and hears. Rather than eliminating her suffering, He gave her something to help her endure it—Himself. With this assurance, she returned to Abram and Sarai.

Calculating from ages given in Genesis 16 and 21, Hagar lived in her undesirable situation for about seventeen years before God allowed her to leave (Genesis 21). Then she found herself in the wilderness again, dying of thirst. But God heard the cry of the son whose name means “God Who hears,” and the “God Who sees” opened Hagar’s eyes to see a well. (Abraham and his descendants had to

dig their own wells, but God provided one for Hagar and Ishmael.)

HAGAR’S LEGACY TO US

When you suffer, do you also want to run away? Do you plead for the thorn’s removal or at least ask God to show you reasons?

God gives *promises* not *explanations*.

“Hagar’s wilderness experience gave her new insights about God. She is not abandoned—God sees and hears. Rather than eliminating her suffering, He gave her something to help her endure it—Himself.”

He wants us to ask “*Who* are You, Lord?” not “*Why* am I suffering?”

Every [be]wilderness is an opportunity to see God in a new way and learn things you did not know before.

With this perspective of Hagar, we can also see Ishmael in a new light. Another “first” in Genesis is found in 21:20, “God was with the lad.” Later, this phrase about God’s presence is given in the book for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, but Ishmael was first. Is God’s presence enough for us, especially when we suffer? After we believe the promise of eternal life, the best promise in Scripture is that God

is with us. Not only does He see and hear, but He never leaves or forsakes us.

We may not get a remedy, but we are not without resources. We have God’s presence. He sees our needs and hears our pleas. When we remember this, we can respond like Hagar—surrender to God and submit to suffering if that is what God wants. **END**



Marcia Hornok is the managing editor of CHERA Fellowship, a quarterly print magazine for people who have been

widowed. She is the wife of a retired minister and mother of six.

1. The Hebrew word related to being afflicted or humbled is found in v 6, Sarai dealt “harshly” with her; v 9, Hagar should “submit” herself under Sarai’s hand; and v 11, God heard her “affliction” (cf., Gen 15:3).

2. Tony Maalouf presents this perspective in his book, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2003), pp. 49-106.

3. Some translations say he will dwell in hostility to his brethren, but compare the Hebrew in 16:8 “from face of”...Sarai, to the Hebrew in 16:12 “in faces of”...all his brethren. It is a geographical term (see Maalouf, p. 73).

4. Others assigned a name to the place where they encountered God, but Hagar assigned a new name to God.



TEACHABLE PASTORS IN ZAMBIA

Grace Goes to Zambia

By Ken Yates

I just got back from Zambia, Africa and wanted to give an update.

The trip was outstanding.

My daughter, Kathryn, son-in-law Dewey, and I were gone about two weeks.

I taught at a Bible college there. One of the professors is a young man from Zambia that I tutored in Greek while he was attending a seminary in Columbia, SC (where I live). I had given him three books by Zane published by GES and he asked if I could come teach there.

I had 22 pastors in class for a total of 40 hours.

The class was on eternal salvation. They had never been exposed to Free Grace Theology. They were extremely interested and asked tons of questions. I gave each of them a copy of *Absolutely Free* and one of the little handouts put out by Bob Bryant (Cypress Valley Bible Church and 289 Design) on the difference between salvation and discipleship.

The pastors were very receptive. At the end of the course they said it had changed the way they saw the Bible and how they were going to preach and do ministry. Praise God!

I also had the opportunity to preach at a church (Sunnyside Baptist Church) in the capital of the

country (Lusaka). There is a service in English and one in the native language. It is a large church with the two services having around 500 people.

Since the clear message of grace and assurance is extremely rare in Zambia, I preached a simple message on the Woman at the Well. After the service in the native language, the translator told me that the people were very interested in what the passage taught. They were saying that nobody had ever told them that Jesus offers eternal life to *them* as a free gift.

Needless to say, I was thrilled. This experience confirms what I have seen in other countries. The folks are very receptive to Free Grace teaching and they are excited about how Free Grace opens up the Scriptures.

Trips such as this involves a lot of time but are very rewarding. The hard part is realizing that often there are no Free Grace teachers to build them up afterward.

I look forward to GES doing more of this overseas ministry in the near future. 



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



SUNNYSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT?

By Bob Wilkin

Preachers and Theologians Sometimes Make Up Stuff

Preachers and theologians tend to be careful when explaining fundamental Biblical truths like the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, Jesus' bodily resurrection on the third day, the Second Coming of Christ, and the inerrancy of Scripture.

