

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019

Preview of New Books



PLUS NO MORE SCARLET LETTERS / GOD WISHES NONE TO PERISH / TOP FIVE WAYS TO ENCOURAGE
YOUR PASTOR / GRACE MOTIVATES EVANGELISM / ALL WHO COME TO JESUS / **AND MORE!**

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FROM THE EDITOR

The author of Hebrews wrote: “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...” (Heb 12:2).

Theodore Monod wrote a booklet about *Looking Unto Jesus*. It is a wonderful devotional about focusing on Christ.

This coming year, Bob, Bethany, Mark, and I will be looking unto Jesus.

Looking unto Jesus to help us freely give *Grace in Focus* to even more people who need solid Bible materials to teach them.

Looking unto Jesus to help us produce a quality grace blog that is read by thousands everyday.

Looking unto Jesus to give us wisdom as we begin *Grace in Focus* Radio on January 14th. I have the contracts for five stations. I’m working on four to five more. I’m excited to see who will stand up and say, “I’ll pay for *Grace in Focus* Radio in my city!”

We will be looking unto Jesus to help us write, edit, and publish several new books, including two by Bob (one on repentance, the other on 100 hundred verses that teach faith alone); a commentary on Hebrews by Ken Yates; a slew of books based on Zane Hodges’s class notes; and at least one book by me on final punishment. You will find a preview of some of these new books in this issue.

We will be looking unto Jesus as we plan a series of conferences across the country, because so many Free Grace believers feel



Looking Unto Jesus

Shawn Lazar, **EDITOR**

alone and need a human connection with like-minded people.

We will be looking unto Jesus to grow our faith and trust in Him as seek to have His mind in all things.

Ministry is taxing, but Jesus’ grace is sufficient!

It is a privilege to serve Him, our God and Savior.

In 2019, we’re looking unto Jesus to receive all the glory!





GOD WISHES NONE TO PERISH BUT FOR ALL TO REPENT

(2 PETER 3:9)

From the forthcoming book
The Power of Repentance

BY BOB WILKIN

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

WE SHOULD NOT ASSUME THAT “PERISH” IN 2 PETER 3:9 MEANS WHAT IT DOES IN JOHN 3:16

Elsewhere I have analyzed every occurrence of the verb *apollumi* (perish) in the NT. I showed that it refers to eternal condemnation less than 20% of the time. Normally it refers to some sort of loss or destruction, including physical death.

While clearly in John 3:16 *apollumi* refers to eternal

condemnation—the context there is what makes that clear (see John 3:17-18). The context in 2 Peter 3 is radically different than John 3:16.

“PERISHING” IN 2 PETER 3:9 REFERS TO PREMATURE DEATH, NOT ETERNAL CONDEMNATION

Peter says, “The Lord...is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” Many people see that as an obvious statement that repentance is the condition for escaping eternal condemnation.

But the issue in 2 Pet 3:1-8 is the timing of “the promise of His coming.” In v 4 Peter says the mockers were saying, “Where is the promise of His coming?”

A point often missed is that v 9 starts with the words, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise [i.e., the promise of His coming].”

When Peter is writing, it is around AD 66, or 33 years after Jesus ascended to heaven with a promise to return. Though we may think that 33 years is not very long to wait, we must understand that the first century believers thought it likely that Jesus would return in their lifetimes (as we do in the twenty-first century).

Verse 9 explains why Jesus had delayed fulfilling His promise to return and establish His kingdom. Peter’s readers knew that Christ’s return will involve rapturing all believers out of earth and then seven years of Tribulation. Concerning those seven years, the Lord said, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved, but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matt 24:21-22).

God is not looking forward to the Tribulation. As long as enough people on earth repent, the Tribulation will continue to be postponed.

Repentance postpones His coming. It does not eliminate eternal condemnation. Peter made clear that the only way to escape eternal condemnation is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 10:43; 15:7-11; 1 Pet 1:21-24).

THE CONTEXT CONCERNS THE COMING TRIBULATION AND BILLIONS OF DEATHS

A simple rule of hermeneutics is that you determine the meaning of a word by its use in context. Well, here it is obvious what *apollumi* means in context if we just read the words before and after v 9. In v 6 the same word is used to refer to those who died in the Noahic flood: “The world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.” That’s the only other use of this word in 2 Peter

and it is in the immediate context. (There is also one use of the word in 1 Peter and it also carries this meaning.)

In addition v 9 is culminating a discussion begun in v 3 and following about the delay in the Lord’s promised return. Peter is saying in v 9 that the Lord will fulfill His promise, but He is delaying since He is longsuffering toward us, meaning the human race. He doesn’t want to kill billions

of people on earth. He would rather people repent and live full lives here and now prior to the kingdom. But when the sins of mankind are filled up, then the Tribulation will begin and billions will die. Even then, however, God will show that He would prefer men repent and avoid premature death (Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11).

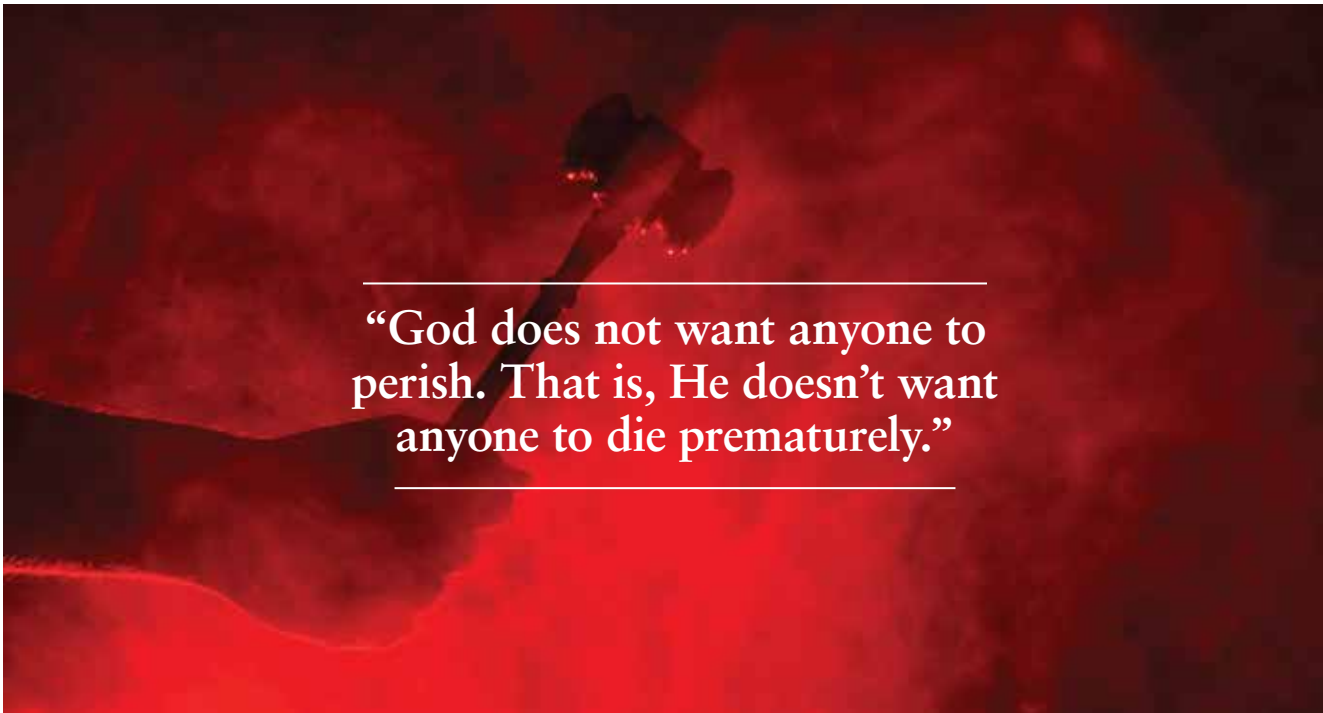
The verses which follow 2 Pet 3:9, that is, vv 10-13, discuss not hell, but the

