

A Simple Way to Pray / R-E-S-P-E-C-T / Avoiding Small Church Ruts / Spirit Week Loving Me Enough / Bible Bloopers / What Will Your Legacy Be? / The Good Fight

CONTENTS

- 3 From the Editor
- 4 Faith Alone in 100 Texts
 BY BOB WILKIN
- 8 What Will Your Legacy Be?
 BY KEN YATES
- **12 Appropriating Faith**BY JAMES MORISON
- 14 Bible Bloopers and How to Avoid Them
 BY MARCIA HORNOK
- 18 The Good Fight
 BY BILL FIESS
- 20 Avoiding Small Church Ruts BY JOSH MEIER
- 24 Spirit Week

 BY NATE STEVENS
- 25 The Bookstore
- 34 The Simple Life Is Meaningful BY RANDY WHITE
- 36 Learning to Sorrow in Hope
 BY ALLEN REA
- 39 Loving Me Enough
 BY CHARLIE MCCALL



41 A Review of Sam Storms's Kept By Iesus

BY BOB WILKIN

- 44 R-E-S-P-E-C-T (Ephesians 5:22-24)
 BY DAVID BECHTEL
- 47 A Simple Way to Pray

GRACE IN FOCUS

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FROM THE EDITOR

eptember and October are a great time of transition here in Texas. We move from summer to fall. From 100 degree highs to 78 degree highs.

We have a new season of conferences scheduled in the coming months, too, including Denver (Sept 14-15) and Trego, WI (Sept 28-20). In addition, I'll be speaking at Upland Bible Church in Las Vegas on Oct 14. Then on to the World Senior games for racewalking and high jumping (low jumping, really).

I hope you enjoy the September/October issue of Grace in Focus. It has excellent articles and several new authors.

"Faith Alone in 100 Texts" lays out over 100 Bible texts that teach that the sole condition of everlasting life (justification, kingdom entrance, etc.) is faith in Christ.

Ken Yates has a challenging article asking us "What Will Your Legacy Be?"

James Morison was a Scottish theologian who died in 1893. Yet he still speaks. We are running an article entitled, "Appropriating Faith" from his book *Saving Faith*. I think you will find it more than a "wee" bit interesting.

Marcia Hornok tackles "Bible Bloopers and How to Avoid Them." While she is articulating views like those of Zane Hodges, her style is quite unique. Enjoy.

Bill Fiess is once again urging us to "Fight the Good Fight." Thanks. I needed that.

Pastor Josh Meier (who is a wee bit taller than I am) lives way out in El Paso. He gives us a very challenging and practical article, "Avoiding Small Church Ruts."

An article has come in from the Pittsburgh area, from Pastor Nate Stevens, "Spirit Week." Well, not week. Spirit *lifetime*. Walking in the Spirit day by day.

Randy White, not the HOF Dallas Cowboy, the other Randy White, Pastor of FBC Taos, rgues that "The Simple Life Is Meaningful."



Nice Weather Ahead Bob Wilkin, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

His mother departed this life earlier this year. Pastor Allen Rea talks about how he is "Learning to Sorrow in Hope."

Charlie McCall tells us that God loves us enough ("Loving Me Enough") to discipline me. Thus, we should rejoice, not grumble, at His loving discipline in our lives.

My review of Sam Storms's book Kept by *Iesus* sheds some light on an important issue assurance and eternal security.

Aretha Franklin died recently. David Bechtel talks about "RESPECT," not just a great song, but a key to a happy marriage.

Finally, Shawn Lazar gives us six secrets (sound familiar?) on "A Simple Way to Pray." Enjoy.

Sol Vill.

Where does the Bible teach we are saved through faith alone?

BY BOB WILKIN

In a recent blog, I indicated that there are over 100 passages in the Bible which say that the one and only condition of everlasting life is believing in Jesus. That led to an email from one of our blog readers:

I have known that for a long time, but it would be a nice tool if we had a list of where all those places are in the Bible. As you well know, for most people, that has to be an incredible statement, like "I'll believe it when I see it." I am wondering if you could put out there on a blog those 100 passages.

Well, I happen to have such a list. But before I give it, let me give some explanation.

Lewis Sperry Chafer famously said there are over 150 verses in the NT that clearly say that everlasting life (or justification) is solely based upon a person's belief or faith in Jesus Christ (*Systematic Theology*, Volume 3, Soteriology, p. 376).

I have found the number is slightly lower, depending on how we count. Obviously, a passage which repeatedly refers to faith alone for regeneration could be counted as one passage or multiple verses. Examples include John

3:14-18; 4:10-26; 5:24-47; 6:26-58; 11:25-27; Rom 4:1-6; Gal 3:6-14; 1 John 5:9-13.

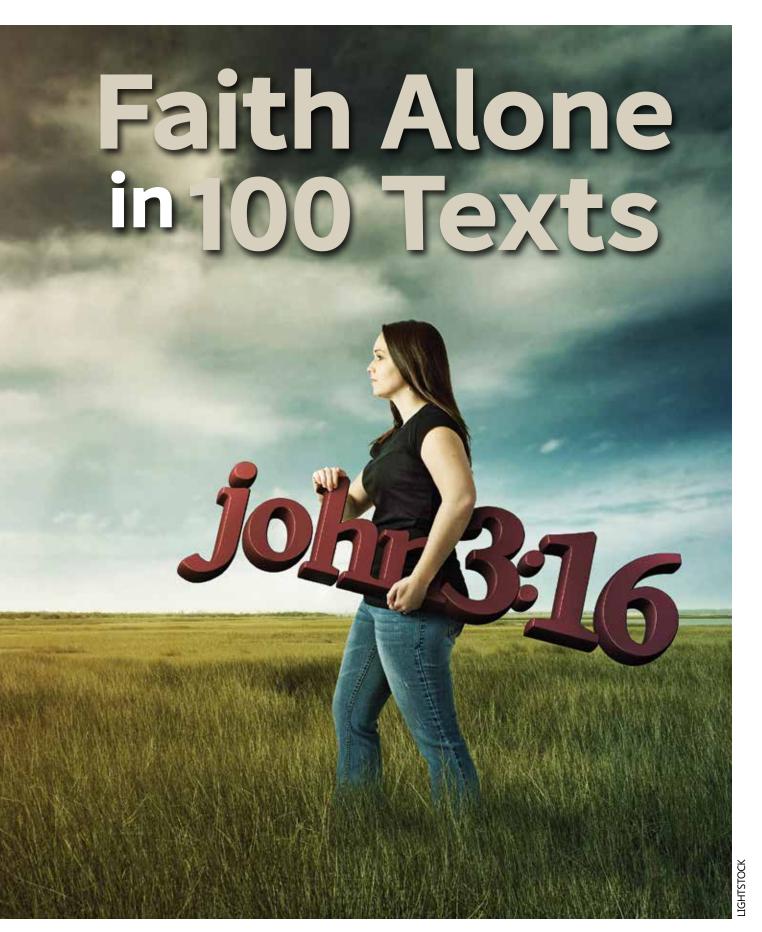
There is even one verse, Gal 2:16, which three times in the same verse says that justification is by faith and not by works. Is that one or three references? I counted it as one.

I have taken a sort of middle of the road approach to such passages, counting them as more than one in many cases, but often less than the number of verses involved.

If we are looking for texts that explicitly say that the one who believes in Jesus has everlasting life (or is saved or is justified), the number is around seventy-four.

If we include fifty-five texts which implicitly say that (for example, saying that someone is born again by the Word of God, but not specifically mentioning faith in Christ), the number rises to 129.

Note that in some of the seventy-four definite verses, faith is not specifically indicated as faith *in Christ*. Ephesians 2:8-9 is a famous example: "For by grace you have been saved [made alive, v 5] through faith..." Since in such cases it is clear based on the context that



the author means faith *in Christ*, I have included these.

SEVENTY-FOUR VERSES WHICH CLEARLY TEACH FAITH ALONE

Genesis has one: 15:6. In light of Gen 15:1-5, John 8:56, Rom 4:3, and Gal 3:6, this text is clearly teaches justification by faith alone in the coming Messiah, who is Jesus.

Matthew and Mark have no verses which explicitly teach faith alone.

Luke has one explicit verse on faith alone: 8:12, "The devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."

John has at least eighteen clear texts on faith alone, though the number could realistically be much higher: 1:12; 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 4:10-14, 25-28; 5:24, 39-40; 6:35, 37, 39-40, 47; 10:24-30; 11:25, 26; 12:36, 46-47 (cf. v 50); 20:31.

Acts has seven clear faithalone texts: 10:43 (compare Acts 11:14); 11:17; 13:39; 15:9, 11; 16:31; 26:18.

Romans has nineteen: 3:22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30; 4:3, 5, 9, 11, 13, 16, 22, 24; 5:1; 9:30, 33; 10:4, 10 ("For with the heart one believes unto righteousness [=justification]").

First Corinthians has only one clear verse: 1:21, "to save those who believe."

Second Corinthians has two clear texts: 5:1-5, 8.

Galatians has a dozen clear texts: 2:16 ("justified...by faith in Jesus Christ"); 3:2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 22, 24, 26.

Ephesians has two clear texts: 1:13; 2:8 (compare 2:5).

Philippians has one clear text on faith alone: 3:9 ("the righteousness which is from God by faith").

First Thessalonians has one: 5:10 ("whether we watch or sleep, we should live together with Him").

First Timothy has one: 1:16, "I [am]...a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."

