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JULY / AUGUST 2018

You Were Chosen

EPHESIANS 1:4



PLUS Fundamentalism / Bob's Second Ordination Exam / Coping with Loneliness /
"That Day and Hour" / The Films of the Kendrick Brothers / Grace and Groans



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FROM THE EDITOR

July and August are the hottest months of the year in North America. Theologically, Free Grace Theology is hot right now. As an example, our May national conference had our best attendance in over a decade. Our regional conferences are having nice attendance and lots of enthusiasm as well.

In 2016 a leading Evangelical theologian, Dr. Wayne Grudem, wrote a book that has Free Grace Theology in the title. His book is entitled: *Free Grace Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*. While it is discouraging to have someone say that we *diminish the gospel*, it is encouraging to see that our views are gaining more attention.

A few years ago Logos Bible Software had me teach a Mobile Education Course entitled TH 265 Free Grace Theology. That course has reached many people as well.

Five years ago I was one of four authors of a four-views book entitled, *The Role of Works at the Final Judgment*. Zondervan selected me to represent the Free Grace view. What an honor that was. And it shows how Free Grace Theology has gained traction.

Examples could be multiplied with Free Grace books and commentaries published by John Hart, Gary Derickson, Charlie Bing, Dave Anderson, Jody Dillow, Lucas Kitchen, and others.

Of course, no matter how hot we become, we will likely not be in favor in Christendom until the Lord returns. There are many of us who rejoice in the grace of God. But our numbers pale in comparison to the Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant Arminians, and Protestant Calvinists.

I remember Zane Hodges commenting in class at DTS on James 4:4, which says that friendship with the world is enmity with God. He said something like this, “Men, if you wish to become Bible scholars which the world of Evangelicals will acclaim, then you will lose friendship with God. The price is too high!” He



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

was right. I know of no Free Grace person who is recognized as legitimate Bible scholar. We are considered as those who self-publish and whose writings will not stand up to peer review.

Most of us in Free Grace circles will not achieve fame and fortune in this life. We just had a great regional conference in Orlando at Circle Community Church, the home of Florida Bible College. We had a little over sixty people. We had a great time talking about the question *Is Calvinism Biblical?* One of the conferees called and said, “You know, we had a great conference with great content and great fellowship and we had sixty people. The Calvinists have conferences and they have thousands of people in attendance. We may not get the numbers. But we really are proclaiming God’s Word clearly.” Amen.

I hope you enjoy the July-August issue of *Grace in Focus Magazine*. It has excellent articles on a wide variety of subjects. The issue is hot, hot, hot.

BOB'S SECOND ORDINATION EXAM

PSALMS

289 146 I cried unto thee: save me,
and I shall keep thy testimonies.
20 147 I prevented the dawning of
the morning, and cried: I hoped
in thy word.
18 148 Mine eyes prevent the night
watches, that I might meditate
in thy word.
255 149 Hear my voice according
unto thy lovingkindness: O
LORD, quicken me according
to thy judgment. (YHVH)
19 150 They draw nigh that follow
after mischief: they are far from
thy law.
14 151 Thou art near, O LORD;
and all thy commandments are
truth.
15 152 Concerning thy testimonies,
I have known of old that thou
hast founded them for ever.
259 153 Consider mine affliction,
and deliver me: for I do not for-
get thy law.
257 154 Plead my cause, and deliver
me: quicken me according to
thy word.
738 155 Salvation is far from the
wicked: for they seek not thy
statutes.
251 156 Great are thy tender mer-
cies, O LORD: quicken me ac-
cording to thy judgments.
927 157 Many are my persecutors
and mine enemies; yet do I not
decline from thy testimonies.
774 158 I beheld the transgressors,
and was grieved; because they
kept not thy word.
251 159 Consider how I love thy
precepts: quicken me, O LORD,
according to thy lovingkind-
ness. (YHVH)
14 160 Thy word is true from the
beginning: and every one of thy
righteous judgments endureth
for ever.
927 161 Princes have persecuted me
without a cause: but my heart
standeth in awe of thy word.
21 162 I rejoice at thy word, as one

PSALMS

that findeth great spoil:
163 I hate and abhor lying: but
thy law do I love.
164 Seven times a day do I
praise thee because of thy right-
eous judgments.
165 Great peace have they
which love thy law: and noth-
ing shall offend them.
166 LORD, I have hoped for
thy salvation,
167 My soul hath kept thy tes-
timonies; and I love them ex-
ceedingly.
168 I have kept thy precepts and
thy testimonies: for all my ways
are before thee.
169 Let my cry come near be-
fore thee, O LORD: give me
understanding according to thy
word. (YHVH)
170 Let my supplication come
before thee: deliver me accord-
ing to thy word.
171 My lips shall utter praise,
when thou hast taught me thy
statutes.
172 My tongue shall speak of
thy word: for all thy command-
ments are righteousness.
173 Let thine hand help me; for
I have chosen thy precepts.
174 I have longed for thy sal-
vation, O LORD; and thy law
is my delight.
175 Let my soul live, and it
shall praise thee; and let thy
judgments help me.
176 I have gone astray like a
lost sheep: seek thy servant, for
I do not forget thy command-
ments.

PSALM 120

1 In my distress I cried unto the
LORD, and he heard me.
2 Deliver my soul, O LORD,
from lying lips, and from a de-
ceitful tongue. (YHVH)
3 What shall be given unto

thee? or what shall be done
unto thee, thou false tongue?
4 Sharp arrows of the mighty,
with coals of juniper.
5 Woe is me, that I sojourn in
Mesoch, that I dwell in the tents
of Kedar!
6 My soul hath long dwelt with
him that hateth peace.
7 I am for peace; but when I
speak, they are for war.

PSALM 121

1 I will lift up mine eyes unto
the hills, from whence cometh
my help.
2 My help cometh from the
LORD, which made heaven
and earth. (YHVH)
3 He will not suffer thy foot to
be moved: he that keepeth thee
will not slumber.
4 Behold, he that keepeth Is-
rael shall neither slumber nor
sleep.
5 The LORD is thy keeper: the
LORD is thy shade upon thy
right hand.
6 The sun shall not smite thee
by day, nor the moon by night.
7 The LORD shall preserve thee
from all evil: he shall pre-
serve thy soul.
8 The LORD shall preserve thy
going out and thy coming in
from this time forth, and even
for evermore.

PSALM 122

1 I was glad when they said
unto me, Let us go into the
house of the LORD. (YHVH)
2 Our feet shall stand within thy
gates, O Jerusalem.
3 Jerusalem is builded as a city
that is compact together.
4 Whither the tribes go up, the
tribes of the LORD, unto the
testimony of Israel, to give
thanks unto the name of the
LORD.

PSALMS

5 For there are set thrones of
judgment, the thrones of the
house of David.
6 Pray for the peace of Jerusa-
lem: they shall prosper that love
thee.
7 Peace be within thy walls, and
prosperity within thy palaces.
8 For my brethren and compan-
ions' sakes, I will now say,
Peace be within thee.
9 Because of the house of the
LORD our God I will seek thy
good.

PSALM 123

1 Unto thee lift I up mine eyes,
O thou that dwellest in the
heavens.
2 Behold, as the eyes of ser-
vants look unto the hand of their
masters, and as the eyes of a
maiden unto the hand of her
mistress; so our eyes wait upon
the LORD our God, until that
he have mercy upon us.
3 Have mercy upon us, O
LORD, have mercy upon us: for
we are exceedingly filled with
contempt. (YHVH)
4 Our soul is exceedingly filled
with the scorning of those that
are at ease, and with the con-
tempt of the proud.

PSALM 124

1 If it had not been the LORD
who was on our side, now must
Israel say: (YHVH)
2 If it had not been the LORD
who was on our side, when our
enemies rose up against us:
3 Then they had swallowed us
up quick, when their wrath was
kindled against us.
4 Then the waters would have
swallowed us, the overflowing
floods would have covered us.
5 Then the proud would have
said, We will swallow them up
for ever.
6 Blessed be the LORD who



BY BOB WILKIN

THE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

I often receive questions via email. Recently, I received a real doozy. It was not just one question, but ten, concerning justification and sanctification. Here it is:

My brother has recently been sharing a lot of GES videos and literature. He spent many years reading the Puritans, and of course, as you point out, some of the Puritans had a legal spirit. On the other hand, some had a gospel spirit seasoned with grace. For instance, Ralph Erskine or Thomas Boston had a different spirit than, say, Richard Baxter.

Upon reading some Puritans, my brother found himself constantly examining himself—looking within rather than outside of himself to Christ. Because of the human heart and our propensity to do what we would not, a constant diet of self-examination can cause God's people to doubt their state before a Holy God. This is not a good thing.

From my experience, when I see sin in my own life, the remedy against it is best dealt with by resting in the gospel promises, that is, being so blown away by God's precious Son that I am compelled to resist sin out of love and a thankful heart. That is not to say that is the most effective solution for overcoming sin—sometimes God's law does act as a binding restraint upon the conscience. Sometimes we are sanctified by "disciplining our bodies" not to do certain things because we know what is right and what is wrong.

To be honest, one concern that I have with your teaching is that you minimize sanctification

in the life of the believer. I am just trying to understand where you are coming from. If you could address a few of my concerns I would greatly appreciate it. These are not “gotcha questions”....I just want a better grasp on your beliefs.

1. *Do you believe that God’s children are saved for a purpose, that we are saved “unto good works” in order that we will be conformed to the image of Christ?*
2. *Do you believe that whom God justifies He also sanctifies?*
3. *How do you define sanctification?*
4. *Do you believe that one who professes faith in Christ should ever have reason, by his fruit/works, to doubt his salvation?*
5. *Is there such a thing as a hypocrite, or a false professor?*
6. *Adolph Hitler professed faith in Christ. Based on the atrocities that he committed, is there any reason that he should have doubted his salvation, or that we should doubt his salvation to this day?*
7. *If a person who believes in Christ when they are 30, no longer believes in Christ when they are 35, and stays an unbeliever until they die at 80, are they still saved?*
8. *How do you view church discipline? Is the person who is excommunicated from the church to be treated as an unbeliever?*
9. *Is repentance necessary for salvation?*

10. *I think I read something by you that defined repentance as a “change of mind.” Would not the very essence of “changing our mind,” in terms of how we relate to God, necessitate a change of action or course? If I cheated on my wife, knew that it was wrong, apologized, and then did it again the very next night, wouldn’t that mean that I really didn’t “change my mind”? Your definition of “change of mind” seems subjective.*

Thanks for your time.

*Best Regards,
BSC, email*

MY ANSWERS TO THE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Thanks for your questions. This feels a bit like an ordination exam. I appreciate your desire to learn the Free Grace view.

Before I begin answering questions, let me give an overall comment on sanctification.

When I believed in works salvation, I did not drink, smoke, cuss, or sleep around. I was outwardly righteous. But I was filled with doubt, fear, jealousy, anger, and so forth. I was a self-righteous Pharisee.

When I was a senior in college, over the course of five conversations, I reluctantly came to believe in the eternal security of all who simply believe in Jesus. I came to believe that there were no strings attached, that no matter what I did or did not do, I was eternally secure.

What gratitude I felt! My fear of hell was gone. I knew I was

God’s child forever. I immediately changed from pre-med to pre-ministry. My whole life changed, not because I thought I had to live a good life to stay saved or to prove I’m saved, but because the love of God in Christ bowled me over like a spiritual tsunami.

The idea that the Free Grace message somehow ignores or deemphasizes progressive sanctification strikes me as contrary to both reason and fact. The Free Grace message is the *only* message that promotes sanctification. We know from Scripture that legalism and works salvation produce fleshly indulgence (cf. Gal 5:15-16). Grace is our only hope for holiness.