destruction of the current earth and heavens by fire. Temporal destruction is what is being discussed. The ultimate end, of course, is that His promise will be fulfilled: we will receive “a new heavens and a new earth in which righteous dwells” (v 13). Zane Hodges writes,

What God seeks from men while His judgment tarries is repentance. God’s wish, therefore, is **that all should come to repentance**. This statement should be read as though it indicated God’s desire that all men should be *saved from hell*. It is true that God *does* have such a desire, since it is plainly stated in 1 Tim 2:4-5 and also found in passages like John 3:16-17 and 2 Cor 5:19-20. What is suggested here, however, is that if men would repent, the judgment of the Day of the Lord could be averted [i.e., postponed]. But this repentance would need to be universal, that is to say, *all* would have to *come to repentance*.

This truth is illustrated in microcosm in the case of Nineveh (Jonah 3)...What is clear is that *all of them* were spared from the impending ‘overthrow’ of their city, because *the whole city* repented.

“God is not looking forward to the Tribulation. As long as enough people on earth repent, the tribulation will continue to be postponed.”



“God does not want anyone to perish. That is, He doesn’t want anyone to die prematurely.”

Thus we might paraphrase 2 Pet 3:9 in this way: God wishes that none should die prematurely under His hand of temporal judgment (especially during the calamitous judgments of the Tribulation), but that all should come to repentance and extend their lives and their experience of His blessings.

2 Peter 3:9 illustrates the truth of Ezekiel 18. Unrighteousness leads to premature death and repentance is the remedy: “‘Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?’ says the Lord God, ‘and not that he should turn from his ways and live?’” (Ezek 18:23).

GRASPING THE TRUTH


In order to hold fast to what God has said, we must understand what He said. A perfect example of the need for careful observation is 2 Pet 3:9.

God has promised that the Lord Jesus will return soon to establish His righteous kingdom. But God does not want anyone to perish. That is, He doesn’t want anyone to die prematurely. Thus the promise of Christ’s return is at odds with the love of God for mankind.

God wishes for all to repent. Repentance is the remedy against premature death. Worldwide

repentance is the remedy against worldwide premature death.

The promise of the Rapture will not be fulfilled until the sins of the world rise to a level that triggers God’s worldwide judgment.

Death is not pleasing to God. Thus He postpones the Lord Jesus’ return as long as possible to allow more people to have full lives (and hence more people to come to faith in Christ). That’s the message of 2 Pet 3:9. 



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.

No More Scarlet Letters

(Galatians 6:1)

By Shawn Lazar

Have you ever read Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* or seen one of the film adaptations?

The story is set in Puritan Boston. The protagonist is a woman named Hester Prynne. She was sent to live in colonial America by her husband, who was supposed to follow her but was captured by the Indians. As a result, Hester lived alone, making a living as a seamstress. She found comfort with the local minister. One thing led to another, and they ended up having an affair that resulted in the birth of a little girl named Pearl. For that act of adultery, Hester was forced to wear a large scarlet letter "A" on her dress. And if that was not enough, she was scorned and shamed by the community until she became an outcast.

Can you imagine being forced to wear the sign of your sin for all to see?

What kind of religion does that?

Law religion.

FALLING FROM GRACE IN GALATIA

Paul's letter to the Galatians is a treatment of the distinction between law and grace.

All through the letter, Paul contrasts law-religion with grace-religion.

The Galatians believed the gospel of grace, but when Paul moved on, some legalists moved in,



and the Galatians began to teeter on the brink of works salvation. So Paul rose up to stop it.

The legalists were wrong about justification (which, Paul clarified, is by faith apart from works), but they were also wrong about the Christian life. It turns out the law, and all the little religious rituals that so impress the world, are no more useful for sanctification than for justification.

Another example of the difference between law-religion and grace-religion in the Christian life comes to us in Gal 6:1-2:

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not

“In a grace-based church, there’s no room for scarlet letters.”

be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:1-2).

The issue here is *church discipline*.

Unfortunately, most churches no longer practice church discipline.

If you try to discipline anyone, he will leave and go to the church down the street. Do that too often, and how will you pay the electric bills?

But we’re *supposed* to exercise discipline, not for its own sake, but so that erring people can be restored.

If there’s no discipline, there’s no restoration.

GRACIOUS DISCIPLINE

What happens when there’s a Hester Prynne in your congregation?

Well, if you’re a legalist, as were the Puritans, you mark her, and shame her, and push her to the margins of society.

What else can the law do but condemn those who break it?

By contrast, what should grace religion do? Not shame, but restore.

Notice, Paul is not suggesting we ignore sin or pretend that sin isn’t sinful. Many (liberal) churches think that being gracious means accepting all behavior as morally equal. But that isn’t grace; it’s relativism.

Nor is Paul suggesting that we be sin-seekers. The church is not supposed to be Big Brother, inspecting every detail of our lives, looking for people to discipline. If someone *gets caught* in sin, then you deal with it.

And how do you deal with it?

Roughly?

Scornfully?

Angrily?

By making the offender wear a scarlet letter?

No.

Grace restores *gently*.

Put another way, instead of condemning the sinner, you help bear her burden (“Bear one another’s burdens”). You walk with her as an act of love (i.e., “the law of Christ”).