Second Timothy has two clear texts: 1:12 (Paul knows he will be with the Lord and will be rewarded by Him for the work he has done); 3:15.

Hebrews has three: 4:3; 10:10, 14.

First John has two texts that clearly teach faith alone: 5:1, 9-13.

A few of those seventy-four do not explicitly mention faith in Christ. However, the context brings that out, so I included them. See 2 Cor 5:1-5, 8; 1 Thess 5:10; Heb 10:10, 14, as examples.

If we were to be very narrow in our list, the number would be around sixty-nine.

FIFTY-FIVE IMPLICIT FAITH ALONE VERSES

Matthew, Mark, and Luke have six implicit faith alone messages. In all six places the Lord Jesus, after healing someone, says, "your faith has saved you." Those verses are Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 8:48; 17:19; 18:42. The Lord might have simply been referring to physical healing. However, it is quite possible that He was referring to both physical healing and eternal salvation.

John has fifteen implicit faith alone texts: 1:7; 2:23; 4:39, 41, 42; 6:29; 7:38-39; 8:24, 30-31; 11:15; 14:6; 17:20, 21; 19:35; 20:29.

Acts has nineteen possible implicit faith alone texts: 3:16; 4:4, 12; 8:12, 13 (compare v 17); 9:42; 11:14, 21; 14:1, 23, 27; 15:7; 17:4, 12; 18:8, 27; 19:4; 20:21; 21:25.

Romans has one: 11:6. Second Corinthians has one: 4:4.

Galatians has one: 2:21. Philippians also has one: 1:29. First Thessalonians has three implicit: 1:7; 2:10; 4:14.

Second Thessalonians has two: 1:10; 2:12.

First Timothy has one implicit verse: 4:10

Titus has one: 3:5-8.
James has two: 1:18; 2:23.
First Peter has one: 1:23.
And Revelation has one implicit text: 22:17.

If you have time, work your way through both lists. You might not agree on each and every one of the verses I listed there. You may have many more you put on your own list. But the point is clear. There are a lot of verses in the Bible which make it crystal clear that justification/regeneration/eternal salvation is gained simply by believing in the Lord Jesus *Christ.* No works required. He took away the sin of the world at Calvary (John 1:29). All that we need to do is believe in Him in order to have the life which He promises to the believer, ever-lasting life.



WHY IS THERE **RESISTANCE TO THIS?**

The puzzling question, in light of the evidence cited above, is why anyone in Christianity would deny that justification is by faith alone, apart from works? And why would anyone who calls himself a Christian say that we are justified by faith alone, but then define true faith as including repentance, commitment, and obedience?

The faith alone message is hard to believe. That is the bottom line. And many if not most people in Christianity are unwilling to believe it.

I personally was opposed to this message and unwilling to believe it until one day before my senior year in college a friend, John Carlson, asked me if my view of the gospel might be wrong. That hit me hard. At that moment I became willing to consider whether I was wrong. I told the Lord that. But I also told Him that I had to be

convinced by the Bible. After five one-hour sessions debating the faith-alone message with a Cru staff member, Warren Wilke, I came to faith in Christ for everlasting life. I knew I had everlasting life by faith alone and that I could never lose it. What a day of rejoicing that

In His ministry in Israel, Jesus repeatedly confronted this very situation of legalists unwilling to believe. Here is one of my favorite texts on that issue, one of the definite verses listed above, John 5:39-40. The Lord said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."

Do you believe? That is, are you convinced that all who simply believe in Iesus for everlasting life have that life?

If not, are you willing to believe that?

Is it possible your view of the gospel is wrong?

I am so thankful for the witness of John Carlson and Warren Wilke. They convinced me that the faith-alone message is correct. You might say that I'm eternally grateful.



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 Is Calvinism Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide.



WHAT WILL RLEGACY

By Ken Yates

Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection...others had trial of mockings and scourgings...and imprisonment...were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute...of whom the world was not worthy (Heb 11:35-39).

LEGACY FROM A WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE

n my work with GES, I often have contact with Spanish speaking people. Recently, I noticed that many in that community really enjoyed the movie Coco. It is an animated film that deals with a little boy who goes into the world of the dead during the Mexican holiday called, Day of the Dead. This is a holiday in which people in that country focus on those who have previously died, especially family members. They remember those who have passed away by offering them food and praying for them. All

these things will help them in the land of the dead.

The dead who are remembered by many living people are pictured in the film as being rich and comfortable in the afterlife. For example, famous artists and movie stars who have died live in mansions with plenty of food. Those who are not remembered by many people have a poor existence. They live in the slums of "heaven" with little to eat. In fact, the film shows one man in the land of the dead who is only remembered by one living person. When that living person dies, he ceases to exist in the afterlife.

Clearly, one of the messages of the film is that popularity in this world has benefits in the world to come. The more "fans" you have in this world, the greater you will be even after you die.

Even if we do not belong to a culture that celebrates the "Day of the Dead," we can certainly see how the philosophy behind it can influence our own thinking.



In our country fame is something many people desire. We want more followers on our Facebook page. The Kardashians are rich and envied by many because they are famous. Christians are not immune to this kind of thinking.

Not surprisingly, the Bible gives us a different idea of what constitutes greatness in the world to come.

A TRULY GREAT LEGACY

Hebrews 11 is a famous chapter in the Bible. It is sometimes known as the "Hall of Faith." This title is a play on words familiar to all sports fans. The names of the people in Hebrews 11 are the great men and women of faith. In the Hall of Fame, people are remembered even after they die. Without a doubt, many of the people in Hebrews 11 are also well known. We read about people like Noah, Abraham, David, Sarah, and Jacob. The point is that these folks will be great in the kingdom of God. Their deeds will be remembered forever.

But it is interesting that at the end of the chapter, we read about people that are not well known. In fact, we don't even know who they are! We don't even know their names.

In Heb 11:35-39 we are introduced to anonymous women and also to others who were tortured, mocked, beaten, and imprisoned. They were certainly not rich and could not afford the clothes of the rich and famous. Instead, they had to wear sheepskins.

They had few fans in this world. In fact, the world often killed them. And, no doubt, the world quickly forgot them.

But the author of Hebrews says that God has a different view of them. He is a fan of these people. He says that they were so great that the world was not worthy of having them live in this world! In the world to come they will have a "better resurrection." In that world they will be recognized and be great.

JESUS SAID LEGACIES ARE IMPORTANT

One's legacy is important. Jesus Himself said so. What kind of legacy will we have in His kingdom? What will be remembered?

In Luke 6:26 the Lord says we should not be concerned about being remembered fondly by the world. He said our legacy in the world to come is in bad shape "if all men speak well" of us.

In Matt 10:32 He tells His disciples that if they will be faithful in confessing Him to others, God will remember and confess their names among the angels.

Surely if God remembers what we have done, this is more meaningful than being important in the eyes of men.

And God will never forget.

As the author of Hebrews states,

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

How great would it be that God would remember forever that we were faithful to Him? That is a legacy to strive for. Such a legacy will result in great rewards that will last forever. It involves being great in the world to come. It will include reigning with Christ forever in His kingdom. That is even greater than being a Kardashian.

CONCLUSION

Even though I never saw the movie *Coco*, I understand that it was very entertaining. The animation is said to be outstanding. In fact, it won two Academy Awards and will gross over a billion dollars. We could say it will be remembered by many people.

But the philosophy and theology of the movie leaves a lot to be desired. One's existence in the world to come has nothing to do with being remembered by a great number of people. Popularity in this world does not translate into greatness in the next.

My guess is that most people reading this already know that the thinking expressed in a holiday like the Day of the Dead does not find Biblical support. However, it is easy for us, even subconsciously, to desire the approval of the world. If it wasn't a problem, the Lord would not have warned us about it.

Simply put, the only legacy that is of any value, that has eternal value, is a life lived in obedience to the Lord.

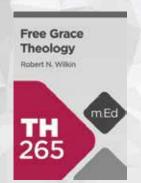


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Mobile Ed: TH 265

Free Grace Theology

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Appropriating Faith

By James Morison (1816-1893)

Some of our older theologians—inclusive of many of the "Marrow-men"—spoke much of the appropriating act of faith. It was this act which they supposed to be saving.

"In the direct act of saving faith," says Anderson, "a person appropriates Christ crucified to himself, saying with the heart, I am verily persuaded that *Christ is mine*."

This idea was partly right and partly wrong.

YOU SHOULD BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED FOR YOU

It was right in so far as it assumed that it is indispensable on the part of the sinner, that he should realize *his own "proper" interest* in the grace of God and the work of Christ.

We think rightly when we think that it is not enough for the sinner's peace that he believes that *God is gracious*. He must believe that *God is gracious to him*. It is not enough that he believes that *Christ made atonement for sins*. He must believe that Christ made atonement *for his sins*.

He must find the word *me* in the bosom of the word *world*.

The language of his faith must be—God so loved *me* that He gave His only begotten Son that *I*, believing in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life. The Son of God loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*.

The believer thus realizes his property, or, as it was often called, his "right of propriety," in the grace of the Great Father, and the atoning work of the Great Savior. He *appropriates* to himself what God is, and did, and does, in so far as He is the Father of mercies. He *appropriates* to himself what Christ did, and does, and is, in so far as He too is exhibited in the Gospel—in so far as He is a merciful High Priest and Savior.

It is at once the privilege and the duty of the sinner to "ply diligently," as Luther used to

express it, "the first personal pronoun," and say *me*, *me*. All this is right. It is of great practical moment. It is indispensable in order to have personal peace, and personal joy, and personal hope of glory, and the personal experience of the constraining power of the love of God and of Christ—the constraining power which sweetly urges and impels the believer to a life of reciprocative love and holy devotedness.