Now to your questions.

1. Yes, we are saved to glorify God now and forever. However, how well we glorify God in this life is not a condition of everlasting life. And it is not guaranteed that all believers will live in a way that their lives were characterized as God honoring.
2. Regarding sanctification, see my articles on three types of sanctification in our *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (available online). All believers are already positionally set apart. All believers will one day be set apart forever (glorification). Currently, the Holy Spirit is moving believers to be set apart in our experience, but there is no guarantee that believers will achieve some level of holiness.
3. To be sanctified is to be set apart. Progressive sanctification is a work of the Spirit



whereby He increasingly conforms the receptive believer to the Person of Christ, which is to say that He sets that believer apart from the unbelieving world. Success in progressive sanctification is not guaranteed. Believers who do not fellowship with other believers and hear God's Word taught regularly may well fail to progress in their Christian lives. Backsliding is even possible.

4. Not everyone who professes Christ believes in His promise of everlasting life. A person who believes in Lordship Salvation/works salvation looks to his own works, not Christ's promise, for assurance. Such people doubt their salvation because they are not focusing on

Christ, but themselves. The issue in professions of faith is not one's works, but what one believes—root not

“I was outwardly righteous. But I was filled with doubt, fear, jealousy, anger, and so forth. I was a self-righteous Pharisee.”

fruit. If a person believes that he must work to stay saved or to prove he is saved, then he does not believe the promise and he lacks certainty of his eternal destiny.

However, someone who believes the promise of everlasting life to the believer need never doubt his salvation based on his works because God justifies the ungodly and assurance is found in Christ, not in ourselves.

5. Yes. A false professor is one who says, “I believe in Jesus Christ,” but who in reality is believing in Jesus plus his own works to get him into the kingdom.
6. Hitler was a terrible person. If he looked at his works for assurance, he had every reason to believe he was headed for hell. However, *anyone* who looks at his works for assurance has ample evidence to believe he is headed for hell. Even you and I. All of us fall short

of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

A believer should not look to his works for assurance. To do that is to take one's eyes off Christ.

Apart from the blood of Christ, no one would have everlasting life.

Because of the blood of Christ, anyone who believes in Jesus has everlasting life.

The death of Christ removed the sin barrier (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). Hence the issue is not sin, but Christ.

Lewis Sperry Chafer said that in light of Calvary men don't have a sin problem; they have a Son problem.

I believe you bring up Hitler to ask whether we should question our own salvation if we find ourselves sinning a lot. But there's the rub. What is "a lot"? If someone like Hitler is the comparison (and there is no evidence he ever had saving faith in Christ), then very few people today would need to question their salvation. If Jesus is the standard, then all of us would need to question our salvation if our works are the issue.

But our works aren't the issue. The issue in regeneration and assurance is believing in Jesus for what He promises—everlasting life. Sadly most people do not believe in Him for that life.

7. Yes, if a person believes in Jesus for everlasting life for five years and then stops believing in Him, he remains eternally secure even though

he stopped believing.

Indeed, if a person believes in Jesus for everlasting life for five seconds and then falls away, he remains eternally secure.

If there is a time requirement for faith, then Jesus lied when he spoke to Martha in John 11:25-26. The Lord assured Martha that she would never die. He gave her no requirement


“Repentance is not necessary to be born again. It is necessary to escape temporal wrath in this life. The only condition of the new birth is faith in Christ.”

that one's faith in Him must remain steadfast.

I like to put it this way, *We are not saved by eternal faith in the Lord Jesus; we are saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who is eternally faithful to keep His promise.* Another way of saying that is, *we are not saved because we are faithful, but because He is!*

8. Church discipline is for believers, not unbelievers. Scripture specifically says, “And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an

enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thess 3:14–15). Also in 1 Cor 5:11, “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”

9. No, repentance is not necessary to be born again. It is necessary to escape temporal wrath in this life. The only condition of the new birth is faith in Christ.
10. I believed in the change of mind view until around 1997. I even wrote my doctoral dissertation defending the change of mind view. But then I repented of my view of repentance. I believe that Biblical repentance is turning from sins. All NT examples fit that understanding. You can read an article on our website on why I changed my mind about repentance. It was published in our journal in 1998. 



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife

of 42 years, Sharon. His latest book is Grudem Against Grace: A Defense of Free Grace Theology.

JOIN US!

We are praying for and dreaming of new ministries to promote Free Grace.

There are at least 10,000 of you reading *Grace in Focus* every month. There are over a hundred thousand reading online. If you went to faithalone.org, clicked on **DONATE**, and committed to a monthly donation of only \$10, we could raise the funds to support ministries like these:

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- Social Media Coordinator (full-time)
- House Church Mentor

For every \$100k increase in our budget, we can fund one of those positions for two years.

get us to
the goal!





LIGHTSTOCK



You Were Chosen

(EPHESIANS 1:4)

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

When I was a kid, I participated in many pick-up basketball games. When we had too many players, some of us were chosen to play while some of us were not. It was always a bummer when you weren't chosen to play. You would then have to sit on the edge of the court and simply watch.

In Eph 1:4, Paul says that believers have been chosen. In this case, however, God is the One that has done the choosing. Paul writes that, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

The question is: What has God chosen us for?

FOR SALVATION/ETERNAL LIFE?

Many think that Paul is saying that the believer is chosen by God for eternal life. This view sees Eph 1:4 as saying that God chose certain people in eternity past to be eternally saved, and those people will be "holy and without blame" because of their position in Christ. Because they are in Christ, all their sins are forgiven and they have been chosen to be holy forever.

The *Reformation Study Bible* takes this view.

It says that Eph 1:4 means that God has chosen people for a relationship with Himself. God's choice always had in view the union of a fallen people with their Redeemer.

Thomas Constable, in his Bible study notes, holds the same view. To be “holy” means to be *set apart for God*. To be “without blame” means to be *without blemish* and describes Jesus Christ in 1 Pet 1:19. The believer positionally has the same holiness as his Savior.

Closely related to the view that Eph 1:4 is talking about God’s choosing people for eternal life is the idea that holy living is also a result of God’s choosing believers. E. K. Simpson (*Ephesians*, p. 26) says that God’s design in eternity past will not fail. All the chosen are also elected to live in holiness. Eadie (*Ephesians*, p. 21) says that this holiness includes the believer’s final perfection. It begins in this life in how the believer lives. This is the result of God choosing the believer. God gives the believer a holy heart and this heart leads to a stainless life.

In summary, there are those who assert that Paul is saying that God chooses some people to go to heaven. Those He chooses will also live holy lives. People who are not chosen will go to hell. Those who are chosen have no choice in how they live. Their lives will please God.

Obviously such a view means that people do not have free will. If they are not chosen by God, they cannot believe the gospel. For those chosen, they do not have free will in how they will live. They will automatically live in a godly way.

Many will recoil from such a theology. In addition, it certainly seems to go against the teachings of the Bible that say that men and women are responsible for their actions. In addition, if we do not have free will, how can we be held responsible by God for anything we do or do not do?

A more basic question is: Is this view the only way to understand Eph 1:4?

CHOSEN AS A GROUP

Many have noted that in the book of Ephesians, Paul’s main emphasis is on the Church. God chose in eternity past that both believing Jews and Gentiles would be united in the Body of Christ as the Temple of God.

This is the way we should understand Eph 1:4. God has chosen the Church to accomplish His will during the Church Age (Eph 1:22-23; 2:14, 16, 22).

To put it simply, Eph 1:4 is not talking about God’s choosing individual people for heaven or hell and taking away their free will. Instead, Paul is talking about God’s choosing a group of people (believers) for a purpose.

But what is that purpose and is it automatic?

CHOSEN TO LIVE GODLY LIVES

It is very clear that Paul is saying God chose believers to live in a holy way. But this does not mean that all believers will automatically do so.

The words “that we should be” in Eph 1:4 involve the use of a grammatical construction using an infinitive (“should be”). The question is whether this is something that is possible and desirable or simply automatic. In other words, are believers guaranteed that they will live holy lives or not?

An infinitive can be used to indicate a result. If used in this way, one could say that Paul is saying that God chose the Church, and the result is that all believers will live

holy lives. Believers would have no choice.

However, as Daniel Wallace points out, the most common use of the infinitive is to indicate purpose (Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, p. 592). Walter Liefeld, who is not a Free Grace writer, says that the infinitive here clearly indicates purpose (*Ephesians*, p. 34). If the infinitive indicates purpose, it is not automatic. Probably the most important question here is: Does the context indicate result or purpose?

The idea that Paul is talking about the purpose of His choosing makes perfect sense in the context. What is the purpose of God’s choosing the Church? He wants it to be a body of believers who live in a godly way. The world is to see Him in us. We are to reflect our holy Heavenly Father in our holy actions. He created the Church for this purpose (Eph 2:10).

Specifically, believers are to live holy lives “in love” (Eph 1:4). Members of the Church, even

“What is the purpose of God’s choosing the Church? He wants it to be a body of believers that live in a godly way.”

Jews and Gentiles, are to love one another. We are to love one another as Christ loved us. But as we know from the Scriptures and experience, believers often do not live up to the purpose for which God placed us in the Body of Christ. Believers are often unloving towards each other. Living holy lives in love is anything but automatic!

PAUL TOLD THE BELIEVERS AT COLOSSAE THE SAME THING

When we conclude that in Eph 1:4, Paul is saying that members of the Church have the option to live godly lives, we see that he says the same thing in Col 1:22-23. A quick look at Col 1:22 shows that it is parallel with Eph 1:4 and Paul is dealing with the same topic. The words “holy and blameless” as well as “before Him” are the exact same words in Greek in both verses.

In Col 1:22, Paul says that Christ died to present us holy and blameless before Him. We see in the next verse that this is not automatic. Believers will be holy and blameless before the Lord *if* they continue grounded and steadfast in the faith. Here, the word “faith” refers to the teachings of the Apostles that were challenged by the false teachers Paul was addressing in the book of Colossians.

But when will believers appear “before Him”?

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

It is unfortunate that many people assume that most verses in the NT deal with eternal salvation. Both Ephesians and Colossians were written to believers. They already knew they had eternal life. They would never appear before Christ to find out if they were going to be in the kingdom of God.

Instead, all believers will appear before the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). That is when we will appear “before Him” (Eph 1:4; Col 1:22). On that day, the Lord will evaluate the lives of believers for the purpose of rewards.

To the Colossians, Paul said that he taught believers in the hope that they would be mature believers when they appear at the Judgment Seat (Col 1:28). In Ephesians, Paul wants the believers

there to understand their “calling.” They were called to receive a glorious inheritance in the kingdom (Eph 1:18). If they lived holy lives they would receive at the Judgment Seat a glorious inheritance/reward in the kingdom.

CONCLUSION

When I was a kid, it was great to be chosen in pick-up basketball games. When chosen, I was part of the game. I was not on the sidelines watching others play.

If you have believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life, you have been chosen. You are part of the Church, the Body of Christ. God has chosen the Church for a purpose: that we would live godly

“If you have believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life, you have been chosen. You are part of the Church, the Body of Christ.”

lives. That when we appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ we will be found by Him as mature believers who will receive His approval and rewards and thus bring honor and glory to Him.