If Hester Prynne had been in a grace-based congregation, what should have happened?

The spiritual people would have acted to restore her.

A spiritual person is someone who is spiritually mature. That person knows Bible doctrine and applies it to his life. He lives according to God’s revelation. He confesses his sins regularly and attends the fellowship of the church.

If Prynne repented, she should have been welcomed and supported by the spiritual people.

She should have been shown the grace of Christ and been assured of her forgiveness because of the cross of Christ.

Her daughter Pearl would be loved, not maligned.

Prynne would be looked at as no worse than anyone else—i.e., a sinner saved by grace and forgiven by Christ.

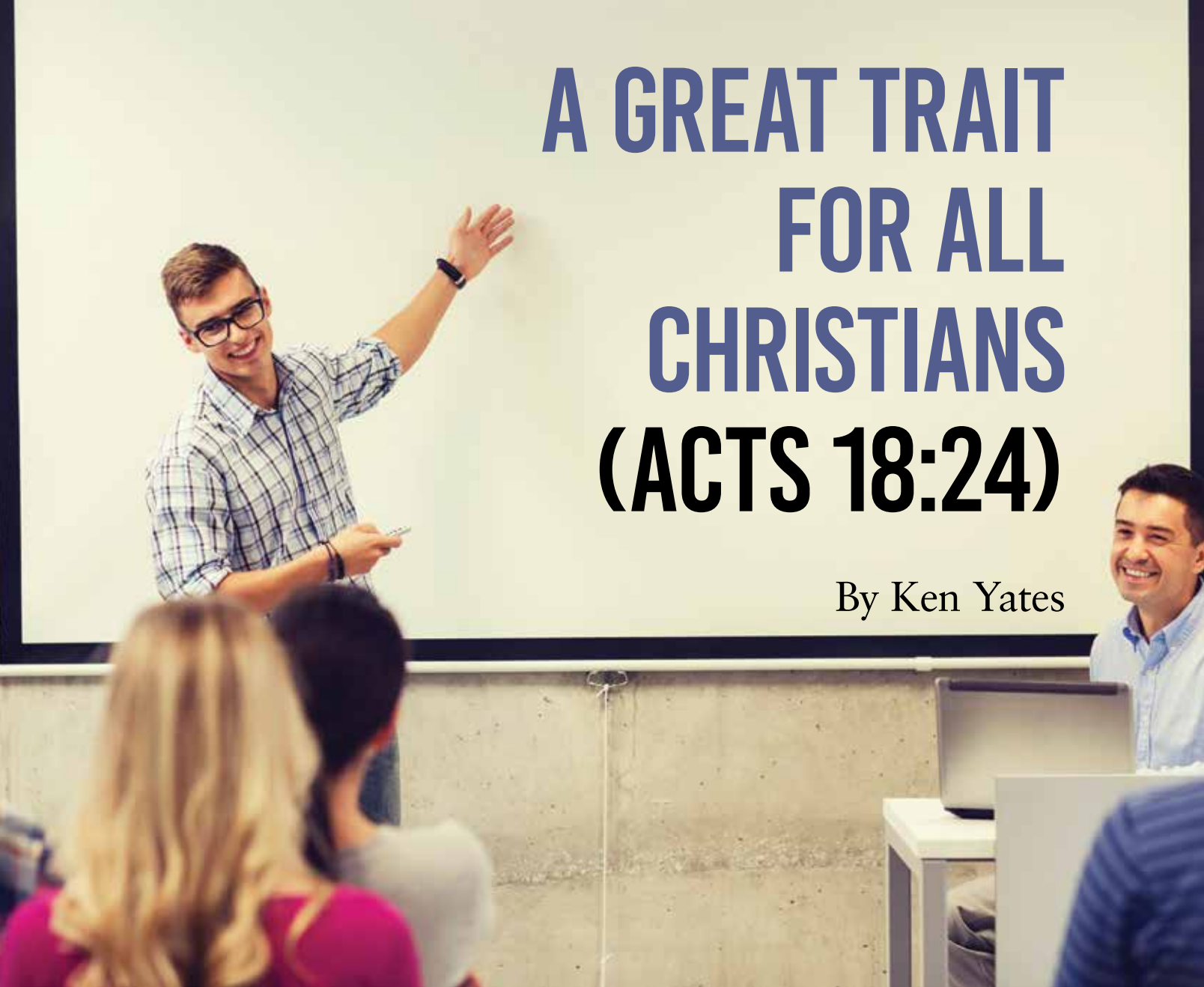
And the people in the congregation, especially the older women, would have come alongside her to help bear her burden.

That’s what grace looks like in church discipline.

In a grace-based church, there’s no room for scarlet letters. ■



Shawn Lazar is the Editor of Grace in Focus magazine. He is married to Abby, and they have three children. He is the pastor of Gateway Baptist’s Faith Fellowship in Denton, TX (www.faithfellowshipdenton.org).



A GREAT TRAIT FOR ALL CHRISTIANS (ACTS 18:24)

By Ken Yates

MORE THAN GIFTED

In Acts 18:24 we are introduced to a man by the name of Apollos. We are told that he was an “eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures.” He lived in a Greek culture where eloquence was a much desired trait. Luke goes on to say that Apollos had been “instructed in the way of the Lord” and was a man fervent in spirit (v 25).

So here was a man who was a great speaker and had the intelligence to go along with it. We can assume that Apollos was the kind of man that fellow believers would have admired. If he lived today, it would be easy to picture him in the pulpit of a large church or being a well-liked and

popular seminary professor. He probably would have authored a couple of best selling books.

But as gifted as Apollos was, there is another trait in this passage in Acts that in my opinion stands out even more.

GENTLE CORRECTION

Luke tells us that Apollos was teaching in the synagogue. A couple named Aquila and Priscilla were in the audience (v 26). While this couple is described in the NT as great servants of the Lord, their ministry in the church was not a public one. They certainly did not have the speaking skills of Apollos.

“To me, the greatest trait of Apollos in this section is his willingness to be taught.”

Luke tells us that there were certain things that Apollos did not know. Aquila and Priscilla, after hearing him speak, noticed that there were “holes” in Apollos’ theology. They took him aside to teach him things he needed to correct, or as Luke says, they “explained to him the way of God more accurately.”

So, here was a nondescript couple, Aquila and Priscilla, teaching a rising star in the early church. This couple were tentmakers by trade. One can picture many people in the synagogue who were listening to Apollos speak, hanging on his every word. Then Aquila and Priscilla came up to him and told them they could help him in his ministry.

WILLING TO LEARN

How would someone like Apollos respond?