"What avails to believe that God is a Father," asks John Rogers reasonably, "if I believe Him not to be mine?" What avails to believe "that Christ is a perfect Savior, who died for man's sins, and rose again for his righteousness, except I believe that He did these for me?" What avails to believe in "the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to eternal life, except I believe they belong to me?"

LIMITED ATONEMENT PREVENTS YOU FROM BELIEVING THAT JESUS DIED FOR YOU

But the idea of appropriation, as advocated by John Anderson, John Rogers, and many others, was partly wrong, as well as partly right.

They combined with it the limitarian doctrine that the grace of God was really restricted in its outflow, and that the atonement of Christ was really confined in its compass, to a few of mankind—the unconditionally elect.

They did not believe that "God so loved the [whole great] world," that He sent His only begotten Son to be "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world" (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).

They did not believe that Christ "gave himself a ransom" really "for all," and that "He tasted death" literally "for every man" (1 Tim 2:6; Heb 2:9).

They thought only of God's love to the whole elect world, and of Christ's ransom for some of *all classes of men*, and of his death, *for every one of the many sons whom He brings to glory*.

They believed that outside the number of these favored ones there is an immense world of the unconditionally reprobated, whom God never loved, and for whom Christ never tasted death or gave Himself a ransom. They conceived that if Christ had shed His blood for any who are finally lost, it would have been a waste of suffering.

The idea that our Savior's death should be "in vain" in relation to any, appeared to them



a glaring incongruity. They could not reconcile themselves to the notion that One, who saw the end from the beginning, would buy with His blood the souls of those who would "bring upon themselves swift destruction."

Hence they required to devise a theory of faith which would supplement what was deficient in their theory of the atonement.

In their doctrine of the atonement, and of the grace of the Great Father, there was nothing that enabled them to say to sinners, without distinction or exception, God loves 'you,' Christ died for 'vou.'

HOW LIMITED ATONEMENT DISTORTS FAITH

And yet, as they saw clearly that the sinner's conscience would not be satisfied, nor his heart pacified, until he could say, God loves 'me,' Christ died for 'me,' they invented a doctrine of faith which enabled the sinner to bring out of the Gospel what the Holy Spirit, according to their theory, had never put into it.

It was unwarrantable doctrine.

The appropriation of antecedent non-existences is an impossibility. The imagination of such an appropriation is a delusion. Faith cannot make a fact of its own object. [Editor: In other words, Morison is arguing that people who believe in limited atonement cannot know for sure if they

are one of the elect for whom Jesus died, so they cannot believe that Jesus died for them.]

The notion of Marshall, the author of *The* Gospel Mystery of Sanctification, that the object of saving faith "becometh a certain truth when we believe it" (p. 142, ed 1836) is a manifest inversion of thought. To have *faith* is one thing, to have a fancy is another.

UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT MEANS YOU **CAN BELIEVE JESUS DIED FOR YOU**

But happily, it was no fancy that God loves all, and that Christ died for all. It was only the limitarian creed of the theologians referenced to which was at fault. It was it which was the fancy.

The Holy Spirit has, as a matter of fact, put into the Gospel all that the worthy preachers sought, by means of appropriating faith, to bring out of it.

It is actually the case that the grace of God is to all, and that the atonement of Christ was for all; and hence, when any appropriated to themselves their full share of the universal grace and universal atonement, they only took, though they knew it not, what had been really provided for their use.

GIF

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



Bible Bloopers and How to Avoid Them

By Marcia Hornok

MAKING ASSUMPTIONS

Thile the Bible has no bloopers, the way we visualize the written Word might. For example, when Joseph's eleven brothers came to him, we picture Benjamin as a youth because he was the youngest. However, shortly thereafter, all seventy members of Jacob's family moved to Egypt, and the name list *includes* Benjamin's ten sons (Gen 46:21).

Another Bible story picture that may need a retake is Samson. If he had a Mr. Universe physique, the Philistines and Delilah would not have wondered about the source of his strength. Perhaps Samson had an average or even puny body build. Thus his strength was a conundrum.

And don't get me started on the narratives about Jesus' birth. Show me the verses that mention a donkey, an inn-keeper, a stable, or wise men worshipping at a manger.

Nor does the Bible say that the wise men followed the star from their homeland all the way to Israel. If that were true, it would have led them to Bethlehem, not Jerusalem. They did follow the star in Matt 2:9-10, but only for about six miles.

Yes, our Christmas carol lyrics contain several bloopers.

In my opinion, the greatest hotbed for bloopers shows up in Christian devotionals, which commonly take a verse or phrase and make it say something inspiring.

Writers and speakers should not start with a great application and make the Biblical text support that thought, lest bloopers result. Rather, we must observe the text *in context*—by asking what God was saying to the original audience. Someone has correctly observed that not all the Bible was written to us, but all the Bible was written for us. Good study results in unforced interpretation, which will then determine relevant applications.

Consider these verses we often pull out of context.

BE STILL?

Be still, and know that I am God (Ps 46:10).

Psalm 46:10 has nothing to do with so-called "listening prayer" or God speaking to our hearts. Instead, God is telling the nations to "be still and know" that He is God. He wants them to cease striving (warring) and let Him have His way.

ON GOD'S MIND?

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jer 29:11).

In the beloved verse, Jer 29:11, what was God saying to the original audience, the Israelites in exile? We cannot personalize v 11 (that God plans to give us a future full of peace, not evil) unless we also claim v 10—that we will return to our

homeland after seventy years. Yes, we are constantly on God's mind, but a better verse for that concept is Ps 40:5.

DEAD IN SINS?

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1).

I've heard popular speakers trying to prove that regeneration precedes faith, and that even faith is a gift, not a response. Yet in Eph 2:2, that dead condition results in walking! Let Ephesians interpret Ephesians. "Dead in sins" is explained in 2:2-13 and 4:17-19. It means *separated* from God because of sin.

NEW CREATION OR NEW CREATION?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17).

Does 2 Cor 5:17 mean that believers will exhibit godly behaviors because they are "a new creature," or is "a new creation" a better translation?

We answer this by observing that the theme of 2 Cor 5:14-20 is our ministry of reconciliation. Now that we are "in Christ," we have a new perspective on all of creation. Our old way of perceiving things according to the flesh (v 16) has passed away. A new outlook has come. Thus we now discern that unbelievers need to be reconciled to God, and we are His ambassadors in that process.

CONFESS AND BELIEVE?

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom 10:9-10).

Perhaps you like to evangelize using Rom 10:9-10 to facilitate a response that people must both believe with their hearts and confess with their mouths.

While many people have no doubt believed Jesus' promise of eternal life and trusted in Him by a misapplication of these verses, in context they concern national Israel being saved (delivered) when they call on the Lord. We must not ignore

the OT quotes in Romans 10. They reveal the meaning.

Whenever the word *salvation/saved* appears in Scripture (eight times in Romans 9-11), always ask: "Saved from what?" (Hint: it usually does *not* mean from Hell.)

Also, study the phrases, "calling on the name of the Lord" and "confess" the Lord Jesus throughout Scripture to see if this is done by believers or unbelievers. (René A. López explains six views of this passage in his outstanding book, *Romans Unlocked*.)

ALL THINGS?

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4:13).

Finally, consider Phil 4:13 where doing "all things" through Christ refers to learning contentment, not running a marathon!

PAY ATTENTION TO CONTEXT

I am not a scholar, and many Bible passages baffle me. But I am a student who has learned to study a verse in context before offering wisdom on how it relates to us. Sometimes I look at my early published devotionals and blush at the bloopers they contain. Was I purveying God's intended truth or my imposed concepts?

Hopefully this article will help you avoid bloopers as you study and teach the Biblical text contextually.



Marcia Hornok is Ken's lucky wife, proud mother of six, and happy grandma of 11. Her gift book of 82 practical devotionals, Fruit of the Spirit: Inspiration for Women from Galatians 5:22-23 is out of print but available as an ebook on Amazon.

JOIN US!

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

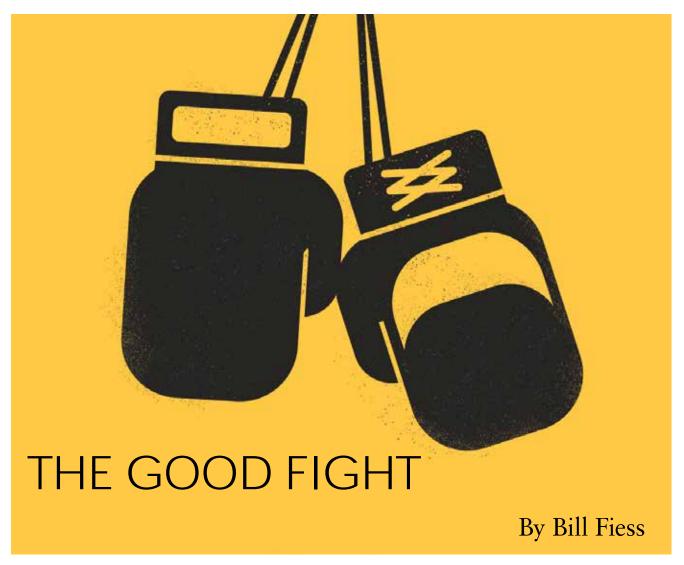
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get us to the goal!





In 1 Tim 6:12 Paul writes, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

Why does Paul call it *the good fight of the faith*? And to what is he referring here?