But such rewards and such living are not automatic. If we continue using the analogy of a basketball game, the question is: how did you play the game? Did

you play in such a way that pleases the One Who chose you to be a part of His Church? God has chosen you to “play.” We have the honor and joy of doing what He chose us to do. Will we do it, or choose to just sit on the sidelines? ■



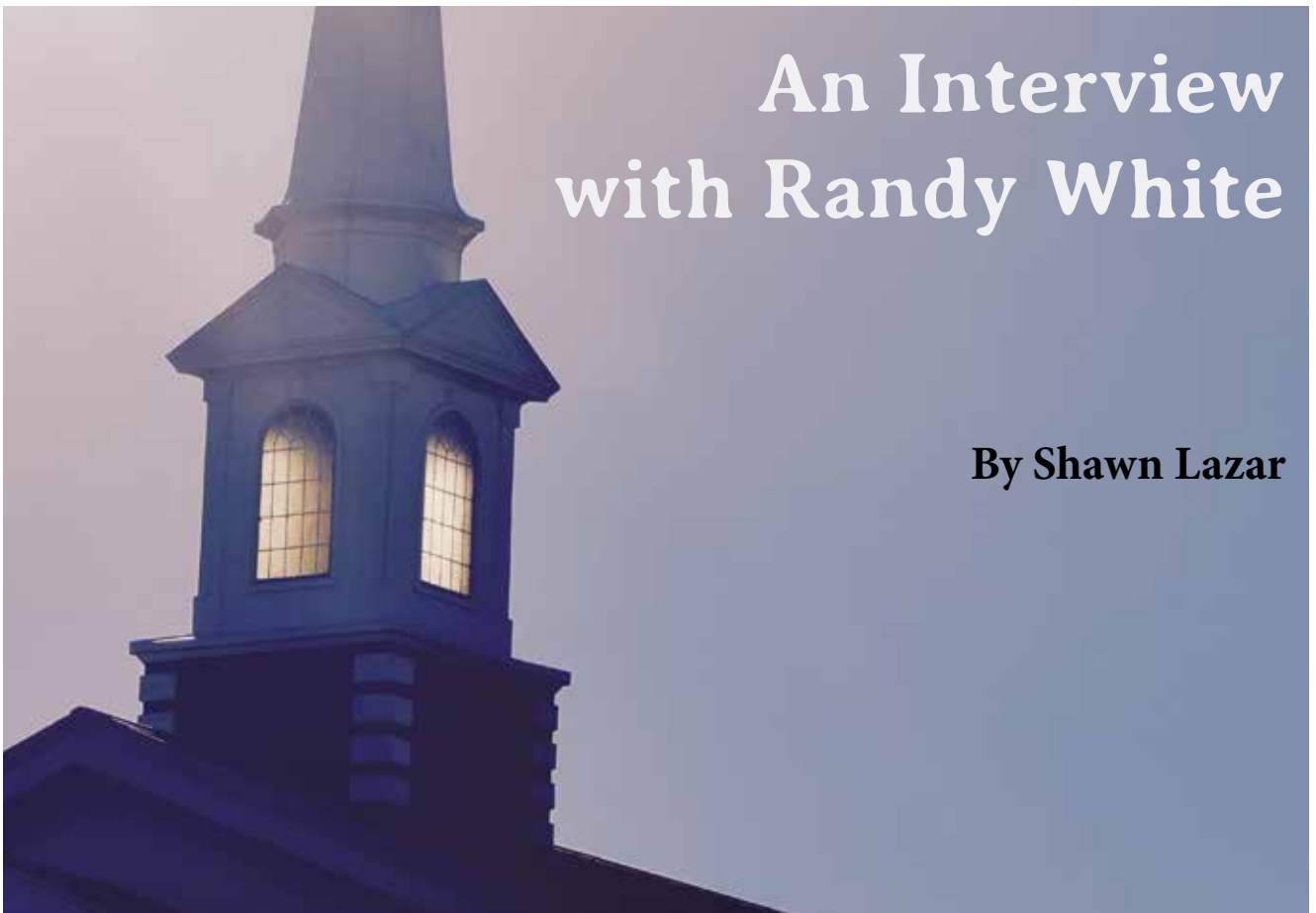
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Becoming a Fundamentalist

An Interview
with Randy White

By Shawn Lazar



LIGHTSTOCK

Christian fundamentalism started a century ago. Bible teachers and pastors organized to resist the onset of liberalism in the denominations. They defended the fundamental doctrines of Biblical Christianity, such as the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth, and the literal resurrection of Christ.

Over time, a split began to occur between evangelicals and fundamentalists.

Fundamentalism gained a bad reputation as narrow-minded and anti-intellectual. This reputation only became worse as the secular media adopted the term “fundamentalism” to identify Islamic terrorism. Suddenly, the independent Baptist church down the street became conceptually on par with criminals who bombed embassies, planes, and street markets.

In the last few decades, evangelicalism seems to have become less conservative and more permissive, both doctrinally and socially. For example, many evangelicals now hold to a limited view of inerrancy and reject Biblical sexual norms.

That downward trend has alarmed many of us who consider ourselves evangelical. We have taken to identifying as “conservative” evangelicals, because conservatism is no longer implied.

Consequently, I have had several conversations with people who have wondered if the term “fundamentalism” needs to be rehabilitated or reclaimed.

Dr. Randy White shares many of these same concerns and recently wrote a booklet on this subject. He was kind enough to agree to an interview for this magazine.

Shawn Lazar (SL): Please introduce yourself.

Randy White (RW): I am Randy White, a former life-long evangelical Southern Baptist who increasingly became frustrated with evangelicalism and Southern Baptist theology.

Having been a pastor of some relatively large churches in Texas, I moved three years ago to the little tourist village of Taos, NM. I moved here to focus my time on studying the Word and teaching it online (via www.RandyWhiteMinistries.org) and publishing thoroughly Biblical resources (via www.DispensationalPublishing.org, a company I started when I moved to Taos). I also serve as

the bi-vocational pastor of the Taos First Baptist Church.

I was raised the son of an evangelical, SBC pastor. I was educated in evangelical, SBC colleges and seminaries. I used to say I was “Baptist born and Baptist bred, and when I’m gone I’ll be Baptist dead!”

However, the more I studied the Word of God, the more I became convinced that Baptist denominational life was flawed in essence and theologically left-leaning (though they would never admit it and scarcely recognize it).

OUT OF EVANGELICALISM

SL: What led you out of evangelicalism?

RW: For most of my life, I did not even know there was anything *but* evangelicalism.

I knew I wasn’t Catholic, and I knew the main-line Protestant denominations had all but rejected Biblical Christianity.

All I knew of fundamentalists were that they were angry and didn’t allow ladies to wear pants.

One of the most life-changing studies I ever did was an extensive study of the kingdom of God. The more I began to understand the kingdom, the more I understood the motivations behind much of evangelical thinking, especially that which related to the growing *social justice* emphasis.

SL: So you began to realize that evangelicals were working with a particular concept of the kingdom?

RW: Yes. I realized that “building the kingdom” was almost the definition of evangelicalism.

I also realized that, Biblically, I cannot build, advance, or strengthen the kingdom in any way because the kingdom of God is *future* and *physical* and related to the nation of Israel, not the church.

With this new understanding of the kingdom, I realized that evangelicalism, Protestantism, and Catholicism all had the same foundational flaw: believing that we are somehow in the kingdom of God *today*. With this “in the kingdom” thinking, they all build a missional outlook based on kingdom building.

In the kingdom, for example, you have total economic, social, and physical “justice” (a word I only use because it is the *word of the day*). If

this justice is present in the kingdom, and we are in the kingdom *now*, then Christians must join together to advance kingdom justice.

This is the fuel beneath the social justice and the ecumenical movements in evangelicalism.

Consequently, I began to see that evangelicalism had a worldview that was fundamentally different from my own.

INTO FUNDAMENTALISM

SL: What led you into fundamentalism?

RW: I found myself forced into independence as I was increasingly unwanted at the denominational table, honestly. This was gradual, but I knew that I had increasingly isolated myself from denominationalism. I found myself the only guy in the room who was shaking my head at what I was hearing from so-called conservative evangelicals.

I was daily becoming more uncomfortable with the mixture of law and grace that was standard fare in evangelicalism.

I was becoming increasingly aware of the emotionalism, manipulation, and pop-psychology that so many around me were saying was “a move of the Spirit” or a “God-anointed sermon.”

As I joked earlier, I really didn’t know any real fundamentalists. I only knew characterizations and stereotypes of fundamentalists. You know, the suit, tie, and large KJV Bible, along with a scowl and a sermon against alcoholic beverages.

At the time my journey was beginning, I had a radio program over 400 stations (I have since moved to internet-only broadcasts). I began to notice that it was *fundamentalists* who were writing, calling, and thanking me.

I “accidentally” began to realize that I was quickly becoming a fundamentalist.

THE ISSUE OF LEGALISM

SL: Aren’t most fundamentalists legalists? Are you?

RW: Some are, I’m sure. I just haven’t met them yet. The fundamentalists I know smile at least twice a week. They wear shorts when it is hot. Some even listen to country music!

I know that the stereotype of fundamentalism is legalism. Almost all stereotypes have some basis in reality somewhere down the line, so I wouldn’t

deny legalism in the fundamental family altogether. All I know is that legalism hasn’t been my experience.

I am a Dispensationalist, and I don’t see how legalism of any kind is compatible with *rightly dividing the Word of truth*. Legalism is built on a flawed understanding of the purpose and place of the Law. Legalism believes that a right standing with God comes from righteous living. I reject those views.

Incidentally, the Puritans (who are not considered *fundamentalists*) were very legalistic. Puritan legalism (and its modern Calvinist counterpart) is drawn from a failure to divide the dispensation of Grace from that of the Law.

As for me, I hold to a Free Grace position both for salvation and for sanctification. We are complete in Christ, not because of anything that we have done, but by God’s grace alone.

KEY ISSUES

SL: What are the key issues we can learn from fundamentalism?

RW: We can learn that the Bible is God-breathed both in its whole and in its parts. The Bible is God’s Word, but each word in the Bible is also God-breathed.

This is why Christian fundamentalism (whether of the Baptist, Bible, or any variety) is where you will most often find exegetical, verse-by-verse Bible teaching.

We can learn that cultural conformity is not necessary for church growth or health. Fundamentalist churches have not chased every church-growth fad. They don’t have the emotional need for the latest “Christian” music. They do not get any self-validation from having the most recent cool-kid preacher come preach in their conferences. Fundamentalist churches tend to be like the church you grew up in. They sing a few songs, they give a few announcements, and they preach a long sermon (Amen!).

SL: What are some key areas where fundamentalism can change for the better?

RW: My recent booklet, *Why I Am a Fundamentalist...and You Should be Too*, explains that fundamentalism needs to better distinguish and define itself. I am convinced that evangelicalism

is imploding, and many evangelicals are about to take the same journey I have been on. These evangelicals need to know there is a place to call home.

Historically, fundamentalism was built on the acceptance of the “five fundamentals” of the early fundamentalist movement from a century ago. However, most evangelicals hold to these five fundamentals without being fundamentalists.

In order to clarify the distinction between the two traditions, I am calling for fundamentalism to add four more *fundamentals* to the list.

These four things are already a part of fundamentalism, but they need to be better articulated by fundamentalists. And they need to be explained to the evangelical, who will not understand them at first.

REFINING FUNDAMENTALISM

SL: What are the four additions?

RW: First, fundamentalists need to strengthen their ability to explain why they reject the ecumenical movement. Evangelicals do not understand a rejection of ecumenicism, but they can be convinced if it is explained well.

Second, fundamentalists need to strengthen their understanding and argument against an “already/not yet” kingdom. Historically, fundamentalism strongly held to a future kingdom, and this was almost a distinguishing mark. I think fundamentalism has weakened in this area and needs to strengthen its understanding.