I would imagine that many in his position would have an arrogant attitude towards this couple. Who did they think they were? What could they possibly teach this golden tongued, educated preacher? The people had come to hear him speak at the synagogue. It would have been easy for Apollos to reject any advice this couple could give him.

But that was not the attitude of Apollos. The way Luke describes what Aquila and Priscilla did, we see that Apollos accepted the correction to his theology that they gave him. The next two verses tell us that as Apollos continued his ministry, it was a highly fruitful one. The implication is that Aquila and Priscilla had a hand in that.

To me, the greatest trait of Apollos in this section is his willingness to be taught. He was willing to change his view of certain theological points when confronted with the truth. The more gifted a person, the harder that is.

IT TAKES HUMILITY

We in the Free Grace movement often find ourselves in the position of Aquila and Priscilla. We often hear the gospel of grace distorted, or a denial of eternal rewards, or certain passages mishandled. We might want to speak to the person involved but face a daunting task. What we have to say often goes against what well-known and successful Biblical teachers say. How could we possibly be right when popular experts tell us we are wrong? Experience tells us that our offer of help is often rejected.

But it is the same with us. It takes humility to admit we are wrong and need correction. It is probably harder to do if we have been in public ministry or even if we have been believers for a long time. Sometimes we can be Aquila and Priscilla and can be of assistance to others. Other times, we need to have the attitude of Apollos and accept what others can help us with. If we are going to accurately divide the Word of God and teach others, being humbly teachable is one of the greatest traits we can have. ■



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

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GRACE MOTIVATES EVANGELISM

BY BUD BROWN

Is there a distinctively Free Grace way to motivate Christians to talk about Jesus and eternal life with those who don't believe?

Many are urging pastors to exhort church members to evangelistic effort. A wealth of books, blogs, electronic resources, videos, and ministries have been devoted to creating evangelistic momentum in churches. Pastors with strong teaching gifts preach sermons featuring the imperative in the "great commission" passages (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15ff; Luke 24:46-48; John 15:16; 20:21; Acts 1:8). Those with caring and helping gifts may extol Jesus as our example (Matt 18:11; Luke 19:10) or highlight the plight of those who live in darkness. Others who prefer the

prophetic voice warn of potential discipline upon the disobedient (Revelation 2-3). Pastors in denominations with a strong affinity for revivalism schedule itinerant evangelists to conduct annual crusades. These may include strong importunities to urge believers into evangelism.

There's usually some measure of imperative (duty), admonition (guilt), or reproof (shame) baked into these methods. They are flavored with "must do." This lends an aroma of law rather than grace. But beleaguered pastors who earnestly want churches to become effective evangelistic outposts may reach for anything that may help.

So, the question remains, is there a distinctively Free Grace motivation that reignites

“Isn’t it remarkable that Jesus often told those whose lives He had touched *to keep quiet*? Yet, in spite of the Lord’s admonition, those who experienced His gracious blessings could not help themselves. They broadcast the good news of what God had done for them far and wide.”

evangelistic passion in apathetic Christians? How do Free Grace pastors, teachers, and evangelists reframe the privilege of witnessing for Jesus from a “*have to*” to a “*get to*”? How do pastors avoid resorting to law yet ensure that church members pray for (Col 4:3) and enter open doors (2 Cor 2:12) and make the most of every opportunity (Col 4:5-6)?

The answer is in the NT. There we find two suggested strategies: (1) remind people of God’s blessing in their lives; (2) reconnect them with God’s love.

REMEMBER GOD’S BLESSING

Isn’t it remarkable that Jesus often told those whose lives he had touched *to keep quiet*? Yet, in spite of the Lord’s admonition, those who experienced his gracious blessings could not help themselves. They broadcast the good news of what God had done for them far and wide. This motif recurs in the Gospels with different people, in different settings, with different audiences.

Mark 7:31-37 tells the story of a deaf man presented to Jesus with a request that He heal him. Perhaps his family, friends, or neighbors brought him to Jesus. Whoever it may have been, they “begged Him to put His hand on him” to heal this poor soul (v 32). When the deed was accomplished (vv 33-35), Jesus told them to keep the matter private (v 36). His warning was unheeded. It seems Jesus warned them several times, but each time they broadcast the news even more widely. The good news was announced loud and

clear to those who had not yet heard or believed it!

Consider the two blind men upon whom Jesus bestowed sight (Matt 9:27-31). He touched their eyes, immediately restoring their sight. The Lord told them, “See that no one knows it (v 30).” But how could one so blessed, the recipient of such amazing grace, possibly keep quiet? They naturally spread the good news throughout the whole region (v 31). Once again, those who had not yet believed in Jesus saw clear evidence that the good news was true!

Do you see the pattern? When a person experiences the blessings of God, when his gracious hand touches us, the beneficiary of God’s grace cannot be restrained. They tell anyone and everyone the good news of what Jesus has done for them.

This pattern is a common feature of the Gospels. There’s the paralytic’s running dialog—debate, even—with the Pharisees about the indisputable facts of what Jesus has done and what those facts imply (John 9). A leper wouldn’t keep quiet despite Jesus’s admonition to say nothing to anyone (Matt 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-44; Luke 5:12-14).

Perhaps this is the principle we’re looking for: recipients of God’s grace cannot restrain themselves from proclaiming the good news, even when God or man warns them to remain silent.

FROM GRATITUDE TO COMPASSION

This leads us to fascinating research into the nature of gratitude. It turns out that

gratitude—the awareness that we have been blessed by another—is statistically and positively associated with empathy. Empathy, that awareness that another person is enduring hardship, results in compassion. Compassion leads to action intended to alleviate that hardship. It works like this:

Gratitude > Empathy > Compassion

Those Gospel stories are the written record of gratitude responses. People experienced God's blessing. Gratitude overwhelmed them. That, coupled with the desire to glorify God, led to passionate proclamation of what Jesus had done so that others might enjoy the blessing of knowing Jesus.

APPLICATION

Here then is a way to motivate church members to active evangelism, a process that relies on grace rather than law or duty.

It begins by reconnecting believers who do not evangelize with their own experiences of God's grace and blessings. Pastors who trust that “we love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19), help people arrange themselves before God in such a way that He can ignite their passion once again. This involves a two-pronged approach: the preaching calendar and teaching two spiritual disciplines.

PREACHING

Make God's love and grace your major preaching theme for the next year. Yes, perhaps it sounds a bit too much - a whole year? My experience (eighteen years a church consultant, trainer, and mentor of pastors) tells me that pastors embrace change (cognitive and behavioral) much faster than church folk. Your goal isn't conveying information; it is to change how believers see themselves. This is a slow process. It can take many months.