THE CONTEST

The Greek word translated "fight" is $ag\bar{o}n$, which refers to a contest or conflict and often occurs in the NT. $Ag\bar{o}n$ is the root from which we derive English words such as "agony," "antagonist," "protagonist," "agonize," etc.

In antiquity an *agōn* was originally an assembly of the Greek people for athletic contests like the Olympic or Pythian Games. With the passage

of time, the term began to metaphorically refer to not just the assembly, but the athletic contests themselves.

In the NT, $ag\bar{o}n$ is used to indicate physical persecution encountered in proclaiming the gospel: "But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict $[ag\bar{o}n]$ " (1 Thess 2:2).

In Heb 12:1 it is used in the sense of an athletic contest:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race [agon] that is set before us.

We see this use again in 2 Tim 4:7 in which Paul uses the term in reference to a fight, another type of athletic contest: "I have fought the good fight

[agon], I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Why does the Apostle Paul refer to the Christian life as a fight, an agon?

OUR STRUGGLE

I think every believer experiences inevitable struggles because of pressure from the world and the sin nature (often in Scripture called *the flesh*).

Jesus told the disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation [lit., pressure]; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul directs attention to the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit within each believer:

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish (Gal 6:16-17).

So how can we fight the good fight, and why is it called *good*?

RELY ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

A clue is found is Col 1:28-29. Here Paul uses the related verb agonizomai to refer to striving in the Christian life: "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving [agonizomai] according to His working which works in me mightily." Paul states that he is fighting, or striving, but not by his own power. He is relying on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul suggests that the fight will end in victory if we rely on the Holy Spirit:

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man... Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us (Eph 3:16, 20).

This is similar to what we see in other Scriptures, such as 1 John 4:4, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He

who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

The Christian life is a *good fight* if it is lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, because it is then a victorious fight.

YOUR CALLING

There is another reason Paul gives for fighting the good fight. He says, "lay hold of eternal life to which you were also called" (1 Tim 6:12b).

I think he is referring to the same thing Jesus said regarding His coming to rule over the world: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt 22:14).

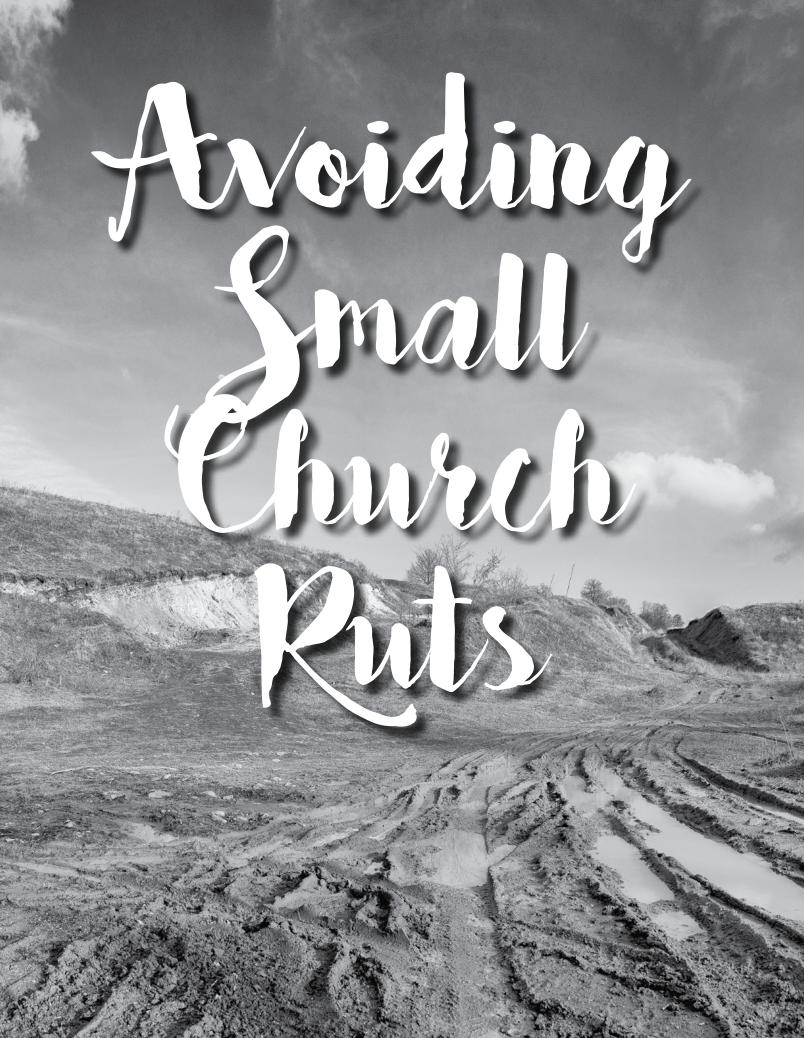
All believers are called to rule with Christ, but not all will fulfill that calling. That is, ruling with Christ depends on whether or not we expend the effort to live victoriously through the Holy Spirit until the end. Jesus said in Rev 2:26, "And he who overcomes [or, is victorious], and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations."

The Apostle Paul writes, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim 2:12a). In other words, it is a good fight because the goal of ruling with Christ is worth striving for. It is a good fight when we live by the power of the Holy Spirit and continue to endure until the end of our lives (unless the Rapture occurs first). Then we will receive the reward of ruling with Jesus Christ. How awesomely good that is!

There is undoubtedly much more that could be said about 1 Tim 6:12. Furthermore, we have many Scriptural examples of those who have fought the good fight—Jesus Himself, the Apostle Paul, and the heroes of the faith listed in Hebrews 11, for example. We have strong motivations to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, because what is at stake is ruling and reigning forever with Christ, gu



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





BY JOSH MEIER

PERMANENT STATE OR TEMPORARY CIRCUMSTANCE?

Someone once said, "Socialism never took root in America because the poor see themselves not as an exploited proletariat, but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires."

The difference is thinking of poverty as an intrinsic quality versus thinking of it as a temporary circumstance.

While that attitude may have been pervasive among the poor in America, it is sadly lacking among many, if not most, small church pastors.

We often consider church size a matter of intrinsic quality, rather than a temporary circumstance.

A church that embraces the clear, simple message of eternal life by grace through faith, has no intrinsic limitation on its growth.

Quite the opposite.

Clarity in understanding and teaching the gospel is a powerful instrument. And yet, it is rare for a Free Grace church to be above average in size.

I can hear the protests now—"It's not all about the numbers!!!"

It isn't? Not even when every number is a unique person to whom God has extended His grace?

DON'T FALL FOR PRIDE

Sometimes we are afflicted by something I call the "Pride of Puny Purity."

This is when we rationalize and revel in the thought that a church is—and may always be—small *because of their doctrinal or practical purity*. While this thinking is common, it is unbiblical.

Life reproduces.

That is one of the intrinsic features of life. If it does not reproduce, either the life itself is deficient, or the environment is.

None of us would dare say that the life granted by believing in Jesus is deficient in any way. So we are left with the fact that if that life is not reproducing, then the environment must be deficient. Some people may think that sounds pessimistic, but it is actually optimistic. Why?

If you have realized the problem is the *environment*, then you have realized that what needs to be changed, *can be changed*. As with many things, it is not a matter of resources, but of volition and consistency.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Small churches that "think small" stay small. Small churches that "think big" grow (whether virally or not).

By "thinking big" I don't mean that a fifty person church should waste time implementing structures necessary for a church of five thousand. But it would be wise to implement structures necessary for a church of one hundred and fifty or two hundred.

Exactly what those structures are will be different in different contexts and with different personalities.

So, what's the obstacle to changing the environment to plan for growth?

To quote G. K. Chesterton, "If you could kick the person in the pants who caused most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit down for a month."

Generally, we are our own greatest obstacle.

Perhaps we are stricken by a potent cocktail of adult ADHD and compassion. This inevitably leads to constant distractions with minor issues, but "plausible deniability" when it comes to accountability about our time man-

agement. In other words, it lets us make decent sounding excuses.

Part of the problem is that we've been often told that our ministry as pastors is not really substantially unique within the body (most often by people who would never dream of serving in the role). That leads us to give too much weight to other people's "suggestions" about ministries and direction.

Another problem is that we often make decisions based on emergencies, not principles.

Emergencies are emergencies. They require immediate action and the decisions are not always what we would make in normal circumstances. However, every shed tear does not meet the definition of urgency.

Urgent situations demand different decisions than normal ones. However, a commitment to making decisions based on principles, decreases the frequency of urgency's demands.

CHOOSE YOUR RUTS

I've been told that there is a "road" in Alaska that has at its beginning a sign that reads like this, "Choose your ruts wisely; you'll be in them for many miles."

That should be applied to a lot of our choices in ministry. However, pastors ought to phrase it a little differently: "Choose which ruts you make wisely; you may never get out of them."

You might assume that small churches are more nimble and responsive than larger ones. In my opinion, that is far from true. A small church can stay in a rut just as long as a larger one.

> Often, a small church makes a rut in a single pass, out of a decision a large church doesn't even remember they made.

Here in the river valley of El Paso, Texas, we are in our monsoon season. The valley is made up of silt laid down over and over by the Rio Grande as it continually flooded its banks. In that damp silt, a bicycle tire will lay down a much deeper rut than a tractor tire will.

A small church is like that bicycle tire; it makes a deep rut

in a single pass. It is our job as pastors to make sure that those ruts are in the right places, going in the right direction. We must ensure our ruts are made by principles, not by urgencies.