Third, fundamentalists need to better articulate their understanding that the *local* church is the *only* church. Evangelical churches have bought into the *universal* church concept, even though it has little (if any) Biblical support. Fundamentalists are strongly local in their ecclesiology, so much so that the word *independent* is often in their church name. Evangelicals will not understand this and may need some clear guidance.

Fourth, fundamentalists need to explain their position on verbal plenary inspiration. Why is the King James Version so prevalent in fundamentalism? There is a theological reason that goes far beyond tradition and nostalgia, but most fundamentalists have not articulated the theology. I am not a “KJV Only” advocate, but I can at least now understand where they are coming from.

Fundamentalism can do a better job explaining their doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration.

RECOMMENDED READING

SL: Who are some fundamentalist authors you recommend?

RW: Randy White is a good one!

Though the reading is difficult, I would encourage people to look through *The Fundamentals*, a set of articles, written beginning in 1910, that really gave birth to fundamentalism. Fundamentalism itself was a response to religious liberalism that came up with the German Rationalism movement started by Julius Wellhausen in the last quarter of the 19th century. The fundamentalist-vs-modernist debates really did shape the worldview of our nation in many ways.


Most of the reading I do is by men who lived prior to fundamentalism as a movement.

I read George N.H. Peters, John Nelson Darby, Sir Robert Anderson, and others of the Dispensational vein.

But there are more modern fundamentalists such as J. Vernon McGee, whose *Thru the Bible* series is great.

W.A. Criswell’s *Why I Preach That the Bible is Literally True* is a classic.

The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, compiled by R.A. Torrey, is a “must-have” Bible study resource.

And I am hoping there will be a host of new Free Grace fundamentalist writers who are published through Dispensational Publishing House in the years to come. 



Shawn Lazar is the Editor of *Grace in Focus* magazine. He is the pastor of Gateway Baptist’s Faith Fellowship in Denton, TX. He’s beginning to wonder if he’s a fundamentalist.

Coping with Loneliness as a Christian Senior

By Pam Rainey

NOT ALL SENIORS ARE SOCIALIZING

Have you ever gone to visit a senior adult to cheer her up, only to discover you were the one uplifted?

Perhaps the person you intended to encourage may have been going through stages of an incurable illness, or perhaps he was recovering from minor surgery. It makes no difference. His countenance and uplifting words to you no doubt came from a contented and happy heart and brought you joy.

However, not all senior adults are engaging with other people.

With declining years, many seniors have experienced heartbreaks, such as losing a spouse or outliving their friends.

Others have grown lonely because their families have either moved many miles away or, even though they live nearby, are too busy with their own complicated lives to stop in often for even a short visit.

According to *Senior Living Blog* posted by Sarah Stevenson (May 2017), eleven million or twenty-eight percent of people aged sixty-five and older lived alone at the time of the last census.



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PREYING ON THE LONELY

One of the silent and subtle schemes lonely senior adults fall prey to is the deceptive marketing practices of casinos.

While their addiction may start out as an innocent way for them to spend an afternoon with friends, one trip to a casino can lead to two, then three, then more, and the well laid trap is set, and the older adult is caught.

Before long their hard earned savings are gone.

Many casinos send buses to transport seniors from the town in which they live. When they arrive, they are provided free food, drinks, and lodging. While they are there, they are not lonely because there are many new acquaintances with which to temporarily socialize. The casino is an almost perfect experience. The only thing that is not perfect is the money they lose in the slot machines.

Oh, they may win a buck or two. But the losses are bitter and unaffordable.

This is a well-organized strategy aimed at a vulnerable generation preyed upon by marketers who know exactly what they are doing.

In an article, “The Casino Trap,” by John Rosengren, in the *AARP Bulletin* (October 2016), a distressing account was given of a well set gambling trap that ruined a man and his wife.

The couple began making a 2 1/2 hour drive from his home to a casino every Friday. He won occasionally but lost more frequently. In one year, he lost about \$50,000. Over four years the slots drained more than \$100,000 from him—all his savings. He still kept playing. Afterwards he cashed in a life insurance policy, took cash advances out of his credit card, and gambled away the Social Security checks meant to pay his utility bills. Finally, in 2008, the gambling habit took their home.

There are many other unhealthy ways in which senior adults cope with loneliness and grief. However, Scripture promises many blessings to the aged who rely on God for guidance and comfort.

We can all be triumphant over temptations that take our eyes off His goodness and tempt us to react in corrupt ways. Whatever our age or circumstance, we are reminded: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to

withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph 6:13).

A PRACTICAL WAY OF COPING WITH LONELINESS: SERVICE

Instead of coping with loneliness by going to a casino, Christian senior adults can find meaningful fellowship by serving in church.

We cannot turn on a television or listen to our children or grandchildren for long without becoming aware of how desperately our world is crying for wisdom.

Christian seniors have so much knowledge to offer our younger generation.

Through experiences of wars, raising families, losing loved ones, and difficult financial times, seniors have witnessed firsthand God’s unfailing love, guidance, and goodness. It would be a shame for older people not to share with young Christians how difficult times helped them grow stronger in their faith.

An eighty-year-old widow, Pearl, moved from Mississippi to our town to be with her daughter. She joined our church and asked the pastor how she could serve the Lord there. He later told the congregation that, due to her age, he wasn’t sure Pearl would be up to helping with children, but he reluctantly suggested she assist with the Vacation Bible School that started the next evening. Even on short notice, Pearl was eager to help.

Our daughter, only ten years old at the time, and normally quiet and not very expressive, bounced to our car the first night after Vacation Bible School was dismissed and excitedly told my husband and me about “Miss Pearl” who was her VBS table leader. I asked her what was so special about her new teacher. She thought for a moment and said, “Miss Pearl has such a sweet face, and I know she loves me very much.”

Mighty insightful observation from a child.

Pearl lived for a year-and-a-half after that. Upon her death, a visitation was held by her family at the local funeral home before holding her burial in Mississippi. The funeral home was filled that night with friends who came to remember her and offer sympathy to the family.

Since Pearl was new in our town, she no longer felt comfortable driving an automobile. But she didn’t let a little thing like that get in the way of



helping others. Her daughter took her to church, and a new friend she met at church volunteered to drive her to several worthwhile places she was asked to volunteer.

I suppose the local folks who came to honor Pearl and minister to the family had met Pearl's kind face during the year-and-a-half she lived in her new hometown and had come to know she loved them very much just as our daughter did.

When I think of Pearl, I am reminded of what Jesus said: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

Seniors are not exempted from that command. And loving the members of your church is a wonderful way for lonely seniors to engage with others.

A DOCTRINAL WAY TO COPE WITH LONELINESS: GOD'S PROMISES


I must admit I've cried out to God asking why He has allowed sickness to intrude my body as it grows older.

I've been guilty of not helping out when needed because I didn't feel very well.

There also have been times my faith has been shaken when I look at our meager retirement savings and ask God if my husband and I will outlast our money.

Then I remind myself—God's Word is true, and He has never forsaken our family.

I'm so ashamed of myself when I worry. God, true to His Word, has always taken care of our family. A good passage for me to remember is: "Your life should be free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for He Himself has said, I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb 13:5, HCSB).

Focusing on God's promises located in the Bible corrects my steps when I fall into any temptation of sin. 



Pam Rainey is a native of Columbus, GA and has lived in Denton, TX, for 45 years. She was a licensed real estate agent for 18 years.

The Importance of the Expression *That Day and Hour*

By Bill Fiess

A NEW EXPRESSION

In the middle of His Olivet Discourse, Jesus Christ made this astonishing statement: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt 24:36). Though it is clear that Jesus had been speaking about prophetic events, He unexpectedly used the phrase “that day and hour,” which had never been used before in Scripture.

The phrase “that day” was very familiar in the OT, being used 110 times in the Major and Minor Prophets. But the full expression “that day *and hour*” was *never* used in the Prophets.

Of course, “that day” is an abbreviation for the fuller expression “the day of the LORD,” which occurs 21 times in the prophets.

But “that day *and hour*” is never found in the OT. In fact, it is found only in two places in the NT; here and in Mark 13:32 (a parallel passage to the above).

Jesus used the word *hour* (Greek *hōra*) four more times in this context.



“Watch therefore, for you do not know *what hour* your Lord is coming” (Matt 24:42, emphasis added).

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming *at an hour* you do not expect” (Matt 24:44, emphasis added).

“The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and *at an hour* that he is not aware of” (Matt 24:50, emphasis added).

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day *nor the hour* in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matt 25:13, emphasis added).

There are several things that seem apparent from the context: Jesus was speaking of the *beginning* of the Day of the Lord—a subject which had never been spoken of before in the Prophets. And He is very concerned that believers *remain watchful* for His coming.

WATCHFULNESS AND REWARDS

Also, the context shows that believers who are *not watching* for His return will *not be rewarded* at that time. Note, for example,

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, *when he comes*, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him *ruler over all*



his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘*my master is delaying his coming*,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and *at an hour* that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint his portion [inheritance] with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 24:45–51, emphasis added).

In fact, the parable given after Matt 25:13 above also concerns the Judgment Seat of Christ and rewards (or lack of rewards) for the believer. For example,

“After a long time the lord of those servants came and *settled accounts with them*. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, *I will make you ruler over many things*. Enter into the joy of your lord’” (Matt 25:19–21, emphasis added).

It is obvious that God is not revealing to mankind (or to the devil) the *hour* of Jesus’ return (which we usually refer to as *the Rapture*, based on 1 Thess 4:15-18). The *beginning* (i.e., hour) of Jesus’ Second Advent is *imminent*, and therefore we are commanded to watch. Not to watch is to be disobedient to our Lord’s command and also to not be rewarded at His coming. I believe that it

is significant that twice in this context Jesus spoke of the possibility of not reigning with Him as a consequence of not being prepared for His Second Advent (Matt 24:48-51; 25:26-30).

This does not mean that the unprepared believer will not be raptured (cf. 1 Thess 5:10; even believers who are not watchful will forever be with the Lord), but rather it means that he will not rule with Christ in the life to come.

DO NOT BECOME COMPLACENT

I think it is easy in 2018, almost 2000 years after Jesus’ statements here, to get complacent about His command because we think that His coming is not really imminent. It seems very easy to put other things above the priority He gives us of looking for His return. But that is to produce a slackening in holiness (as was the case of the unfaithful servant above) and loss of rewards at Jesus’ return.

As for me, I want to reign with Christ in His kingdom, and I don’t want to lose reward at the Bema. ■



Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia and composes Free Grace hymns.

Faith and Knowledge

By James Morison

Saving faith is a kind of knowledge. This is rendered evident by what our Savior says in John 17:3, “This is life eternal, *that they might know thee*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

Life eternal is the gift of God (Rom 6:23). It is the gift of God to men (1 John 5:11). It is given *that men may know the only true God* and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3). And hence, when men come to this knowledge, they have eternal life, and shall “never die” (John 11:26).

They may drop the body; and eyes that have fondly looked on them here, may for a season see them no more. Hands that have fondly pressed them may touch them no more. But they shall “never die.”

Their death will, as it were, be no death. It will be death without its deadly element—death without its “sting.” How glorious!

And all this is to be attained *by knowing God and Christ*.

Hence we read in 1 Tim 2:4 that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the *knowledge of the truth*.” The last clause informs us how the first is to be accomplished. Men are to be saved, by coming to the knowledge of the truth.