By *careful*, I mean that they will quote Scriptures to back up their explanations. And they will try hard to avoid going beyond what the Scriptures say.

But when it comes to the doctrines of justification and sanctification the same preachers and theologians are often not careful. We see this all the time when they explain justification by faith alone. It becomes justification by submission, surrender, following Christ, and obeying Christ. While Scriptures may be mentioned, their arguments are primarily theological. Jesus is the King of kings. He is sovereign. So to believe in Him we must surrender to His authority, rule, and reign.

At least that is how the argument goes.

No Scripture says what they argue. They simply argue based on what they think makes sense.

The same is true in many cases when it comes to sanctification. Recently I received an email pointing me to the greatest message the blogger, himself a theologian, had ever heard on sanctification. The message was on walking in the Spirit based on Romans 6 and Galatians 5.

Is Walking in the Spirit Obeying God?

The speaker suggested that walking in the Spirit boils down to *obeying God in the power of the Holy Spirit*. For him the issue is *obedience to God's commands*.

The funny thing is his view is directly contradicted by Romans 6-8 and Galatians 5. Paul makes it clear in both places that sanctification cannot come by focusing on the commandments. Only by focusing on Christ and falling more and more in love with Him can we grow spiritually.

In other words, obedience to God's commands is the *result* of walking in the Spirit over time, not the definition of walking in the Spirit itself.

Walking in the Spirit Is a Faith Walk

Even a casual reading of Galatians shows that walking in the Spirit is the opposite of walking in the flesh. The Judaizers who were bothering the believers in Galatia were teaching that in order to be justified one must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (Gal 1:8-9; 5:4). Sanctification, in their understanding, is a condition of justification. That is, one must continue to live a set apart life in order to remain justified before God.

Walking in the flesh is not, as many wrongly think, outright rebellion against God. Biblically, the concept of walking in the flesh is *legalism*. It is the person who is actually seeking to obey and



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please God, but he is doing so in the wrong way—by focusing on commandments, on rules and regulations.

Think of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, United Pentecostals, devout Catholics and Orthodox, and Lordship Salvation folks. They mean well. They want to please God. But their understanding of justification and sanctification is legalistic.

Yes, but don't some of these preachers speak of obeying God *in the power of the Spirit*? Yes, they do. But simply by sprinkling the words "in the power of the Spirit" over legalism does not undo the damage. Even Roman Catholics today speak of the necessity of God's grace and the power of the Spirit of God in our lives.

When I heard the speaker define walking in the Spirit as *obeying God in the power of the Holy Spirit*, I thought, *he is making this up. He has no text which says or implies that. He simply knows that the audience will eat that up. He is calling them to obey and he is throwing in a mystical reference to the power of the Spirit.*

Admittedly the Holy Spirit does enable believers to obey, but that is not what walking in the Spirit is.

Walking in the Spirit is the opposite of walking in the flesh.

Walking in the spirit is the opposite of legalism.

It starts with living each day with assurance that I have everlasting life by faith in Christ, apart from works, and that there is nothing I can do to miss out on the kingdom. Gal 3:1-14 and 5:1-4 shows that clearly. Those who lack certainty of their eternal destiny cannot walk in the Spirit because they will of necessity look to their works

for assurance. Those who have certainty by faith in Christ, apart from works, will walk in the Spirit if they are hungry for God's truth and gather with other like-minded believers each week under sound Bible teaching in a local church. See Gal 5:1–6:18. God takes the clear teaching of His Word and transforms the lives of those who are walking by faith (Rom 12:2; Gal 5:8; 6:6, 16; 2 Cor 3:18).

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Another Explanation of Walking in the Spirit: Spiritual Breathing


I've heard another explanation of walking in the Spirit. Some say it is confessing our sins and then asking the Spirit of God to take control. This is sometimes called *spiritual breathing*. Exhale your sins and inhale the Holy Spirit.

But there is no text which says this. Yes, we are to confess our sins. But walking in the Spirit is walking spiritually as opposed to carnally. Legalists walk carnally. Whether believers or unbelievers, they are like Pharisees. To walk spiritually is to see reality the way God does. It is to have "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). We see ourselves as secure in Christ and we see change as something God produces in us as long as we are open to God's

Word and gather each week to hear it clearly taught.

The Word of God Transforms Those Who Are Open

Change takes place over time. There is power in God's Word being taught. Week in and week out our minds are changed. Our worldview changes. No one sermon gives us all we need to grow. It is the accumulation of solid sermons over months and years and decades that the Spirit of God uses to transform us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:18).