"To quote G. K. Chesterton, 'If you could kick the person in the pants who caused most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit down for a month."

WHAT WORKS FOR ME

I was recently handed a booklet called "What Worked for Me" by a well-known evangelist in El Paso. The author said, "This is what worked for me, it may or may not work for you."

Read this next section in the same spirit. These things have worked for me as I have tried to make the right, principled ruts. They may not work for you.

First, solicit less input. Soliciting less input means fewer meetings. The meetings we have are short, efficient, and direct. Those meetings have



fewer people in attendance, but nearly one hundred percent of those invited.

Second, give less input. The rut we generally make is to funnel too many decisions through ourselves, formally or informally. The key to this one, frankly, is to care less about most things (because most things aren't worth the time).

Third, actually delegate. Once we have delegated a responsibility or ministry, the line item veto is anathema. The delegation contract is useless if it does not include the responsibility to both trust and to defend the delegate. We should never even think to utter to a single third party, "That's not what I would have done, but..." Instead, it would be a far more principled position—or rut—to repeat all the reasons why that delegate is trusted.

Again, this is not about avoiding ruts; it's about making the right ruts. Principled ruts decrease the frequency of urgency's demands.

KNOW WHERE TO TAKE A STAND

I pastor a small church.

I preach and teach a principled message of God's Free Grace in a methodical manner.

If you read *Grace in Focus*, you're probably like me, at least in this one way: the doctrine of grace

is a hill you will die on. Nearly every Free Grace proponent I've come across would die on that same hill.

I would not dispute that necessity.

However, in the words of the great cowboy philosopher Augustus McCrae, "It ain't dyin' I'm talking about, it's livin'!"

It is important to know on which hill to die. It is equally important to know on which one to live.

The clear, simple message of grace is enduring and intrinsically powerful. But our circumstances and environment are incidental and intrinsically mutable. If your current church environment is not conducive to growth, then change it.

We ought to live like that is true every day.



Josh Meier is pastor of El Paso Bible Church. When he is not studying the Word, you can find him milking goats, making cheese, relocating bees, welding, or shooting at the rifle range.

Spirit Week

By Nate Stevens

SCHOOL SPIRIT

Tenjoyed spirit week at my high school, just like every other kid does across America. Our rival was Lawrenceville, a grotesque place just across the New Jersey state line, so we had more than the typical rival history between

Their school colors were red and white, ours blue and grey.

New Jersey—a place packed with people, most of whom simply got lost in their desperate attempt to flee the state.

Lawrenceville had admitted girls years ago, and we were still all boys.

This New Jersey spawn matched its state with an overblown campus and student body in the thousands—and it was about to descend on our rural hilltop retreat, home to a mere 400 boys.

Friday night finally arrived. We, the audacious underdogs, prepared to compete on the athletic field. We lit the bonfire and stripped to our underwear in a scene part Lord of the Flies, part barbarian horde, part highland charge. We painted ourselves in school colors and chanted with a fierceness of our future years, "What do we eat? Red Meat! How do we eat it? Raw!"

We call such events "spirit week" because they rightly capture the idea of embodying the spirit, identity, and the resulting pride.

There was not an item of red to be found on any of my classmates that weekend—we were blue and grey all the way (actually, we really never wore red at all).

And there was a common shared identity among us. We all studied at the same library, worried under the same tough teachers, goofed off under



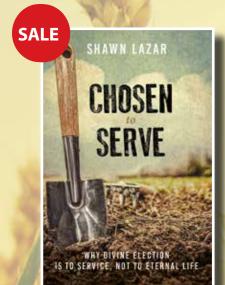
the same easy ones. We ate the same food, sat in the same classes, played on the same teams, walked among the same buildings, and were products of the same history.

Part of this shared identity was an almost unspoken code of behavior, a code of ethics. It wasn't what you would call a Biblical morality, but it was a code all the same. And that weekend, we were, each one, an individual embodiment and representative of what it meant to be a member of the Hill School.

LED BY THE SPIRIT

When the Bible talks about walking by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25), or being led by the Holy Spirit, there are some striking similarities and contrasts. First the similarities. The Holy Spirit resides in every person who has believed in Iesus for eternal life. That person is part of something far greater than any other family or organization—the Bible simply calls it "the Church." Each

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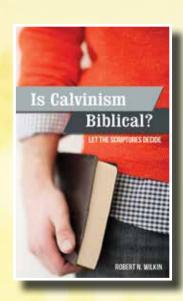


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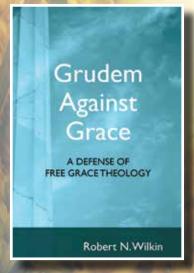


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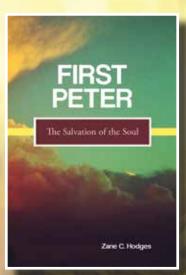


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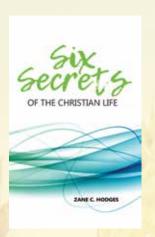


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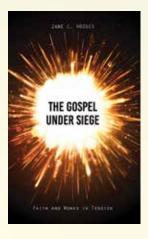


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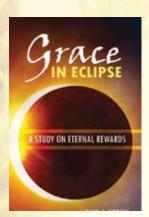


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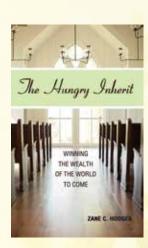


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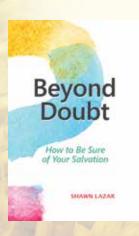


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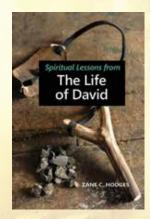


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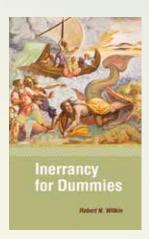




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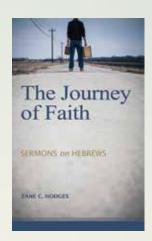


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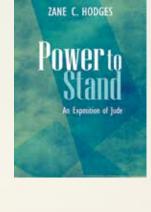


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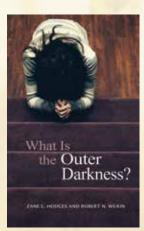


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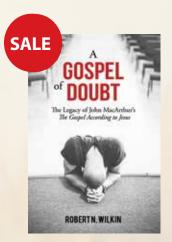


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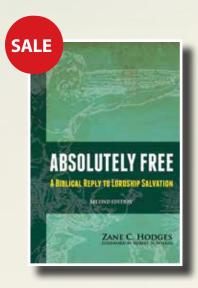
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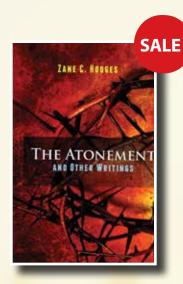
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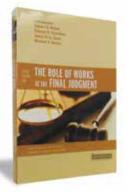
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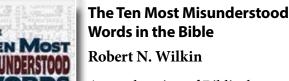


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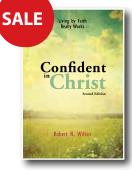
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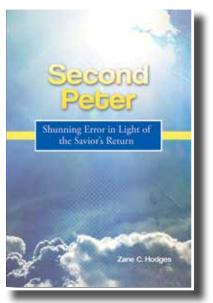


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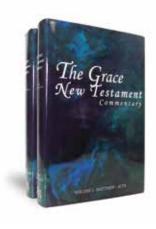
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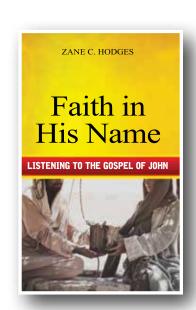
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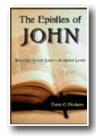




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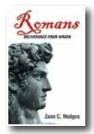


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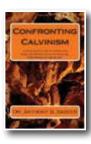


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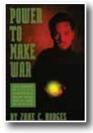


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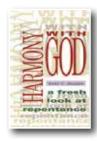


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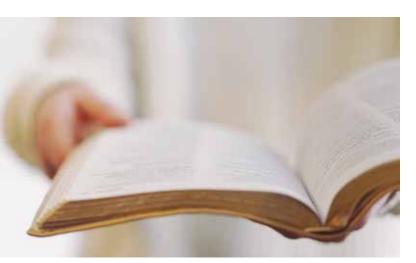
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"He speaks to us not audibly, but through His Word as He points out a verse and says, 'This is for you; dwell on it."



believer is to be an individual embodiment and representative of the Holy Spirit—that is, we are to behave according to His ethic (the Holy Spirit is a "He" not an "It").

We are to be submitted not only to the individual leading of the Holy Spirit, but also to the bigger organization that the Holy Spirit has encompassed—the Church.

We are also pitted in fierce and brutal battle against a foe set on our destruction as Spiritindwelt ones.

But there are also some awesome differences. I never made varsity soccer, so my skills didn't really matter. The real game took place on the field in the center of campus. I was off in the practice fields.

I remember feeling out of place. I really wasn't going to be able to do much for my school. I chanted, but not with the same vigor that some did. I held back. I wasn't a headliner of the school. There were more impressive boys for the spotlight. I felt, under my blue and grey exterior, that I was lacking the embodiment of the Hill School. And with all that was going on in my life, I probably was.

HANDING OVER THE REINS

The Holy Spirit works on a different principle. He lives in the interior (1 Cor 3:16). His work is in the interior, and the exterior is simply the symptom of what He has accomplished inside.

The fears that we don't have what it takes, that we are insufficient for the task, that we are less than the headliners—these all dissipate when we come to grips with the awesome reality that

God—the One who created the universe—resides in us and He is sufficient for all.