As soon as any come to the knowledge of the truth, he enters into the enjoyment of salvation. “They that *know thy name*,” says the Psalmist, “will put their trust in thee” (Ps 9:10). And if any do not put their trust in God, it is because they are “alienated from the life of God through the *ignorance* that is in them” (Eph 4:18). They are “destroyed for *lack of knowledge*—because they have rejected *knowledge*” (Hos 4:6). “Israel doth not *know*,” says God, “my people doth not consider” (Isa 1:3). There are very many who are “laden with sins, and led away with divers lusts,”



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and who are “ever learning” and yet “never able to come to the *knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tim 3:6-7). For this reason they remain unsaved.

It is obvious, then, that saving faith is a kind of knowledge.

It is not so much a kind of feeling, or a kind of willing, as a kind of thinking.

But it is right thinking. And hence, it is knowledge.

It is thinking that corresponds to the reality of the thing which is the glorious object of the thought.

He who thinks the right thought regarding God and Christ—as God and Christ stand related, in the scheme of mercy, to sinners—knows the truth of truths. He is a believer of the glorious gospel and has eternal life. ■

James Morison (1816-1893) was a Scottish theologian. This is an excerpt from his book Saving Faith (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1871), pp. 39-41.

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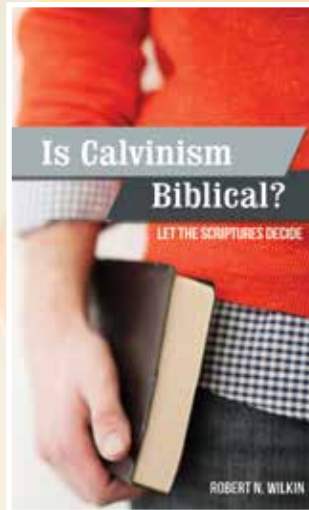


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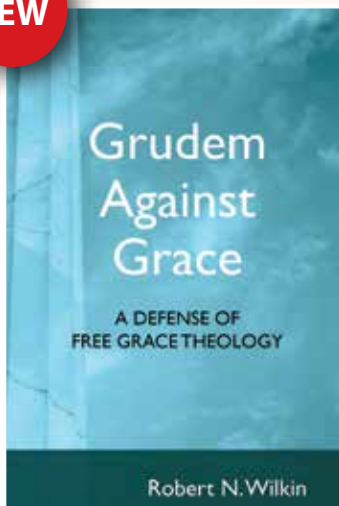
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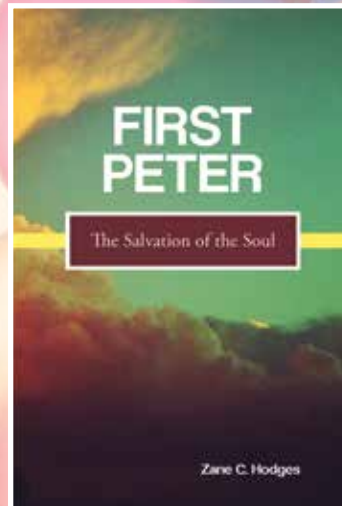


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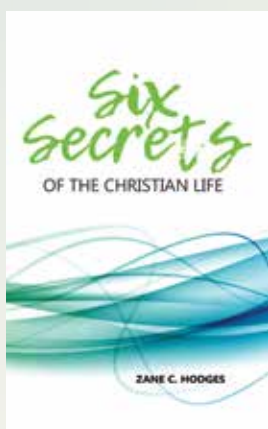
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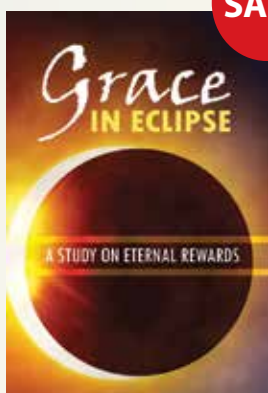


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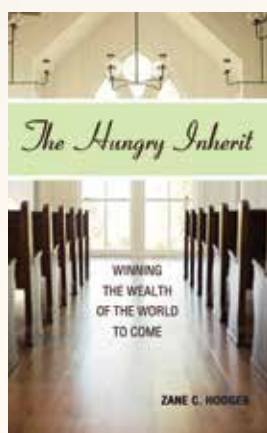
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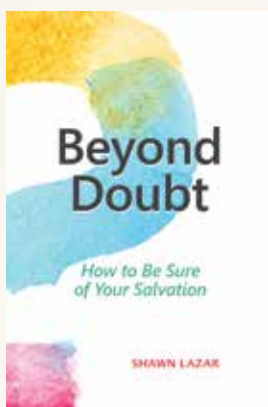


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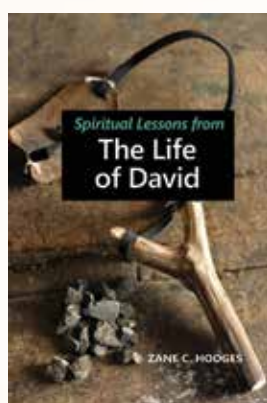


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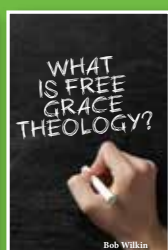
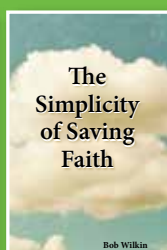
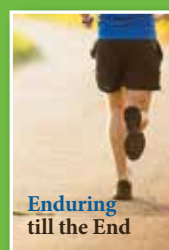


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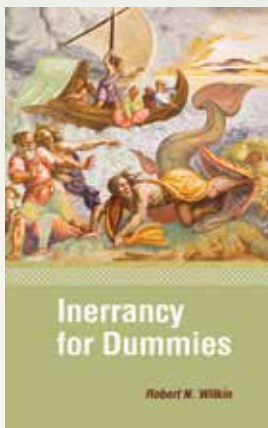
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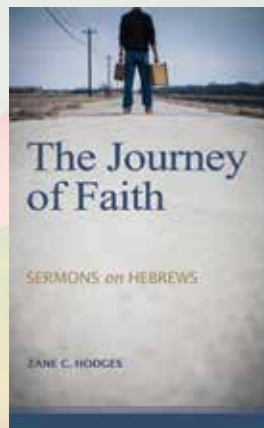


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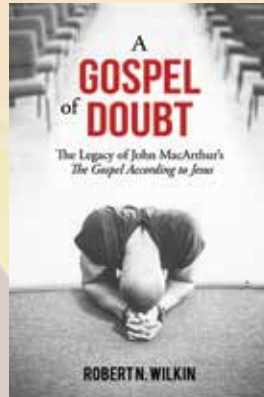


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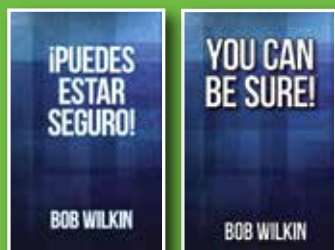


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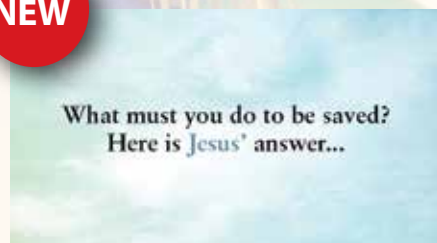
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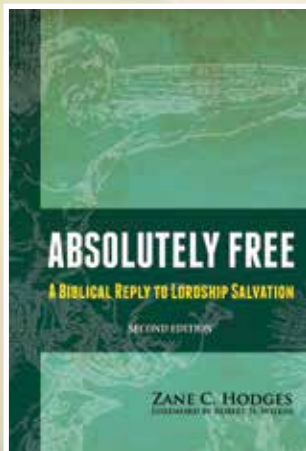


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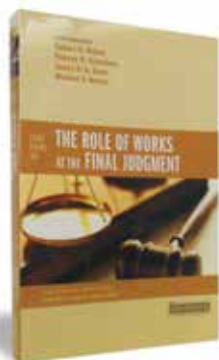
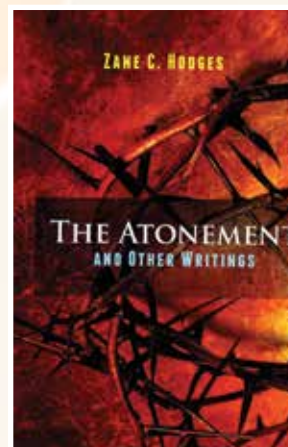
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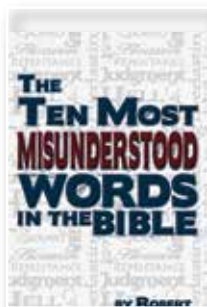
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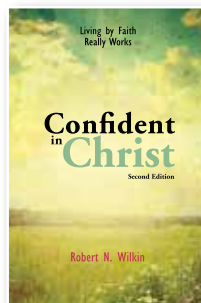
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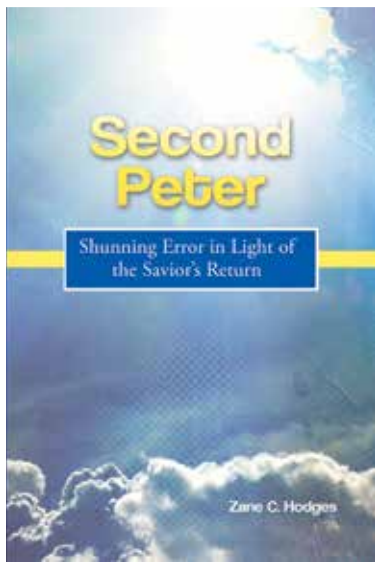
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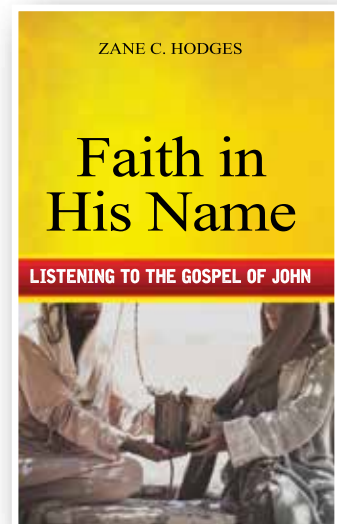
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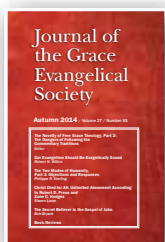
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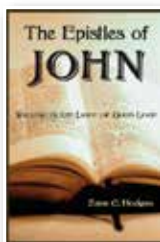




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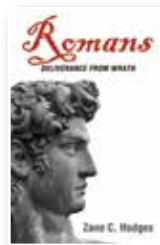


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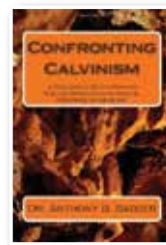


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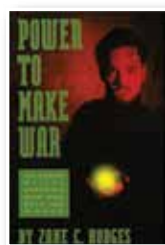


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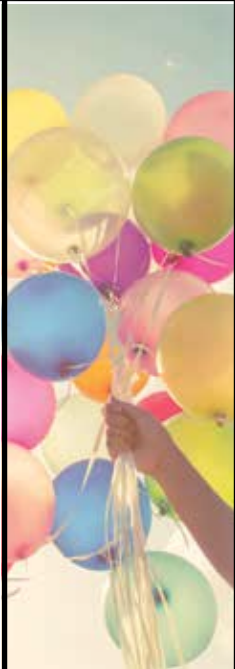
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What Was Zane Hodges Saying about Salvation in 1 Timothy 4:16?

By Bob Wilkin

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim 4:16).

We ran an article in the May-June *Grace in Focus* in which Zane Hodges discussed 1 Tim 4:6-16. At the end of the article there was a short paragraph in which Hodges said, “The word *save* in v 16 cannot refer to what is past for us (cf. Titus 3:5)...The thought here is that of Mark 8:34-38 and John 12:25-26. We save first ourselves, secondarily others” (p. 17).