So, walk in the Spirit. That is, retain assurance by continuing to abide in God's grace and sit under sound Bible doctrine. You will grow over time if you do. God will do that work in you if you are receptive to His Word. 



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Calvinism: Twelve Key Verses is coming soon.

Q&A

By Staff

ARE BELIEVERS UNDER LAW TODAY?

Q Galatians 2:19 and Rom 7:14 seem to be saying that believers are no longer under the Law of Moses, or any law. When we become believers, we are set free from law. Have I missed the boat? ~RE, email

A I think you have one leg in the boat and one leg in the water. Let's see if we can get you fully back in the boat.

You are correct that believers are no longer under the Law of Moses (Rom 6:14; 7:4-6; 8:2; 10:4; Gal 2:19; etc.).

However, believers in the Church Age are under law. The Greek word is *nomos*. If you do a concordance study, you will find that the law which we are under is variously called "the law of liberty" (Jas 2:12), "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2), "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2), and "the royal law" (Jas 2:8).

What is this law we are under?

The commands of the NT.

Nine of the Ten Commandments are part of both the Law of Moses and the law of Christ. Only the fourth commandment, to remember the Sabbath (the seventh day, Saturday), is not part of the law of Christ. The commands we find in the teachings of the Lord Jesus and His Apostles are our law today.

Of course, we are not born again by keeping the law of Christ, or any

law. But the law of Christ is part of our sanctification.

Though you did not ask, I think Romans 7 makes it clear that a fixation on the commandments, even the commandments for us today, will not result in godliness, but in defeat. Our focus must be on the Commander, not the commands. As we focus on Jesus, we fall more in love with Him and we long to please Him and we are transformed (2 Cor 3:18). Of course, we are to study the commands we are under and to pray for the Spirit of God to empower us to keep them. When we confess our sins (1 John 1:9), we are admitting that we broke one of the commands and that we desire to keep it.

It is going too far to say that believers today are not under law at all.

~Bob

FORGIVE US OUR SINS

Q "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

If Jesus died for our sins (past, present and future), why do we confess our sins and repent from our sins even after becoming Christians? If we are already forgiven, what is the point of confessing our sins and repenting from our sins?

~Anon., email.

A You are absolutely correct that Jesus died for all of our sins. When we believe in Him for eternal life we receive the forgiveness of sins. That is what many call *positional forgiveness*. When it comes to our eternal destiny we are eternally secure and forgiven.

However, John is not talking about that. He is talking about having *fellowship* with Christ. There is a difference. You can see that this is John's purpose just a few verses earlier (1 John 1:3).

If we want to have intimacy with the Father and the Son, we need to walk in a way that pleases them. When we sin, in order to maintain that fellowship, we need to confess our sins. We are then forgiven of



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those sins on a daily basis that would keep us from enjoying a close relationship with Him here and now.

An illustration might help.

When a child is born into a family, that child will always be a child (positionally). However, when the child disobeys his earthly father, the child needs to set things straight if a harmonious relationship within the family is to be maintained (there needs to be daily “forgiveness”).

Jesus taught this truth in the Upper Room with the disciples when He washed their feet. Even though they were His children, they needed a daily cleansing of their “feet” in order to have intimacy with Him.

I hope this helps!

~Ken

FALLING AWAY

Q In your article, “Putting the Gospel Debate in Sharper Focus” you state the following regarding the Free Grace theology view: “Fourth, eternal salvation once gained can never be lost.”

Then, in your article, “The Range of Inerrancy,” you write about Bart Ehrman, who fell away from the Christian faith. Later you write, “I fear that there are many who will fall away from the faith due to being taught a broad view of inerrancy.”

Please explain the difference between losing one’s salvation (which you affirm is impossible) and falling away from the faith (which you affirm is possible).

Thank you in advance for your response.

~B.V., email

A Most people think that if a person falls away from the faith, that is, commits apostasy, he will not get into Christ’s kingdom. Apostates, they say, will be eternally condemned.

Yet Jesus said, “He who lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:26). This is the promise of eternal security.

Thus if you believe in Christ today, that promise is true of you. As a living human being who believes in Jesus, you will never die. That means even if you apostatize

“As a living human being who believes in Jesus, you will never die. That means even if you apostatize in the future, you will retain everlasting life.”

in the future, you will retain everlasting life.

If Bart Ehrman ever believed in Jesus for everlasting life, then he is still born again today, even though he lost his faith.