He has what it takes, He is The Headliner. This is walking by the Spirit.

It is handing over the reigns, including our fears, hungers, and passions to God, resting in Him to provide, to sustain, and to validate us, as we follow Him, or "ride the Wind" as one of my mentors put it.

And He does. He speaks to us—not audibly, but through His Word as He points out a verse and says, "This is for you; dwell on it." He speaks through other believers as they encourage or reprove us, and He says, "take this to heart." And He speaks to us through life circumstances, as He reveals a sunrise as not just another day, but a beautiful gift from the good and loving hands of our Father. He is a person, and He expects us to know His voice and enjoy communion with Him.

Thankfully this does not involve bonfires and underwear (we are not that kind of church), and its duration is a lifetime, not a week.



Nate Stevens is pastor of The Bible Chapel, Rostraver Campus in Rostraver, PA.

The Simple Life Is Meaningful

By Randy White

Somewhere in the past 40 years "Purpose" has become our god.

I suppose Rick Warren revealed this god more than he invented it in his wildly successful book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Somewhere, having Purpose (yes, I'm capitalizing it on purpose, since it has taken on a god-like status)

Earlier this year, Facebook tycoon (and socialism advocate) Mark Zuckerberg spoke at the Harvard University commencement, saying,

became a "must have" for western culture.

"Today I want to talk about purpose. But I'm not here to give you the standard commencement about finding your purpose. We're

finding your purpose. We're millennials. We'll try to do that instinctively. Instead, I'm here to tell you finding your purpose isn't enough. The challenge for our generation is creating a world where everyone has a sense of purpose.

"One of my favorite stories is when John F. Kennedy visited the NASA space center, he saw a janitor carrying a broom and

he walked over and asked what he was doing. The janitor responded: 'Mr. President, I'm helping put a man on the moon.'

"Purpose is that sense that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, that we are needed, that we have something better ahead to work for. Purpose is what creates true happiness."

Notice that he said millennials will try to find purpose *instinctively*. He says it in a congratulatory way to the younger generation, but I'm not convinced that this generation of college grads is anything special in this regard. They are simply carrying on the tradition of their parents. Since the 1980s, finding Purpose and following Purpose and bowing down to Purpose and sacrificing to

Purpose has become, well, purposeful. Anyone who doesn't "find his or her purpose" is just a loser (or so the Purpose Cult would have us believe).

RESULTS OF THE RELIGION

When Purpose became a "must have" on the search of significance, I think it ruined the lives of millions.

Why are suicide rates higher than ever? Why is there a heroin and opioid epidemic? Why is marijuana usage considered a God-given right? Why does the Purpose-driven crowd seem so... hopeless?

I think it is past time to realize that a Purposedriven life is unbiblical, unfruitful, and actually even harmful to your emotional and spiritual well-being.

THE PURPOSELESS GENERATION

Those who grew up before the "your-life-has-to-

be-crazy-significant" generations of the 1980s and beyond, used to get up in the morning, drink coffee, eat bacon and eggs, go to work, punch the clock, go home, watch Archie Bunker, and go to bed.

Worthless, right? What a waste, right?

Well, they also kissed their wives, played cards with their friends (they actually had some real relationships with people

who met together in the very same room), played ball with their kids (in the backyard, not with the manicured Purpose-driven teams with coordinated uniforms and regimented practice three times a week), read their Bible (and even knew what it said), and volunteered in their community.

If you asked them what their purpose was, they would have looked at you like a cow at a new gate.

They were the purposeless generations. And God bless them. They were "God and country." They were family, friends, "mom and apple pie." When they retired, they went on a cruise. When they got back from their cruise, they planted a garden, grew tomatoes, and ate them. They



watched re-runs of old movies when movies were not filled with F* bombs and more four-letter words than anybody in any life actually ever uses.

THE SIMPLE LIFE OF EVERY PREVIOUS GENERATION

Looking for Purpose? My advice is to quit. You are on a wild-goose-chase. As soon as you find your Purpose, the world will change its focus and you'll be left with all your investment in an old scheme. Instead, make your purpose to just live life. Love God and love others. Take care of your family. And go on a picnic.

Sometimes "greatness" will come knocking on your door. If it does, be ready. But don't live for it. Don't sell your soul to the Purpose Driven god the one who is an evil taskmaster driving you to always strive for more, always achieve the best, always work for excellence (that never-reachable façade).

Years ago, there were pastors that nobody ever heard of. They just faithfully preached the Word in a little country church. They did it every week and every season. They did it when there were twelve people. Once a year there might have been a hundred, and those hundred got the same kind of Bible teaching as the twelve.

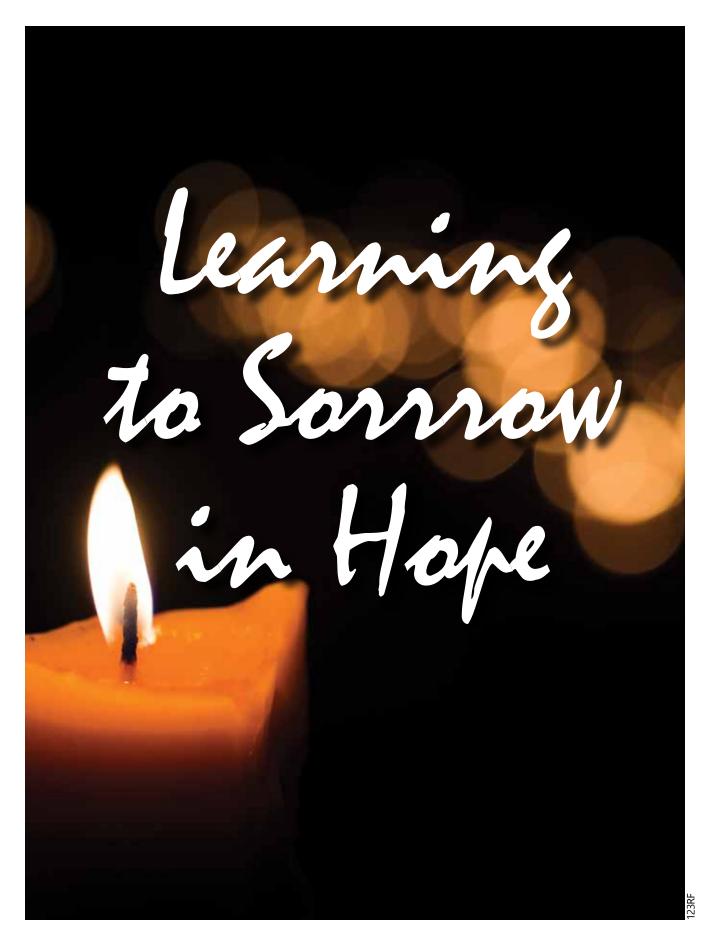
Years ago, there were homemakers. They made a home out of a house. They were always there. They kept it clean and orderly and altogether lovely (though not necessarily fancy).

Years ago, there were auto mechanics and donut makers and newspaper editors and tailors and street sweepers. They got up every morning, drank coffee, ate bacon and eggs, kissed their wives, and went to work.

And in the end, their lives were *meaningful*.



Randy White is pastor of Taos First Baptist Church, NM, and Founder and CEO of Dispensational Publishing House.



BY ALLEN REA

n April 23, 2018, after fighting her disease for a very long time, my mother

The woman that gave birth to me, that cooked me many meals, that loved and supported my every action, left this world.

It has been said that when one loses a parent, he loses a part of himself. Even though I kept my difficult promise to conduct her funeral, I have been raging a battle since April on learning how to "sorrow with hope."

UNDERSTANDING DEATH

The Apostle Paul did not get to plant deep roots in Thessalonica. They were a model church (1:7), and he appears to have gone over every major Christian doctrine with them. The Thessalonians boldly and courageously embraced their new faith in the midst of persecution and hardship.

In the intervening time since Paul's departure, some of the Christians at Thessalonica had fallen asleep. This phrase refers to the Christian's death. Luke uses it of Stephen in Acts 7:60.

The death of these dear Christians may even have been a direct result of the persecution.

Apparently, they had some confusion about death, and Paul sought to correct them.

KNOWING THE TRUTH ABOUT DEATH

First off, Paul did not want them to be ignorant. He wanted them to know the truth about death.

My mom struggled deeply with death, not because she did not have faith, but because she had never experienced death before.

My mother came to faith at a young age. She even desired to be a missionary in her younger years. She underwent a great time of revival in her life and grew much under the preaching of Billy Graham in the 1970s.

But she was ignorant about death.

In one of our final conversations, we talked about the Bible, as we often did. She asked what death would be like and how long it would take to get to Jesus. I told her that I had never died before, but I trusted Paul's words in 2 Cor 5:8: "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." With her quick wit she replied: "Well, what did you go to seminary for if you don't know all the answers?" We laughed a little as she painfully drifted back off to sleep. However, I soon came to realize how prophetic her words were.

Paul wished to wash away all the ignorance the Thessalonians had about their dead loved ones. With Scriptural knowledge we shouldn't "sorrow as others who have no hope."

I preached my mom's funeral. I was strong for my four precious children who were experiencing the pain of losing a loved one for the first time. I was strong for my father. Only my wife knew how fragile I was.

In the time since her funeral, it has been a daily struggle to sorrow with hope.

I have read 1 Thess 4:13-18 at nearly every funeral I've ever officiated, however, I had never really learned to sorrow with hope.