If you relish dwelling on technical details in your sermons, you may need to polish other skills. Connect the sermon to the emotions. You want them to feel God's love and grace, to experience it afresh—not merely to understand it.

Remember the paradigm: Gratitude (not knowledge alone!) > Empathy > Compassion.

TWO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Two spiritual disciplines will amplify your preaching's effectiveness. The “gratitude letter” and the daily “three blessings” discipline reconnect Christians with their experiences of grace and blessing.

First, ask your people to write a letter of gratitude to God. It should be recall three to five specific ways God blessed, with an explanation of why these were blessings and how their lives were changed as a result. Once the letter is written, direct them to read it aloud to the Lord. You may even ask them to share the letter with trusted friends. Have them file the letter and review it from time to time. Within a matter of weeks, they will feel uplifted in spirit and experience positive emotions toward others.

Second, “three blessings” is a daily exercise that focuses their attention on various ways God is still at work in their lives. Each night they set aside ten minutes to reflect on what went well during the day. These could be something as simple as a fine meal enjoyed with friends, a moment of solemn joy, or a short nap. Recording them draws attention to God's grace on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

Gratitude, not obligation, as a primary motive for Christian living is a hallmark of Free Grace theology. Relying on grace to nurture evangelistic passion among Christians is good theology and good science.

Isn't it amazing what grace can do? ■



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

Top 5 Ways to Encourage Your Pastor

By Summer Stevens

1 *Show up.* Showing up says to your pastor, “I believe in what God is doing here at our church.”

Prioritize Sunday attendance as a family. There are dozens of competing activities for Sunday morning—children’s sports, camping, sleeping in, visiting family—but it says a lot to your family and your pastor when church attendance is high on the list. Other events throughout the week are important, but there is nothing more discouraging to a pastor than preaching to an empty room.

If you are new to Christianity or young in your faith, any attendance is encouraging to your pastor.

But, if you have been a believer for a while and have any sort of influence in your church, chances are your pastor notices if you’re gone a lot; after a while your irregular attendance is received as a wound.

2 *Pray for him, and let him know.* The most encouraging people in our former congregation was an elderly couple who sent regular emails letting us know that they prayed for us daily.



Pastors struggle with loneliness and feelings of isolation. Standing up and delivering God’s message on Sunday can feel like being alone in an arena while spectators line up to take their best shot. But when a pastor is prayed for, it is as though the very stage on which he stands is held up by prayer. Spurgeon had a men’s prayer meeting four hundred strong in the basement of the church to support him on Sunday mornings.

It is a tremendous encouragement for your pastor to know that someone is daily lifting him up before God, standing on the front lines with him. Send a little note or card and let him know that you pray for him, or shoot him a text on Sunday morning before he preaches to let him know that you are praying that God fills him and speaks through him.

3 *Take sermon applications seriously.* God has chosen and equipped your pastor specifically for your church. When he prepares his messages, he asks God for His direction and leading. If you believe this, then you believe that



God is speaking through your pastor to nourish and equip you. Make a point to take seriously sermon applications; and then let your pastor know of any positive outcomes. He is already receiving criticism about what he is doing wrong. For most pastors, those may be the only voices he hears even if God is using him powerfully. If God moves you through his messages, be sure to let him know.

4 *Be intentional about community.* The pastor's job is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. If this is true, a pastor is doing his job when the saints are actually doing the work of the ministry. If they are not, then he is not doing a very good job.

It's encouraging to your pastor when he sees members of the congregation sharing the gospel, inviting people to church, and making a point to be intentional about creating community.

A woman in her 80s at our church sets an example for us all. She makes a point to meet a new person each Sunday, and writes down their

name in a notebook so she can connect with them the next week.

5 *Support and encourage personal and family time.* A pastor spends his week pouring out to his congregation through teaching and preparation, meetings, counseling and visitation. It is necessary for a pastor to not only be allowed ample vacation and personal time, but to be encouraged by his leadership to take and enjoy the time in solitude, training, or with his family. This means enabling your pastor to turn off his phone and email responsibilities on days off or vacation weeks, and having an attitude of care and thankfulness when he does take time away.

If he has young children, give him a gift card to a restaurant and volunteer to babysit so he and his wife can have a night out.

Lay leadership must take unplugging from ministry seriously—if your pastor is not unplugging on a weekly basis, make him. If he is not taking at least two weeks of disconnected time away from the church, force the issue. He may fight you on it, but don't give in. Make him go away, or he will burn out and do it on his own.



Summer Stevens has been a "pastor's wife" for almost 12 years. She and her husband Nathanael live south of Pittsburgh where he serves as the pastor at the Bible Chapel—Rostraver Campus. She leads the women's ministry. Summer loves writing, cooking, and playing with their five hilarious children!



Pastor Donnie Preslar teaching on Romans in Charlotte

Zaporozhye Bible College Zaporozhye Ukraine Oct 31-Nov 9

Ken taught the Gospel of John. He lived at the school, where the facilities were wonderful. He was able to eat lunch everyday at the school cafeteria with the students.

The theological situation in Ukraine is different than the United States. "Baptists" are basically Protestants who do not speak in tongues. However, they are Arminian in their theology in that they strongly hold that believers can lose their salvation.

During the class on John, Ken emphasized the eternal security of believers and the assurance that is part and parcel of that. This was a strange concept for the students. The idea of eternal security was considered



Students with copies of Zane's books

"liberal," because in their minds it promotes immoral living.

The class was a struggle because the students would accept some of the things Ken said, but reject others. They would accept new views on a passage as long as they could hold the new view and the view that a believer could lose their salvation at the same time.

Thanks to the ministry of Paul Miles and his wife in Ukraine, Ken gave out translated copies of *The Gospel Under Siege* and *Absolutely Free*. Thanks goes out to Little River Baptist Church in Jenkinsville, SC and an anonymous donor for paying for this literature.

Pray the literature that was left behind will be used by the Lord to continue working among the students to understand the doctrine of salvation by grace and assurance.

Bayside Community Church Tampa, FL November 3-4

Occasionally it just seems like the Holy Spirit is giving a special measure of enablement when I (Bob) speak. This was one of those days. In the first hour, I spoke



The Ukrainian church



In between a rock and hopeful place

on Romans 8:1-13 and victory in the Christian life by having a Spiritual mindset. Then I spoke on Luke 8:4-18 and the Parable of the Four Soils (*Take Heed How You Hear God's Word*).

My thanks to Don Rice, Harley Riedel, John Cash, and all the great people at Bayside. Thanks too to Geraldine for a great supper Saturday night, Mitch and Helga for driving me around, and Dave and Linda for taking me out to lunch after church and then to the airport.