The following email in my inbox caught my attention:

“I need to bring it to your attention that the final paragraph of “Teach the Truth” by Zane C Hodges, whether intentionally or not, misrepresents salvation by saying:

“The word ‘save’ in v 16 cannot refer to what is past for us (cf. Titus 3:5). The NT has much to say of the salvation of the soul (psychē) or life, which is achieved only by discipleship to the fullest extent.”

“It should be made very clear that salvation is faith alone in Christ alone. It is incorrect to describe the means of salvation as *anything* but believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“If an unbeliever, having never heard the gospel, flipped to p. 17 and the only thing he read in the whole magazine was that “[salvation of the soul] is achieved only by discipleship,” that unbeliever would not know salvation or the soteriological view of *Grace in Focus*.”

Great point. We dropped the ball on this one. And by “we” I mean Shawn!

We knew what Hodges meant and left his statement as is. The problem is, as the reader points out, not everyone knows what he meant. If an unbeliever read what he wrote, he would

be terribly confused. Even many believers could become confused.

When Hodges was speaking of the saving of the *psychē*, he was talking about gaining fullness of life by denying ourselves, taking up our crosses, and following Christ.

That is what Matt 16:24-28 and Mark 8:34-38 discuss.

When Zane said, “We save first ourselves, secondarily others,” he was talking about the gaining of fullness of life, not salvation from eternal condemnation.


First we gain fullness of life ourselves, by abiding in sound doctrine, and then we help others gain fullness of lives by grounding them in sound doctrine.

The issue of false teachers and their false teachings is found at the very start of 1 Timothy (cf. 1 Tim 1:3-11) and at the start of chapter 4 (cf. 1 Tim 4:1-8). We have the same problem today. Those who teach in the local church, as Timothy did, are to take heed to “the doctrine,” that is, the doctrine passed down to us from the Lord and His Apostles. If we teach Apostolic doctrine, then we will deliver our listeners from the destructive false teachings which are out there.

The point is this: doctrine is important. Very important. What we believe directly impacts what we say and do and whether we are pleasing or displeasing the Lord. Remember what Paul said in Rom 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind...*” (emphasis added).

He also spoke of transformation via sound doctrine in 2 Cor 3:18: “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror [=God’s Word] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Doctrine matters. A lot. Of course, once we are born again, our eternal destiny is set. But our fullness of life here and now depends on abiding in sound doctrine.

I’m sorry for the confusion. We should have put an editor’s note expanding on what Hodges meant. 

Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

The Films of the Kendrick Brothers

By Steve Dehner

About fifteen years ago, Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, GA, began making movies. Under the creative leadership of Alex Kendrick and his brother Stephen, Sherwood Pictures so far has produced four feature films and one made under the brothers' own subsidiary.

Despite mixed-to-poor reviews in the secular press, they have amassed a huge audience among Christian movie-goers and have reaped substantial profits.

Each successive movie has increased its budget, its production values, and its returns.

How do these films measure up when it comes to their Biblical messages, including their understanding of the gospel?

FLYWHEEL (2003)

Sherwood's debut film was *Flywheel*, a low-low-budget outing with amateur actors, competent sound and cinematography, and an uninspired score.

What it lacks in polish it makes up for in substance and spirit.

Like all the Sherwood films, it is a labor of love made by a tight-knit church family. Produced for about \$20,000, it wasn't released to DVD until 2007, after the success of *Facing the Giants* (2006).

Flywheel targets a Christian audience and its purpose is revivalistic rather than evangelistic.

It tells the story of Jay Austin, a dishonest, church-going used-car dealer who comes to his senses and repents, turning over his car lot, along with his broken relationships and finances, to the Lord.

It is not especially preachy. It conveys its lessons through the experiences of the main character, and there are many Biblical lessons along the way. Believers will appreciate the way the film presents the hand of God at work in familiar ways, and how Jay is delivered *through*, not *from* his circumstances.

In my view, this is a "Free Grace friendly" film. It is really a story about lordship sanctification: a broken man submitting his life and affairs to the will and direction of the Lord.

The scene that shows him putting an empty envelope in the collection plate at church is called "Empty Faith" on the DVD, but it is never suggested that he was not a believer. He never says he wasn't a believer, just that he had fallen into selfishness, greed, and pride.

It emphasizes contrition, humility, seeking and giving forgiveness, and making amends. What it illustrates best is our need for ever-increasing trust in the Lord.

God is gracious, and the characters, when at their best, are as well. He blesses the one who commits his life to Him, but that blessing doesn't mean He always removes the consequences of our sins from our lives.

For a low-budget film, there is a lot to enjoy, with some truly touching scenes, heartfelt performances, good humor, and a realistic portrait of some of the struggles we commonly face.

FACING THE GIANTS (2006)

I'm a sucker for sports movies, even though I'm always pretty sure who'll win the big game at the end. In fact, I typically like a good movie about sports more than I like sports.

With their second movie, the Kendrick brothers upped their game. While the cast still is not all-pro, the crew is, and it shows in the much-improved quality. The result was a surprise hit of the year.



Telling the story of a losing football team at a Christian high school, *Giants* highlights the need for faith in a powerful God with Whom nothing is impossible. It looks at real-life problems like failure, discouragement, unbelief, and even infertility.

But the story bears down on how much effort believers must exert to find God coming to their aid. The team's coach tells them repeatedly that they must put out their maximum effort, and though they should praise God even when they fail (or lose a game), the only way they can have any self-respect is if they "give God their best," and "leave everything on the field."

Giants sounds a theme repeated in the Sherwood films. As their coach tells them, "A team that plays for His honor and glory will have His blessings following that team."

For all the protagonists in the Kendricks movies, their lives are filled at first with frustration, disappointment, failure, and estrangement. But when they seek to put God at the center of their lives, He blesses them by solving all of their problems and making their dreams come true. At the same time, they have to earn that place of blessing with a lot of hard work and sacrifice, and never more than in *Facing the Giants*.

Viewers who have been struck by calamity when they were following the Lord and seeking to serve Him faithfully may take issue with this notion, as I did.

Also, like me, they may find it does not keep them from enjoying this movie.

God is a loving Father who desires to give good things to His children. The characters often model genuine love and respect in a winsome way. The coach tells his team that he loves them. As I watched, I was convicted to deepen my faith and truly believe that with God nothing is impossible.

FIREPROOF (2008)

According to the film, a troubled marriage can be saved by performing a to-do list known as the "Truth Dare."

The story concerns Caleb, a firefighter (Kirk Cameron), and his wife Katherine (Erin Bethea), a hospital PR manager.

The movie is sincere, and without question, many Christians have found it moving and inspiring.

It contends that the key to a successful marriage, and the only hope for a failing one, is dedicating oneself to showing unconditional love in tangible and practical ways to one's spouse, even if the

spouse does not respond. Of course, we are to believe that eventually, he or she will. But the tension in this story is the possibility that such love may elicit no response.

On the one hand, there is a sense of realism about how hard it can be for a husband and wife to restore their love after trust has been broken, and they have fallen into daily acrimony. I think that is why so many Christians responded to this film: seeing some of this play out on the screen can hit pretty close to home.

On the other hand, some of the wins in the story come a little too easily. Caleb secures his victory over porn addiction (handled very tactfully) by smashing his PC with a baseball bat and going for a jog. Later, someone can finally prove his love by writing a big check.

The story begins with both a husband and wife who do not believe. In fact, Caleb is given the to-do list by his father and carries out half of it without the benefit of God's help or having the Holy Spirit within.

I enjoyed the scene where his father presents him with the gospel. But when he finally presses Caleb for a decision, it falls into an all-too-familiar confusion.

DAD: Can't you see that you need Him?

Caleb nods.

DAD: Can't you see that you need His forgiveness?

CALEB: Yes.

DAD: Will you trust Him with your life?

CALEB nods. They hug.

Cut to the fire station, where Caleb is eager to tell his Christian friend Michael what's happened.

MICHAEL: You want to tell me something?

CALEB: It's about your faith.

MICHAEL: My faith?

CALEB: Yeah.

MICHAEL: What about it?

CALEB: Well. I'm in.

MICHAEL: You're in?

CALEB: Yeah, I'm in.

MICHAEL: Now, are you saying you want to be in?

CALEB: I'm saying, I'm in.

MICHAEL: You're really in?

CALEB: I'm really in.

MICHAEL: Cuz you can't be half-in and say you're in. You gotta be all in, brother.

CALEB: I'm saying I'm all in.

There you have it: you can get all the way in by trusting God with your life.

Grace in Focus readers will wish for more clarity here.

It would have been better to hear something about believing in Jesus.

Maybe Caleb could have received life from Jesus, instead of giving his life to the Lord. (Why do so many Christians think God wants us to give Him our lives?)

Not surprisingly, most secular critics found *Fireproof* preachy and weird. Even with its muddled salvation message and its emphasis on working the list (both with and without the Lord), some readers may find in *Fireproof* an encouraging message and a hopeful story.

If anything was missing, in my view, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. He gets no mention, and one gets the idea that simply asking God for your desired outcome is the key, without openness to being personally guided into being more loving. Relying instead on the "Truth Dare's" written instructions could displace the necessary work of the Spirit.

COURAGEOUS (2011)

Is my sanctification the result of the work of God in me by his Spirit, with which I cooperate by doing the good that He has given me to do? Or is it primarily me, holding myself to higher standards of conduct and promising myself and those around me that I will strive to meet them?

Is spiritual growth becoming more like Christ, or becoming the best possible me?

If you watch *Fireproof* and *Courageous* back to back, as I did, you might discern God as the Divine Problem-Solver, Who is pleased with our invention of spiritual gimmicks, like the "Truth Dare," or the "Resolution" in *Courageous*. This movie concerns five men who make a commitment to be better fathers.

There is much to commend in *Courageous*. Like the previous movies, the script is very good, and the acting in the lead roles has stepped up. The

action scenes, like those in *Fireproof*, are taut and well executed.

The story delivers a devastating and effective emotional impact that is surprising in its honesty and depth. (A heads-up: the plot includes the death of a child. The portrayal of the family's grief is authentic and heart-rending, and on my second viewing, it elicited even more tears than the first.) The Kendricks aren't afraid to go to the dark places with their characters, and they don't offer glib platitudes. On both counts, they deserve a lot of credit.

Like me, you might take issue with the emphasis *Courageous* places on making vows. Instead of letting their Yes be Yes, and their No be No, all five fathers not only enter into an elaborate written "Resolution," they stage a solemn ceremony with their families, not unlike a wedding, in which the resolutions that they wrote are read aloud and taken as vows. They have them printed like academic credentials, finely framed and hung prominently in their homes. (And yes, you can buy one for your home as well: \$10.99 at Amazon.)

I know many Christians find this inspiring, but I find it weird and legalistic.

The self-made "Law of Resolution" is bound, eventually, to point an accusing finger at every perceived failure, when as believers we should live under the power, guidance, conviction, and restoration of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, just when you thought they were pretty good at avoiding preachiness, they decide to end this movie with a sermon, delivered by Kendrick himself, the lead actor, director, co-writer, and co-producer, replete with swelling music and, amusingly, some of his own Sherwood Baptist congregation fighting to stay awake!

WAR ROOM (2015)

War Room was not produced through Sherwood Pictures, but it was made by the same creative team, so I have included it.

By now the Kendricks are technically competent filmmakers who have settled into reasonably well told stories. The weaknesses seem now to be the same from film to film, as well as their strengths.

If you have watched them in order, you will recognize the patterned plots: one or more main characters who are spiritually barren make a



wreck of their lives, repent, and find the secret to a faithful and fruitful walk with the Lord. That secret may be submission, a resolution, a dare, or, as in *War Room*, prayer—but it always amounts to vows and promises—commitment.