This was no fault of my training or education, because you need experience to truly understand that kind of Biblical text. Thanks to this passage, and many others, I am well informed of the majestic bliss that my mother is currently experiencing. I know about the new heavens and earth where we will fellowship together.

However, the pain of sorrow with hope is now in her absence.

PERMISSION TO FEEL SORROW

I rarely, if ever, left my mother's presence without her affirming me in some way. She would always mention how proud she was of me. My love language is "words of affirmation." I did not

realize how much I would miss her words until she was silent.

She heard many of my sermons. Few, if any, were wonderful, however, she was always my biggest fan. "Charles Stanley ain't got nothing on you," she would say.

She always called me "baby" or "sweetie." As a matter of fact, her final words to me were: "Allen, you are so handsome."

I was never ignorant of her love and affection for me. But I am glad that her praises are now solely directed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I miss her.

I miss her words.

I miss her presence.

I am thankful the Bible gives me permission to sorrow.

The Bible gives us permission to sorrow. The struggle is how to sorrow with hope. Sorrowing without hope would be unbiblical. Sorrowing with hope is our permission and prerogative as we grieve.

I watched my mother slowly and painfully deteriorate. I am so happy that her pain has ceased.

I watched her disease wreak havoc on her frail body. I am so happy that she is promised to receive a new body.

I watched my mother step out of this earth and step into eternity. I am so happy that it was into a Christ-filled eternity.

I am not ignorant, but I sorrow with hope. I miss her smile, her warmth, and her unwavering

support. I always felt stronger after speaking with

I miss seeing her eyes light up when her grandchildren ran into the room.

There are so many things that I hopefully sorrow about.

There is coming a day when she and I will take some time to walk the street of the New Jerusalem and I can fill her in on my story.

My race is not finished yet, but she is already in the winner's circle.

I have miles to go before I sleep, but she is

"Sorrowing without

hope would be

unbiblical. Sorrowing

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grieve."

already at rest. I have more sermons to preach, but she has already heard all she could. Her absence pains me, but death has neither sting nor victory.

LEARNING TO SORROW WITH HOPE

I'm a young pastor learning new things every day, and one of them is how to sorrow with hope. Sometimes I laugh and sometimes I cry when I think about my precious Momma.

Sometimes I get angry and sometimes I can barely stand. However, the Word of God brings me comfort (1 Thess 4:18).

The Word of God stands ready to wash away our ignorance and breathe comfort into our lives.

I know where she is, and I know Jesus will bring her with Him when He descends for His church. I may never cease to sorrow, but as long as it is hopeful sorrow, then I am processing her death in a Biblical way.



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



Loving Me Enough

By Charlie McCall

Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? (Heb 12:7).

summer staff worker whom I was disciplining made two statements to me. The In first was in anger, and I expected it: "You don't have any right to do that; it's unfair, and it's severe!"

A moment later there were tears, I was being bear-hugged, and there were the words "thank you for loving me enough to make it hurt."

The second response so surprised me that I still remember it.

What happened to dispel the anger?

I told him that I loved him and was disciplining him because I wanted his good.

I had known him since he was a boy, and he knew that I cared for him.

His first response was from the flesh that wants its way without the consequences. The second response was from the relationship he had with me. He trusted my heart toward him.

REACTING TO DIFFICULTIES

Aren't we the same toward God? So guick to react in anger to the difficulties that come to us, so slow to trust in His loving heart toward us. Sometimes failing altogether to believe in Him as it concerns our good.

The book of Hebrews is clear in its repeated statements that God disciplines those whom He loves, His children. Discipline is presented by the author as the loving response of the heavenly Father to a child who moves away from the centrality of Christ in his life. How can discipline be loving? The answer is because our only good is God. Discipline is God's working to bring us back, by whatever means necessary, to Himself, our good.

DISCERNING DISCIPLINE

How can we know that the problems we face are due to God's discipline? They can be the consequence of trusting God. They can be the consequence of living in a fallen world or of making unwise choices. They can also be disciplinary as a result of slipping away from Christ as evidenced in our attitude toward the Word of God.

A child rebelling against his father doesn't want to hear him or be with him. His word is not the child's joy. With his presence is his voice, and with his voice is discomfort for the child whose heart is drifting away. The heart toward the word of God is indication of the heart's condition and may be an indication of the nature of the difficulties—that they are for discipline.

It may be hard to know the reason for the difficulties we face. Yet we can know that if we are drifting from Christ as the one true object of our devotion, God will discipline us. In this we can be sure that God is good and disciplines us because He loves us.

That doesn't sound like something to rejoice about, but it is. Do I thank Him that He loves me enough to discipline me? My experience is that as I thank Him for all that He brings into my life, even the discipline, I begin to see that God is good, my only good. And like that staff worker years ago, I begin to thank God for "loving me enough."



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

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS QUOTE?

"There is only one way to be saved, There is only one way to be saved. Repent, believe, and Christ receive, There is only one way to be saved."

~Fundamental Baptist jingle

A Review of Sam Storms's Kept for Jesus

By Bob Wilkin

Kept for Jesus: What the New Testament Really Teaches about Assurance of Salvation and Eternal Security. By Sam Storms. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 203 pp. Paper, \$15.99.

am Storms graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1977, the year before I began. While we did not overlap, I have long known of him. He departed from Dispensationalism, adopting Covenant Theology. He also ceased being a Cessationist. However, he has maintained a reputation as a solid Bible teacher.

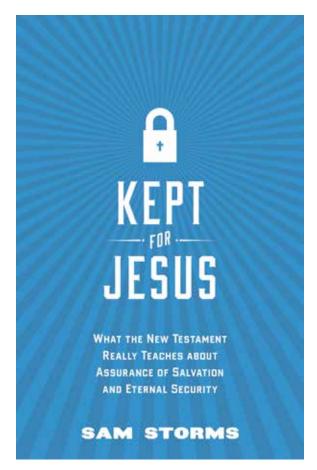
PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS

This book presents Calvinist teaching on the preservation of the saints (eternal security) and the perseverance of the saints (assurance of salvation). However, the extreme comments often found in Calvinist Lordship Salvation writings are rarely present in this book. I found Storms to be easy to follow. Generally he is irenic in tone.

I don't recall reading a Lordship Salvation person who suggests that Jas 5:19-20 refers to one believer saving another believer from physical death. That is a typical Free Grace view. But that is Storm's view (p. 161).

In the same place he also suggests that Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 and the believers under God's discipline in 1 Cor 11:30 were examples of born-again people who died under temporal judgment (p. 161).

Yet Storms, like most Lordship Salvation Calvinists, says believers cannot commit the sin unto death (1 John 5:16-17, pp. 175-87), that Simon Magus in Acts 8 was not born-again, that John 2:23-25 and 8:30-32 refers to "unsaved believers,"



"so-called belief," "transitory, superficial, surface faith," and "fickle faith" (pp. 48, 50, 52).

Unfortunately, the discussion of Jas 5:19-20; Acts 5; and 1 Cor 11:30 is the exception. Lordship Salvation understandings are the rule.

SAVING FAITH INCLUDES REPENTANCE

Repeatedly we find statements which indicate that saving faith includes repentance, believing the gospel, and embracing Jesus as Lord (p. 39; see also p. 25), that to be born again one must trust in and swear allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ (p. 49), and that one must have a deep commitment to Christ (p. 50), not a "shallow commitment" (p. 115).

In light of how careful Storms is in his language, I was surprised to see a number of places in which he suggested that saving faith is a process, not something which occurs at a point in time. Maybe I misunderstood. But when speaking of "unsaved believers," he said, "John often portrays people as 'believing' in Jesus who are clearly not born again. He clearly envisions a stage in the progress of belief in Jesus that falls short of genuine saving

faith and thus falls short of salvation" (p. 48, emphasis added). The progress of belief? "There is in John's Gospel, therefore, a transitory, superficial, surface faith or belief..." (p. 50, emphasis added).

He sees the people discussed in Heb 6:4-6 as unbelievers. He favorably cites Grudem who says "these experiences are all preliminary to those decisive beginning stages of the Christian life" (p. 113). The discussion here is weak. It is hard to think of a stronger way that one could refer to a born-again person than the five participles in Heb 6:4-5. Yet no exeges is done by Storms to show

that these really are not believers. Rather than studying the expression once enlightened (hapax phōtisthentas), he merely pontificates, saying, "'Enlightened' need mean no more than to hear the gospel, to learn or to understand" (p. 111). Where is the evidence?

Nor does he discuss other uses of the word taste (geuomai), which also occurs in Heb 2:9 of Jesus tasting death. Again, he simply asserts that this means that the readers had "a genuine spiritual experience...They have experienced

some degree of blessing" (p. 111). But he says it was not "a genuine saving experience" (p. 111; compare p. 113).

Storms does at least proof text "having become partakers of the Holy Spirit." He cites Luke 5:7 and Heb 1:9, without quoting them and without discussing the contexts.

BY THEIR FRUITS

The discussion of "by their fruits you shall know them" (Matt 7:16, 20) is quite misleading. Storms says, "The simple but profound truth that Jesus taught in Matthew 7:16-20 is that Christians produce moral and spiritual fruit that bears witness to the reality of what is on the inside" (p. 45). But he does not quote the verses. If he did, the reader would see that it is *false prophets*, not Christians, who are in view. By their fruits you shall know *false prophets*: "Beware of false

prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You shall know them by their fruits" (Matt 7:15-16a). They look good. You can't discern this type of false prophet by his works.

The *fruits* in question are the false teachings of the false prophets. Compare Matt 12:33-37 where fruit is identified as words spoken.