Church on the Solid Rock and Church of Hope Lake Forest, CA November 17-18

On Saturday, I (Bob) was able to visit with Ed Ediger, a Free Grace author and fellow DTS graduate who lives in Southern California. We had a good time of fellowship and interaction.

On Sunday, I spoke at a combined service for two churches which are primarily made up of Filipino-Americans. Pastor Fernando Cinco (Solid Rock) and Pastor Freddy Cortez, Jr. (Hope) welcomed me warmly.

They asked me to speak on the five points of Calvinism. So I combined five separate sermons into one mega-sermon. Thankfully I was able to complete the combined sermon in 50 minutes.

Pastor Freddy nearly died in March due to a stroke and a problem with his Aorta. He had a 20% chance of surviving the surgery. He made that, but then he was debilitated. After months of therapy, he is doing great now. He thanked both churches for their prayers and

encouragement. It was a very moving time. Freddy still has some work to do in therapy. Your prayers would be appreciated.

Thanks to Fernando and Freddy for the invitation, as well as my sister, Pam, who drove me to church and then on to the airport for my return flight to Dallas.

Charlotte Regional Conference November 30-December 1

Attendance was great at this conference, with one hundred registering in advance and about eighty in attendance.

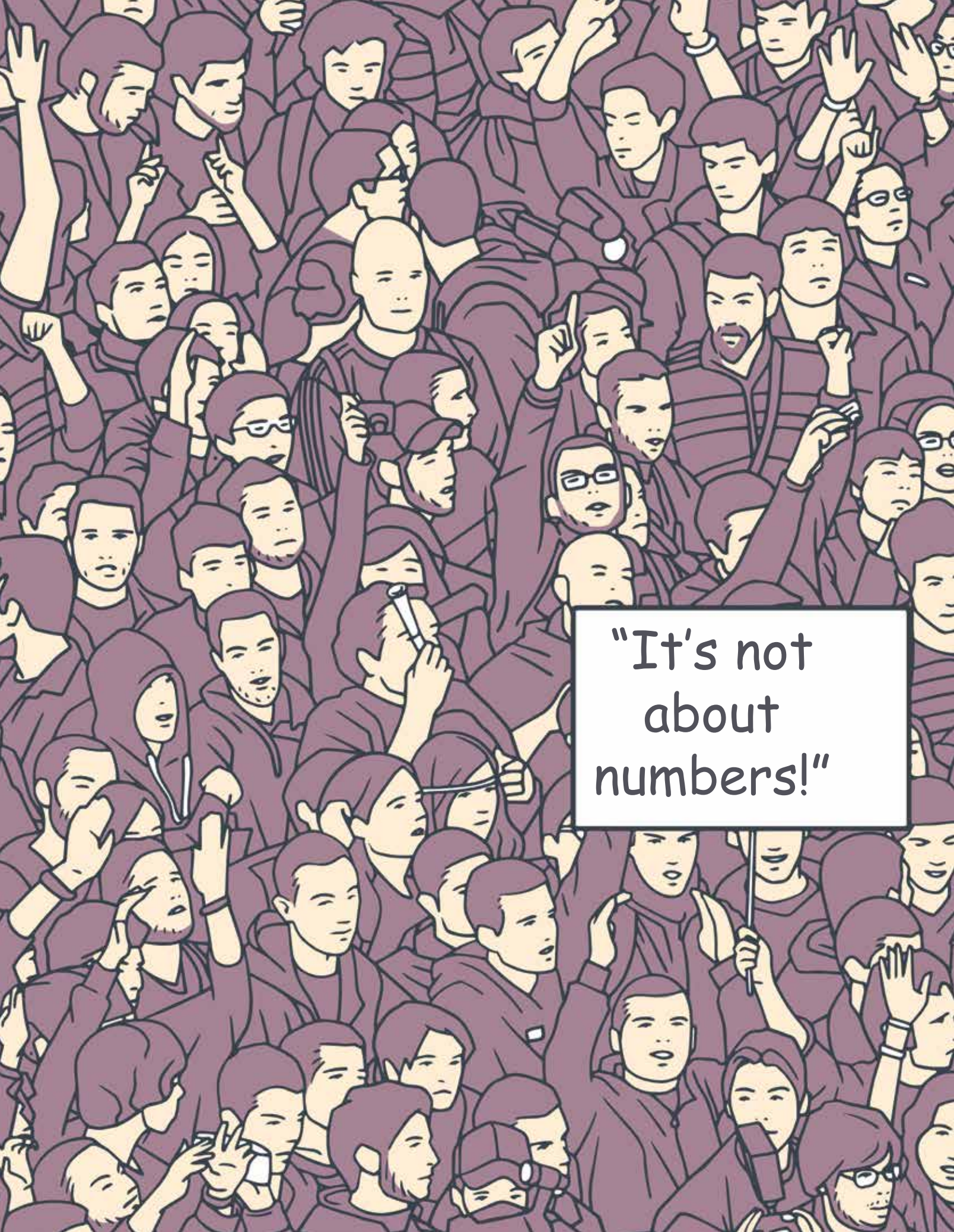
People came from as far as Ohio, Delaware, Virginia, and New Jersey.

Our theme was sanctification from Romans 5-8. What is the Biblical way of growing to spiritual maturity? How can you be saved from temporal wrath? Is it by following a law or by focusing on Christ?

Our speakers, Shawn Lazar, Ken Yates, Donnie Preslar, Allen Rea, and Bob Wilkin, covered all the passages in those four chapters. The messages were great. You can check them out on our website soon.



*Allen Rea and Donnie Preslar, with
Bob, Shawn, and Ken*



"It's not
about
numbers!"



Grace in Ministry (Galatians 6:13-14)

By Shawn Lazar

Paul's letter to the Galatians contrasts law-religion and grace-religion. The contrast applies not only to how you are justified before God, but also to how you live the Christian life.

One of the differences between law-religion and grace-religion shows itself in the pressures to have a “successful” ministry.

What usually counts as a successful ministry? Numbers.

Numbers of people.

Numbers of dollars.

The bigger the church, the more successful it is. The richer the church, the more blessed it is. That's how it is, isn't it?

If a church has empty pews and can't meet its bills, it's either considered a failure or failing. We call them dying churches. And no one likes a dying anything. We're uncomfortable with death. We want life! Success! Some appreciation and admiration!

The legalists in Galatia had the same approach to ministry:

For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh (Gal 6:13).

Apparently, the legalists were interested in numbers, not sincerity. They boasted in how

many men they circumcised. The more “converts” they could get, the better they looked! But these conversions were just as shallow as the legalists’ own religion. The legalists wanted to mark men with the sign of law-keeping (i.e., circumcision), but even the legalists themselves didn’t follow the law. And apparently, they didn’t care! All they cared about were the numbers.