The plot in *War Room* concerns the near ruin and restoration of a marriage between Liz and Tony, two backslidden believers (Priscilla Shirer and T.C. Stallings). It is all about spiritual warfare, and is generally sound in its approach to prayer. It teaches that as long as we regard other people as our enemy, we will be unwitting pawns of our real enemy, Satan. Instead, we need to turn from fighting people to fighting *him*. And prayer is the chief weapon God has given us.

Once again, the filmmakers are more concerned with feckless believers than with the lost. This makes perfect sense given that these movies are marketed to Christian audiences.

Things I liked about *War Room*: it had the best acting of any of the films, with more pros in the cast and stronger actors in the leading roles. Still

no Oscar winners here, but solid work. It has greater energy, with lively performances, effective use of music, and freer movement of the camera. The Kendricks clearly began to diversify their casting after the first two, mostly white casts in *Flywheel* and *Facing the Giants*. Here the lead characters are African-American, a righteous choice since many “church movies” these days are still made and marketed along racial lines. Finally, the name of Jesus, much less frequent in the previous films, is used often and is exalted in *War Room*.

Things I didn’t like: its muddled lordship gospel.

The prayer warrior, Miss Clara (Karen Abercrombie) explains to Liz that coming to Christ means asking for forgiveness, but that God will not forgive the person who has not forgiven others. In her presentation, both faith and repentance from sin are required to be born again. Also, much of Clara’s dialogue consists of sermonettes, including the prayer she shouts to God in the closing scene. This is likely to be much less of an objection for believers.

Given the abusiveness, neglect, and criminality of the husband, it seems there should have been some acknowledgment that wives and children who are not safe should pray for Daddy from an undisclosed location. I believe in prayer, but I also believe in the safety of women and children. A victim of domestic abuse watching this might be confused by the suggestion that one ought simply to pray, submit, and trust God when verbal abuse, crime and the potential for adultery or worse abuse is present.

Like many of these films, its weaknesses may not prevent you from enjoying the story. In almost every Kendrick movie, there are scenes—usually those in which a character finally breaks and turns to Christ, or when he asks others he’s wronged for forgiveness—that are very touching and may require tissues to be nearby.

EXPENSIVE TRACTS

All in all, the movies made by the Kendrick brothers are a mixed bag. I have mentioned many of their virtues. As tracts about repentance, as uplifting entertainment for church-goers, as often emotional and effective exhortations to mind our relationships, they serve well.


As motion picture art and as outreach to pre-believers, they fail. Despite their obvious sincerity and good intentions, the Kendricks have not set out to make great movies. They have set out to write great sermons and package them as movies Christians are willing to sit through.

It is clear the filmmakers aspire to no higher artistic attainment than that of run-of-the-mill Hollywood productions, because their movies mean only to deliver a message. They focus on the content of their message to the neglect of its form. All their effort has gone to the craft of filmmaking and very little to its art.

The Bible study booklet based on *Courageous* perpetuates the confusing gospel message: “Faith is a decision of your heart demonstrated by the actions of your life...The Bible commands everyone to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved” (*Honor Begins at Home*, p. 145).

Alert viewers may also question the notions of religious vows and checklist spirituality; that if you only submit/commit/pray, God will smooth out everything in your life; that God only blesses us when we are working as hard as we can; that He only forgives if we forgive and is pleased with our promises, vows, and commitments.

The concept of “rest” is not in the Kendrick vocabulary.

The Kendricks’ vision is to call Christians to repentance and renewed obedience by publishing very expensive tracts in the form of movies. In our media-saturated culture, most evangelicals will applaud this effort even if it barely reaches beyond the church walls or smacks of works-righteousness. Nevertheless, truly excellent films, like any other endeavor, only result when that is the intent of the creator. Let us hope that in the future the Kendricks will aim higher—artistically *and* theologically. 

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



Grace and Groans

By Charlie McCall

WE NEED CHRIST

God is Himself the grace needed for the Christian life. Romans 7 depicts the Christian experience when a person attempts to live from the Word of God or from his new orientation (new nature) toward Christ *but not from the person of Christ Himself*.

That experience is defeat and despair.

The divinely provided resources of the inspired Word, and a new nature that gives hearty agreement with the Word of God, were never intended to be replacements for Christ Himself. They were intended to orient us *to* Christ and to teach us *of* Christ, but we must *have* Christ. That is, we must have His indwelling presence. Only He can save us from our sin, indeed, from ourselves.

THE BENEFITS OF THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

The indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ means many things for the believer.

For example, Romans 8 tells us that He lives in us to fulfill all that God requires of us, He sets us free from the law of sin and death, He gives us life and peace; He bears witness of our being children of God; He puts to death the deeds of the body; and He leads us.

All of these things God lives in us to do.

He is the answer to the sin within us.

He is the One Who delivers us from the defeat and despair depicted in Romans 7.



THIS FALLEN WORLD

This is all very true and triumphant. Yet the world we live in is still fallen!

Jesus died for all sin and for all its consequences, including death. Yet, creation is still suffering, and we are still dying.

What Christ has accomplished is clearly not yet fully applied.

We wait and groan with creation for the “not yet” of what God is yet to do. It is the “not yet” which causes us so much heartache, confusion, and even despair. We are prone to wonder if something is wrong with our faith when so much is still so wrong in our circumstances.

While the world remains fallen and our bodies remain unredeemed, we groan in every aspect of our beings.

Sometimes it is simply too much to bear.

For this, too, we need the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. Creation groans. We groan. And the Holy Spirit groans.

He doesn't just empathize with us; He is personally pained by the sin that pains this world and pains us.

Sin and death were not God's will. Sin entered the world because of one man (Adam), and death came through sin. Death spread to all men because all sinned (Rom 5:12). No one hates death more than God does. It is His last enemy (1 Cor 15:26). He despises it. It pains Him to the point of groanings that can't even be expressed.

Frankly, that comforts me.

THE NEED TO PRAY

The world is fallen, and Christ lives in us to be victorious over sin and death. How are we then to pray? Do we pray for healing, or not?

We don't know.

If God, through Paul, says that believers don't know how to pray (Rom 8:26) in view of the apparent conflict between the ministry of the Spirit within us and the sin and suffering that is in creation, is it honest to say that we *do* know?

Only the Spirit knows.

He knows the Father.

And He knows how to pray for us.

He lives in us to intercede for us constantly, correctly, and effectively.

Sometimes, I believe, He will lead us to pray for healing. Sometimes He will tell us not to do so, as Jesus did with Paul in 2 Cor 12:9. Always He will lead us to Christ, remind us that we are His, and

give us life and peace. Always. He never lags in His ministry to us.

Be assured, God lives in you to be and to give grace and victory over indwelling sin, and He groans in intercession for you concerning the tragic effects of sin around you. The power of His indwelling life coupled with the fallenness of this world means that we are not always going to know how to pray. It is not unbelief to admit that.


Avoid the ditch of saying there is no healing.

Avoid the other ditch that says He wants everything healed now.

Both are wrong.

In between is great turmoil of soul.

Turn to the One who is living in you, and rest in Him Who knows how to pray for us and Who is constantly doing so.

Thank you, O Lord, for Your indwelling presence which graces us and for Your constant intercession in groanings for us. 



Charlie McCall is the General Director of His Hill Bible School and Camp in Comfort, TX.

BAD QUOTE

“If we hold fast to an unforgiving spirit, we will not be forgiven by God. If we continue on in that way, then we will not go to heaven, because heaven is the dwelling place of forgiven people.”

~John Piper,

*As We Forgive Our Debtors:
What Does Forgiveness Look Like?*



We had a great turnout at a great venue!

23RD ANNUAL GES CONFERENCE MAY 21-24

What a conference! This was possibly our best conference in over a decade. The location was new: The Hope Center in Plano, TX. Everyone enjoyed it very much. The facilities were great.

The attendance was up significantly. On Tuesday we were right around 200. For most of the conference we had around 160-180. We aren't sure why attendance was up. Was Plano easier to get to? Did the regional conferences encourage people to attend the national? Was it because of the extra advertising we did? Was it all of the above?

The conferees were very enthusiastic and enjoyed the messages and fellowship very much.

Some of the plenary messages which stood out the most (all were excellent) were Bob Bryant on Genesis 15:6, "That Critical Split Second in Abraham's Life"; Donnie Preslar who showed that "Continuous Faith Is Not Required for Everlasting

Life"; Ken Yates who explained what "Faith Without Works Is Dead" means in the context of James 2:14-26; Steve Thurman, "Free Grace Is the First Fundamental in Discipleship"; and Shawn Lazar, "Who You Are Tells You Who to Love."

The theme was the difference between evangelism and discipleship. That was an excellent topic to learn more about Free Grace Theology. If people were unclear on some key issues before attending, I think the conference will have given them much to consider.

Here are some of the comments from the conferees: "Great speakers & wonderful people." "Excellent." "This is the best GES Conference I've attended." "Positive, encouraging, refreshing, informative." "Great on discipleship." "The conference was great." "I can't thank you enough." "As a first time attendee: Time well spent getting



Bob with Bill Fiess



BOB WILKIN

to know God's Word better." "Awesome." "Great!" "Wonderful, excellent, thought-provoking." "Tremendously encouraging & inspiring." "Educational, uplifting, thought-provoking, affirming, occasionally frustrating." "Good teaching and fellowship." "The most relevant to my life." "Refreshing." "A wonderful experience, unparalleled, joy and delight to meet like-minded brothers and sisters."

The audio and video from the conference should be available in about a month. Our thanks to Don Reiher for all his hard work in filming, once again.

Next year we will meet at the Hope Center again. Dates: May 20-23. We are currently voting on the theme: either Ephesians verse-by-verse, or Systematic Theology.

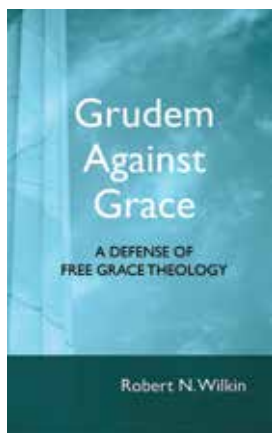
RESPONSE TO GRUDEM

Bob released his book, *Grudem Against Grace: A Defense of Free Grace Theology*.

Several other books from Free Grace authors have come out in response to Wayne Grudem's criticisms. But none have been as direct a response as this one, and none give all the same answers that Bob gives to Grudem.

Bob responds to Grudem chapter by chapter and section by section.

Now on sale in the bookstore and on amazon.com!



TONY EVANS

UPCOMING REGIONAL CONFERENCES

Upcoming regionals include Orlando, Denver, Northwest, and possibly the upstate New York area. See the Events page of the website for more details.

NEW BOOKS

This summer, Shawn has ambitious plans on finishing several new books.


First, Ken Yates's commentary on Hebrews. This will be a substantial commentary, probably in the 200-300 page range.

Second, Zane Hodges's notes on Revelation. Those will probably get done.

Then Shawn is working to finish a book on Hell, defending a somewhat different version of eternal conscious torment.

Meanwhile, Bob is working on his autobiography, planning a book on repentance, and doing a sequel to *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words*.

Other projects include publishing Zane's notes on 1-2 Timothy, 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews.

You should have plenty of new books to purchase at Christmas. 

3rd Quarter Financial Report

Budget thru March 31	\$321,753
Expenses thru Mar 31	\$341,388
Revenue thru Mar 31	\$371,020

The Mailbag

By You

Always great information. I hope God continues to bless your ministry.” ~C.C., DeKalb, MS.