After having read five pages' worth of discussion of how Calvinists understand falling from grace in Gal 5:2-4 (pp. 145-49), I was moved to see this honest and humble admission by Storms: "Although I'm not entirely satisfied with any of

"Like most Calvinists,

Storms says that only

those who persevere

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him assurance is not

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the interpretive options suggested by Calvinist scholars, one of them must surely be correct" (pp. 149-50).

ONLY THOSE WHO PERSEVERE

Like most Calvinists, Storms says that only those who persevere to the end will prove that they were really born again in the first place. Hence for him assurance is not certainty. It is impossible to be sure that you are born again because you cannot be sure you will persevere. "In the absence of all this, no one can

be assured of salvation" (p. 57). In the previous sentence he defined *all this* as follows, "It means we are always prayerful, embedded in Christian community, worshipping Jesus in all of life, and living on mission with him every day" (p. 57).

No one can be sure he will continue to do those things.

A character in the book who comes up in the Introduction and several other times is "Charley." He is a young man who grew up in a Christian home, professed faith in Christ at twelve, was baptized, and was discipled by the youth pastor for several years. "Charley's faith appeared to be quite vibrant and joyful. He endured the same trials and temptations as do virtually all teenaged boys, but he never wandered far or failed to repent when he sinned. He prayed every day and read his Bible and was growing in his understanding of God" (p. 11). But. College. "It wasn't long before

Charley stopped attending church and eventually declared himself to be an atheist" (p. 12). Worse still. "Charley is now thirty, already twice divorced, an alcoholic, and painfully bitter and unpleasant to be around" (p. 12). Unless Charley comes back to the Lord, he will end up in the lake of fire because he will prove he never had true saving faith (pp. 54, 191).

In the conclusion, after bringing up Charley and a similar case study called Charlene, Storms says, "Scripture does not give us warrant for assuring them that no matter what has happened 'it is' still 'well' with their soul. Sadly, it may not be" (p. 191).

Of course, if Charley had died before college, then Storms would have said he was likely with the Lord now. He just lived too long. What about Storms himself? What if he becomes an atheist and alcoholic in his senior years? Wouldn't he then be just like Charley?

I know that could happen to me. Anyone who does not think he can fall is much more likely to fall.

The last two sentences of the book are quite telling. Speaking about Charley and Charlene: "In

the final analysis, as much as we'd like to have a well-grounded reason to draw a definitive conclusion about his or her salvation, only 'the Lord knows who are his' (2 Tim. 2:19a). We don't" (p. 191).

We don't know who is born again and who is not.

That is a sad way to live, not knowing if your spouse and children are born again. Not knowing if your parents are born again. Not knowing if you yourself are born again.

I highly recommend this book for well-grounded believers. I would not, however, recommend it for new or poorly taught believers or for unbelievers.

GIF



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G, I, V, I, N, G,

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

(Ephesians 5:22-24)

By David Bechtel

n Thursday, August 16th, 2018, the world lost one of its great voices, the "Queen of Soul"—Aretha Franklin.

She was perhaps best known for her recording of the song "Respect." But, perhaps few know that the song was originally written by a man—Otis Redding.

Redding wrote and released the hit song "Respect" in 1965, which went on to be reworked and popularized by Aretha Franklin.

Redding's version is a plea from a desperate man who will give his woman anything she wants. He doesn't care if she does him wrong, as long as he gets his due respect when he brings money home.

By contrast, Franklin's version of the song was about a strong, confident woman's demand for respect from her man.

Her version was quickly adopted by both the Civil Rights movement and the feminist movement.

MEN AND WOMEN ARE WIRED DIFFERENTLY

In his eye-opening book, *Love & Respect*, Dr. Emerson Eggerichs points out that:

Aretha had the right to sing 'R-E-S-P-E-C-T' from a female point of view, of course. A

woman does need respect. And if a man loves her properly, she will get that respect.

But the primary meaning in Otis Redding's song is a cry from a man's deepest soul that says respect is what he needs and he's "got to have it" (p. 47).

The main premise of Dr. Eggerich's book is that men and women are wired differently.

A man's deepest need from his wife is respect.

A woman's deepest need from her husband is love.

However, in times of conflict, the wife's first instinct is to respond in a way that communicates a lack of respect.

Conversely, when faced with conflict, a man will usually act towards his wife in an unloving way.

This perpetuates what Dr. Eggerich calls the "Crazy Cycle"—a cycle which quickly degrades relationships and leads to unhappiness, marital strife, and divorce, but is possible to avoid. Dr. Eggerich draws heavily from Ephesians 5 as the basis of his book.

SUBMISSION

In Eph 5:22-24, Paul writes,

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is



the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."

Paul spells it out: God wants wives to submit themselves to their husbands.

Submission is the act of accepting or yielding to the authority or will of another. It speaks of humility and meekness—the same kind of humility we see in Christ submitting to the will of the Father.

The command for wives to give respect to their husbands is also unconditional. Of course, if a wife is asked to partake in sin, a woman's higher duty is to her Lord, Jesus Christ. She must submit to her Savior before all else. This also isn't a call to remain under abusive conditions that endanger herself or her children.

Yet the command does not depend on reciprocal submission—i.e. I will only submit to him and respect him if he acts in a loving way toward me. The command is unconditional.

LOVE

Now, ladies, before you cry "foul," know that men aren't off the hook just yet. In vv 25-28, Paul writes:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her... So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

Wow! Did you hear that guys? God tells husbands to love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her." To what extent did Christ love the Church, His bride? To the extent that He died for her.

And let's not forget our position towards God when Christ died for us. It was while we were enemies of God that He chose to die for us. God loved his bride, the Church, unconditionally, while we were still estranged from Him.

What great love!

In this case, as with the command to wives, it is also unconditional. Men are called to love their wives regardless of whether they are being respected or not.

I don't know about you, but that seems like a tall order.

THAT UNNATURAL FEELING

The nature of both commands—to both wives and husbands—is wholly unnatural, given our fallen humanity.

When a man is disrespected, it's not in his nature to respond in love. A man will interpret a lack of respect and submission as contempt, plain and simple.

Likewise, when treated in an unloving way, it's not a woman's nature to respond with respect. She will fear that if she gives her man respect when he doesn't deserve it, she will become a doormat.

Yet, both commands are unconditional.

There's no wiggle-room given to either husbands or wives. Both commands are a call to "submit to each other in the fear of God."

God wants men and women to lay down their wills and serve one another. This is only something that can be accomplished by the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ working in us and through us. It's a call to grace—a call to show grace to those we deem least deserving—since Christ showed us grace when we were at our worst.

MEETING EACH OTHER'S NEEDS

On a practical note, this looks like encouraging one another and forgiving each other freely and often.

Love, true love, is meeting each other's needs, like it or not, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health. We must choose to believe the best about each other and see the value and worth of each

other. Whenever conflict arises it's rarely, if ever, because one individual is acting maliciously or out of spite. One or both parties are most often simply being misunderstood. Marriage is difficult, if for no other reason than it joins two sinful, selfish people in lifelong commitment.

It's almost as if God already knew beforehand that a man's deepest need is for respect, just as a woman's deepest need is to be loved.

Well, He did.

"Our relationships and marriages ought to mirror the submission and love that Christ exhibited in dying for a fallen world."

He not only designed men and women individually as separate creatures, but He also designed the institution of marriage as a picture of His grace. Our relationships and marriages ought to mirror the submission and love that Christ exhibited in dying for a fallen world. Any conflict is not an opportunity to harbor resentment and hurt, but to show the grace we so often hear about and preach. It's an opportunity to be a conduit of God's grace, under

the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Otis Redding may not have been aware that he was doing so, but he was actually echoing what God wrote through the Apostle Paul nearly two thousand years earlier.



David Bechtel is an artist and writer. He lives in Houston, TX.

A Simple Way to Pray

By Shawn Lazar

o you know how to pray? Are you making progress in your prayer life? Do you find that your prayers have become repetitive, dry, and boring?

I find I need help to pray.

Do you?

Martin Luther's barber once asked for advice on how to pray to God. So Luther wrote him a letter explaining his simple method. Taking my cue from Luther, let me share with you five elements of a simple way to pray.

First, read a Biblical prayer out loud. The Psalms are the Bible's prayerbook. If you want to learn what a spiritually mature prayer looks like, read the Psalms. Or read the Lord's Prayer. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17)—it doesn't matter if you're hearing your own voice, so read the prayer out loud.

Second, *learn from it*. As you read it, ask God to show you what He wants to teach you in each section of the prayer. If you pray, "Thy kingdom come," what does that mean? What kingdom? When is it coming? What is it like? Ask God to teach you. And be proactive. Search out Bible teachers who can explain the Psalm or prayer to vou.

Third, give thanks to God. For each truth revealed in the prayer or Psalm, especially if it relates to God's character, give thanks. If you read, "The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them" (Ps 111:2), then praise Him for all His works. Give thanks for creation, for life, and for loving relationships.



Fourth, confess your sins. When you pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10), you cannot help but think of all the times you failed to do God's will. So confess your sins as you pray.

Fifth, *improvise*. As you read a prayer, let it inspire you. For example, as you pray out loud, "Lead us not into temptation..." (Matt 6:13) you might think of a particular temptation or trial you or someone you love is going through. Pray about that temptation. Let words or verses of a Biblical prayer inspire your own prayer to God.

If I were to add a sixth element it would be this: practice. Talk to your Father about anything and everything. A good way to pray better is to pray often, gje



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