How many Christian ministries get trapped in the same numbers-based quest?

I heard one missionary to Asia claim to have led a million people to Christ in a single year.

Really?

Where did he get that number?

Were hands counted? Forms filled out? Are those Biblical ways of knowing if your ministry is successful? And what is the motivation behind making that boast—to raise more money from gullible donors?

That’s law-thinking. And it leads to hypocrisy or burn-out. Hypocrisy, because you end up inflating numbers without having any idea of the real spiritual impact of your work. Or burn-out when you take those numbers as the standard of success, and then relentlessly get condemned (and also condemn yourself) for not living up to them.

Of course, there are economic realities to doing ministry. Paul himself taught about grace-giving (Gal 6:6). But economics is not the measure of success.

What does success look like in grace-based ministry?

A solid Free Grace missionary to the Caribbean once told me he was happy if he led two people to faith in Christ per year.

That seems right to me.

There are no numbers to boast about there. But maybe we shouldn’t be boasting in numbers in the first place. But if not that, then what?

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal 6:14).

Paul didn’t boast in numbers but in the cross. He boasted about God’s gracious provision of salvation for the world. He boasted in Jesus’ sacrificial love. That’s the only thing worth boasting about!

That’s especially true when you think about what was happening in Galatia.

I suppose that at the beginning of his ministry to them, Paul could have boasted about all the churches he planted and all the people he had led to faith. He could have gone back to his supporters with lots of amazing testimonies to raise more money to support Gentile missions.

But look at the Galatians now. They started well, but then quickly began deserting Christ and falling from grace! Not much to boast about then, was there?

You can’t boast in numbers because you have no idea what people are going to do long-term. Will they continue to believe, or will they fall away? Will they continue onto spiritual maturity or rebellious carnality? Will they follow Christ or shame Him?

There’s no telling.

Hence, there should be no boasting.

Grace-based ministry leaves that thinking behind.

In grace-based ministry, all you can do is boast in the cross and die to the world’s standards of what is or isn’t a successful ministry. And when you do that, you’ll trade in pressure for peace. ■



Shawn Lazar is the Editor of Grace in Focus magazine. He is married to Abby, and they have three children. He is the pastor of Gateway Baptist's Faith Fellowship in Denton, TX (www.faithfellowshipdenton.org).

World Changers (Mark 4:26-29)

By Ken Yates

In Mark 4:26-29, we find a parable of the Lord unique to Mark's Gospel. It doesn't get much attention. I think the attention it does receive is often superficial.

A major reason for this neglect is that this parable is often treated more or less as a repetition of the Parable of the Four Soils which occurs earlier in the same chapter (Mark 4:3-9). That parable is longer and is often discussed as to its meaning and application. It might be easy to conclude that this later, shorter, parable does not have much to add.

Certainly there are many parallels between the two parables. Both have a man who sows seed. In both, the seed falls into the ground. In both, the seed sprouts and grows. In both, there is a harvest at the end of the age.

It is clear, and practically unanimously believed, that the Parable of the Four Soils deals with how individuals respond to the words of the Lord. Different people respond in one of four different ways.

With the parallels between the two parables, it might logically follow that the second, shorter parable has the same basic meaning as the first. I think a closer look at it might challenge that view.

NOT INDIVIDUALISTIC

I think a potential problem at looking at Mark's unique parable is the tendency we have in the West of looking at things in an individualistic way. I believe the meaning of this parable can only be understood if we widen our view. We need to look at it as it relates to the world.

I come to that conclusion based upon the wider context of Mark. In the first three chapters, Jesus offers the kingdom of God to the nation of Israel.



This was to be the fulfillment of numerous OT prophecies.

The kingdom will be a time when the Messiah will rule from Jerusalem. Righteousness will reign. All the promises made to the nation will be fulfilled. Israel will be the center of the world with the nations of the world coming to her to worship God. The kingdom will certainly bring about a great change from the world in which we currently live!

At the end of chap. 3, the religious leaders, as representatives of the nation, reject Christ and His offer. The kingdom would not come to that generation of Jews.

The parables of chap. 4 describe the results of that rejection.

KINGDOM COME

One of the questions is: Will the kingdom still come to Israel? It seems to me that this is a point not often made when this parable is discussed.

Jesus has spread the seed of the coming kingdom. His disciples will continue that message. The message includes the offer of eternal life and rewards in the coming kingdom. But it also includes the fact that even though the first century Jews did not experience the coming of the kingdom, a future generation will.

I suggest that the last verse of this parable points to that fact. The Lord speaks of a coming harvest that is ripe. When that time comes, He will put His sickle into the harvest (Mark 4:29).


There are parallels with this verse and a prophecy in the OT about the coming kingdom and how it relates to the nation of Israel. That prophecy is found in Joel 3:13. There the prophet says, "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe" (NASB). This prophecy is talking about when Christ returns at the Battle of Armageddon. At that time, He will judge the nations attacking Israel. After these events, Jerusalem will be holy, and God will dwell there (Joel 3:17). This is a clear description of the coming kingdom of God and the place Israel will have in that kingdom.

A WORLD CHANGING WORD

In this parable, Jesus is saying that His Word is going to change the world. This change will take

place when the kingdom comes. Even though the first century Jews rejected it, that doesn't change the fact that the kingdom is coming soon for Israel and the world. Jesus is telling His followers that in following Him, we can have a role in the message that He will use to change the world. Through His power, our message makes us world changers.

Often we as believers only think in individualistic ways. Christ wants to expand our vision of things.

How is your spiritual vision? 

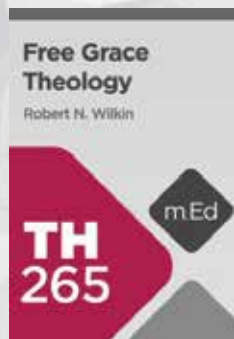


Ken Yates is Editor of The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society and GES's East Coast and International speaker. He is the pastor of Little River Baptist Church in Jenkinsville, SC.