“Thanks so much for your magazine. My wife and I for the last ten years have been in gospel tract distribution, mostly at the largest flea market in Georgia (Pendergrass, GA). We give out thousands of tracts weekly. We find it very hard to find good grace-alone tracts at an affordable price, just plain simple inexpensive tracts. Do you know anyone who prints these? ~J.M., Jefferson, GA.

“Dear Dr. Wilkin, I just wanted to write and thank you for your teaching. You have helped me a lot. My Sunday school teacher, Don Reiher, uses your material in class. I believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation and I want to spend eternity with Him. Once again, thank you and GES for the work that you do.” ~T.D., Prospect Park, PA.

“Thank you for all you do. We are so thankful for your ministry.” ~D.S., Marion, KS.



“I just received your May/June magazine. Wonderful articles as usual. I also received the books you sent. All are outstanding. I’m on the second reading through them now.” ~D.W., Century, FL.

“Thank you for your continual service in providing me with your magazine. I’ve enclosed a small donation in appreciation of your ministry.” ~L.C., Mount Laurel, NJ. 

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Who You Are Tells You Whom to Love

(Ephesians 5:22–6:9)

By Shawn Lazar

WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

What does it mean to follow Jesus—to live the kind of life He wants you to live?

At the very beginning of my Christian life, I was reading very mystical authors like Watchman Nee and Andrew Murray. What they described was so above and beyond me, quite frankly, it made me depressed!

Later on, I began to think the central issues in Christian discipleship were highly intellectual and oriented around the so-called “hard problems” that philosophers and apologists try to answer. I started a PhD in Christian Ethics to pursue that version of the Christian life.

But my approach to Christian living has radically changed since getting married and having three kids. My priorities have changed.

Now I just want my son Zane to flush the toilet! I want to know how to teach my kids to pray.

I want to know how to “date” my wife while we’re both exhausted (“Darling, the candlelight really brings out the bags under your eyes.”)

I want to know how to change diapers by faith apart from works. (“Be thou removed into the diaper pail...”)

Instead of being highly intellectual or overly mystical, my concerns for living the Christian life have become very down-to-earth and practical. I want to know how best to love the people around me.

Is that where you are at in the Christian life? Are you wondering how to love the people around you?

If so, I believe that Eph 5:22–6:9 teaches three essentials in loving your neighbor.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT ROLES IN SOCIETY

First, notice that Paul describes different *roles* in society—roles that you may have.

He mentions wives (5:22), husbands (5:25), children (6:1), parents (6:1), servants (6:5), and masters (6:9).

Paul’s list isn’t exhaustive; it’s illustrative. Those are some roles in society. But there are many more. And please note, you can have more than one role to play.

For example, I am a father to three children; a husband; an employee at a ministry; the manager of some employees; a customer to several suppliers; the pastor of a church; an American citizen; an HOA member; a brother; a grandson, and many other things besides.

All these roles are part of my identity. They define who I am.

Over time those roles have changed. I became a father and a husband. I hope to become a grandfather, one day, and who knows what else I may become as I grow older?

The same is true for you. You have different roles. Some are constant. Some have changed. But they all help to define who you are. And, in turn, understanding your roles helps you understand how you should live as a follower of Jesus Christ.

How so?

That brings me to the second observation about this passage.



EACH ROLE HAS A CORRESPONDING NEIGHBOR

Second, for every role Paul mentions there is a *corresponding neighbor*.

For example, if you are a wife, who is your neighbor? Your husband.

If you are a husband, who is your neighbor? Your wife.

If you are a parent, who is your neighbor? Your child.

If you are a child, who is your neighbor? Your parents.

If you are a servant, who is your neighbor? Your master.

If you are a master, who is your neighbor? Your servant.

The same is true for all the other roles that you have in life. Every role has a corresponding neighbor.

Who you are, tells you whom to love.

Paul only gives us a few illustrative examples of the roles you might have in life. Let's go beyond those and think of some others.

For example, let's say you enjoy spending too much money on coffee and often go to your local Starbucks. Who is your neighbor? The barista.

And if you are a barista, who is your neighbor? Your customers.

If you are a mechanic, who is your neighbor? No, not the car, but the car owner.

If you are a student, who is your neighbor? Your teacher.

If you are a teacher, who is your neighbor? Your students.

Again, who you are, tells you whom to love.

I don't know why, but I used to think of my neighbor as someone who lived in Africa, or Asia, or someplace very far away. Now I know that my wife and kids are my closest neighbors. Then there are my co-workers and all the other people that I meet while functioning in my different roles in life.

If your roles in life help you to know who your neighbors are, how do you know how to love them?

DIFFERENT NEIGHBORS ARE SHOWN LOVE IN DIFFERENT WAYS

Third, I notice that Paul describes different ways of loving different neighbors. How you love someone depends on who you are to him or her.

So, for example, how is a wife supposed to love her husband? Paul gives us two elements—submission (5:22), and respect (5:33). That's not an exhaustive list, either. Paul is giving broad principles here. Submission and respect are two ways that a wife can love her husband.

Abby and I have been married for thirteen years. When we got married, we were clear that I was the head of the family. I would make the big decision, and she would make the small decisions. That has worked out very well for us. It's been thirteen years, and I'm still waiting for a big decision!

And how does Paul think a husband should love his wife? As husbands, our model should be to love our wives as Christ loved the Church (5:25). He gave Himself for her. To use a different model, Paul says that husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies (5:28). He should nourish and cherish her just as he nourishes and cherishes his own body. (My doctor says I'm an over-achiever in nourishing my own body.)

Do you see that while the underlying motivation is the same—i.e., love—the way that love is expressed is very different depending on the neighbor? With husbands, the emphasis is on authority. With wives, it's on caring. Those are just some principles.

Love is not generic. There is no one-size-fits-all way of loving someone.

Love is specific.

It's practical.

It deals with real people, as they are, and who they are, regarding what they really need.

Who you are tells you whom to love. And who you are tells you how to love.

Now, how does a child love his parents? Look at 6:1—by honoring and obeying them. As a father, I can give my hearty “Amen!” to that. We have the Ten Commandments by our kitchen table. I tell my kids all the time that what God expects of them, and what I expect, is obedience and honor. At this point in their life, that really is the most important thing.

And how does a father love his children? What does Paul say? He loves them by not provoking them to wrath (6:4a).

I can relate to this.

Children are called to obey, but parents are called to be reasonable in what we ask of them. Don't put a heavy load on their shoulders to irritate them. Sometimes I wonder how often I do this. I try to push my kids to accomplish more. Sometimes I forget how young they are. I might ask them to do something they really aren't ready to do, and then I get unjustly irritated, and it leads to conflict. That is provoking my kids to wrath.

Fathers are also called to love their children by training them in the things of the Lord (6:4b). You love your children by raising them well in a godly environment, with a Biblical mind so they can grow to be mature believers. That is what love looks like in the parent/child relationship.

Paul goes on to treat the subject of servants and masters (6:5-9). How does a servant love his master? By obeying him willingly. In the ancient world, “servanthood” was probably not your first career choice. It was something thrust upon you, against your will. Paul is saying if you want to love your master, be willing.

And how does a master love his servant? In a world where slaves could be treated as property, don't threaten them. A master should not threaten them or treat them with partiality.

Those are specific examples. What is the lesson Paul is driving at here?

You do not love your neighbors in the same way. Each neighbor is different. Each neighbor requires a different kind of love. The love you show to your child is extremely different from the love you show to your boss. The love you show to your wife is very different from the love you show to your mechanic (although I'm sure your mechanic wants to feel cherished every once in a while, too!).

All love is a type of service to your neighbor. But not every kind of service is the same. The parent might have authority over the child, and the child might be called to obey, but the reverse is not true. But because this is a relationship of love, they are actually serving each other. The father is serving the child by raising him, just as much as the child is serving the father by obeying him.

Wife and husband, even though their roles are different, even though the manner in which they love is different, are still mutually serving one another.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION TO APPLY THESE PRINCIPLES

Unlike the people of the OT, we don't have hundreds of specific laws, and case laws, to apply to our lives.

What we have are principles.

You need to use Christian sense, judgment, and imagination to apply those principles to your life even if it is not directly addressed by Scripture.

So, for example, if you are ordering at a restaurant, who is your neighbor?


The waitress.

And how do you love your waitress neighbor?

By giving a healthy tip. Did you ever think that loving your neighbor means giving a good tip?

Here's another example. Growing up in Canada, we lived on a street of townhomes. There was one two-car driveway between each home. After a good snow, and after people came out to shovel their driveways, you could tell which families on the street got along and which ones didn't! Shoveling your neighbor's driveway can be an act of love. So can paying your neighbor's kid to do it.

GRACE FREES YOU TO SIMPLY LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Knowing that salvation is a free gift, given by grace through faith apart from works (Eph 2:8-9), should free you up to love your neighbor without the baggage of thinking you are earning your salvation. Free Grace should motivate you to love and help your neighbors for their own sake, in ways that really make a difference in their lives. While you should be a great receiver when it comes to eternal life, you should be a great achiever when it comes to loving your neighbor. And if you're ever in a quandary about how to proceed, just remember, *who you are tells you whom to love.* 



Shawn Lazar is the Editor of Grace in Focus magazine. He is the pastor of Gateway Baptist's Faith Fellowship in Denton, TX.

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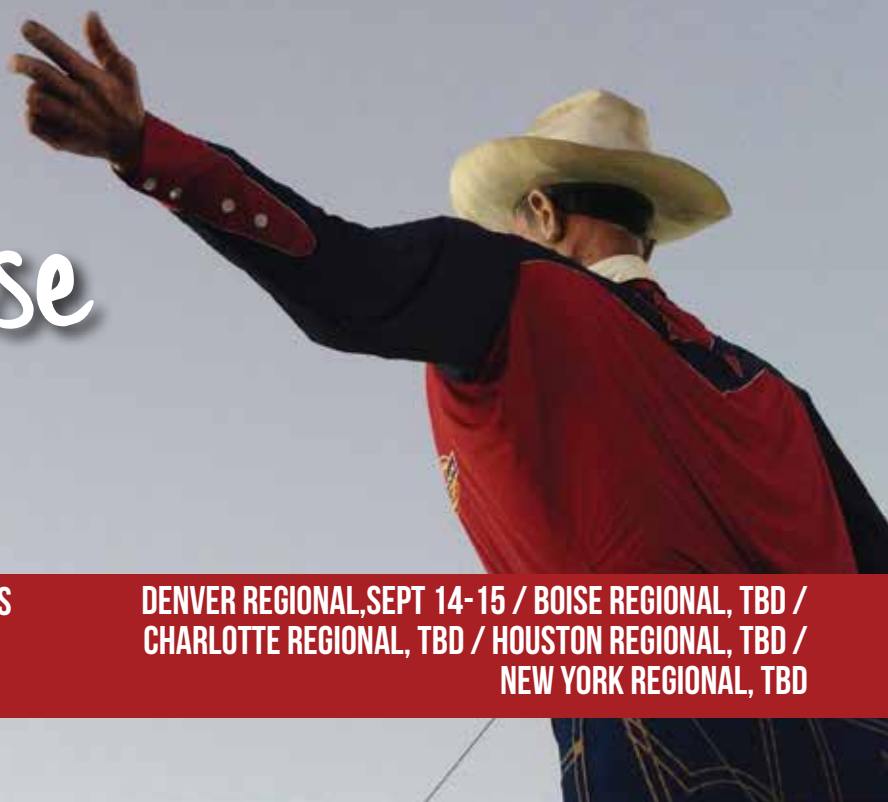
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