Southern Baptists call this doctrine *once saved, always saved*. Theologians call it *eternal security*.

I need to make one final caveat.

A person who has never believed the promise of everlasting life may well identify himself as a believer and as an Evangelical Christian. If that person later falls away from his former beliefs and stops calling himself an Evangelical, we might legitimately say that he fell away,

even though he was never born again.

So a person who falls away might be born again or not born again. It depends on whether he ever believed the promise of everlasting life.

~Bob

LOSING ASSURANCE BECAUSE OF SIN

Q What do you do if I’ve lost my assurance due to sin? A life long struggle with pornography and a relapse after only 8 months of sobriety left me in despair. When I realized that I blew eight months of sobriety, an overwhelming feeling of panic and despair hit me and the first thing that came into mind was “I think I just lost my salvation.” That was 18 months ago and I still struggle with both my addiction and assurance. At some point I began to believe that if I didn’t overcome that sin, I would go to hell. So I believed recovery was my “last chance.” Part of me doubts my doubt, but I still can’t seem to shake that profound experience even if it was just a feeling of despair and panic. Now what?

~Anon., email.

A It is probably safe to say that every believer has experienced some doubts about their eternal salvation at some time in their life. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. Sin can cause us to go through it. Being exposed to false teaching can do it as well. We may even read a passage of Scripture that we don’t understand and think that it is telling us we can lose our salvation. And when we sin we are out of fellowship

with God and this gives Satan an opportunity to attack us spiritually and cause us to question what we know to be true.

The answer to these doubts is to always go back to Jesus' promise of everlasting life. If you believe you can lose your salvation because of sin, you haven't yet understood Jesus' promise which is conditioned on your *faith*, not on your *works* (whether good or bad).

There are many clear passages that tell you that once you have believed in Jesus Christ for everlasting life, you have it as a present possession. For example, you can read John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 10:28; 11:25-26; and 1 John 5:13. Notice the only condition is to believe in Jesus.

If Jesus promised believers everlasting life as a present possession, and you believe Him, then what do you have as a present possession? Everlasting life.

You don't have to wait until we "go to heaven" to get it. You cannot earn it or keep it by works. And, since everlasting life is ever-lasting, it can never end. Once you have it, it is yours forever.

In moments of doubt due to sin, turn away from looking at your sins and believe His promise instead.

Even when you lose your assurance, for whatever reason, you still do not lose your eternal salvation. However, as you have experienced, when you lose your assurance it can have a devastating impact on your fellowship with God. When a believer is not sure he is a child of God, by definition his relationship with God is not what it should be.

In my ministry I have counselled many young men. I have seen the strangle hold that pornography

can have. I have seen it be a factor in many cases of adultery and in the break up of many marriages. I have also seen men who desperately want to be free from this sin, but struggle with the bondage they are in.

You say that you have fallen in this area and want to know what to do now. As already stated, the first thing you need to do is to be assured of your eternal salvation. Read the verses I mentioned above. While your sin, as all sin, has serious consequences, there is no sin

"God welcomes His wayward children back with open arms."

that causes us to lose our eternal salvation. Every believer sins on a daily basis. If we could lose our salvation, we all would be eternally lost. In reference to the sin that you write about, how many Christian men do you think look at women in lust and thus commit adultery on a recurring basis?

The assurance of salvation is critical because you need to know that you are a child of God and that God wants you to grow spiritually. If you continue to doubt your salvation and do what you do in order to earn eternal life, you are following a recipe that will result in failure. As a child of God you can boldly come into God's presence and ask Christ to live through you to change you (Heb 4:14-16). Christ, through the Spirit of God, will help you in your weaknesses (Rom 8:26)—yes, even the weakness of looking at pornography.

I think one of the major problems we have as believers is that we often think we are solely responsible for straightening our lives out when we fail. We think that we are so bad we need to beg God for another chance. We are like the prodigal son in Luke 15. He wanted to return to his father after failing miserably and thought he could only do it as a slave. He would have to work, just for the privilege of being a slave for his father.

But the parable teaches us that God welcomes His wayward children back with open arms. He wants us to "succeed" spiritually. He wants to help us. He is more than willing to meet us half-way if we come to Him for help (Jas 4:8).

We do not have the promise that God will take away all our sinful desires. But if we go to Christ for help, we do know that He will give that help. He will help us in our struggles with sin and will continue the ongoing process of making us more like Him (2 Cor 3:18).

~Ken 

Send your questions to questions@faithalone.org.

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