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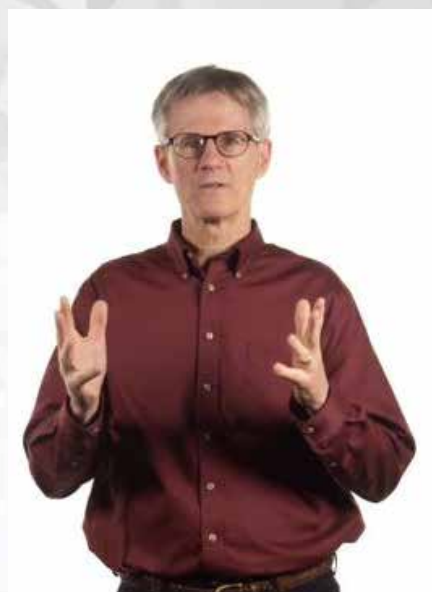
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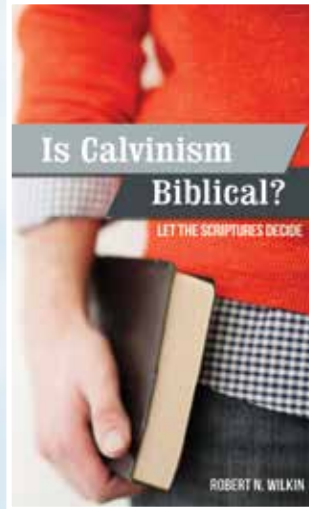


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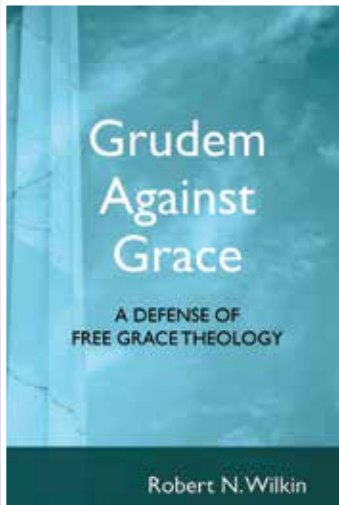


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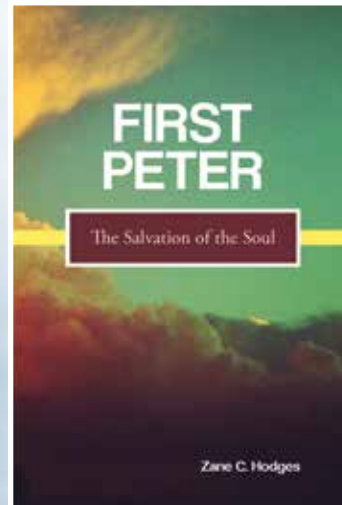


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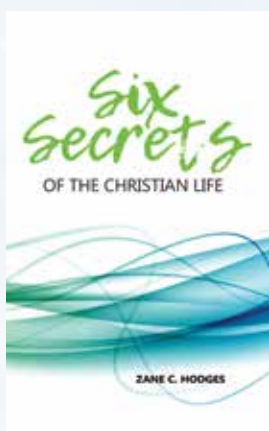
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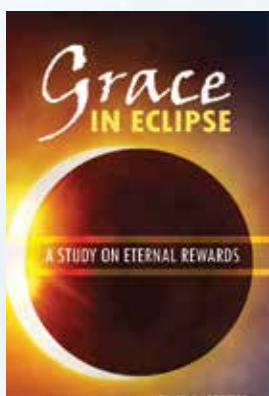
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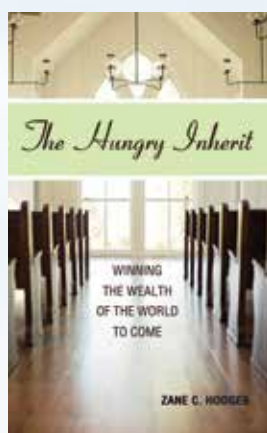
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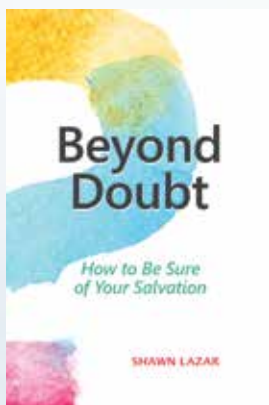
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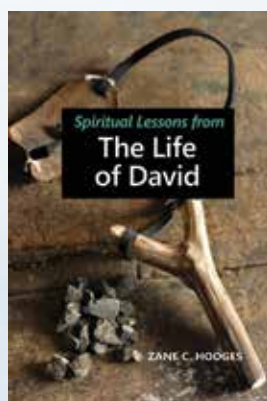
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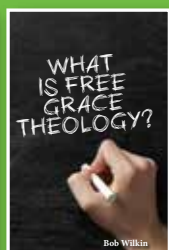
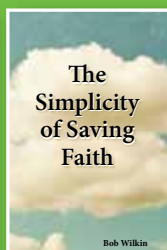
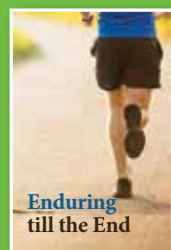
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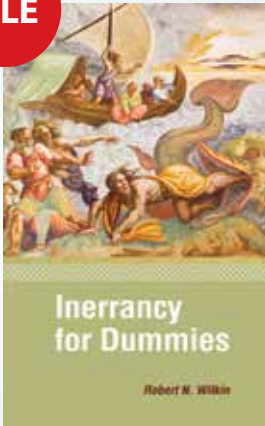


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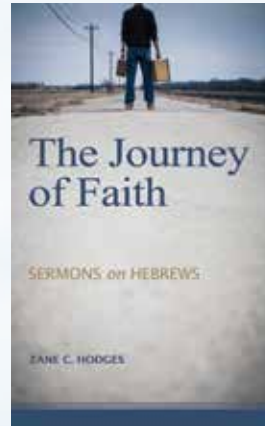


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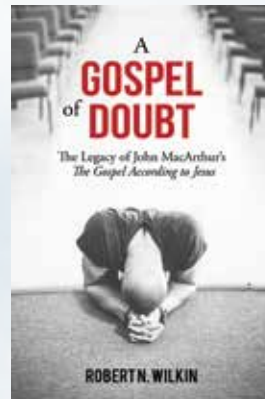


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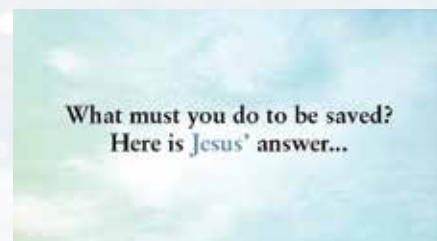


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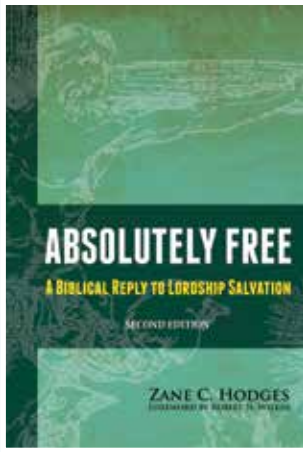
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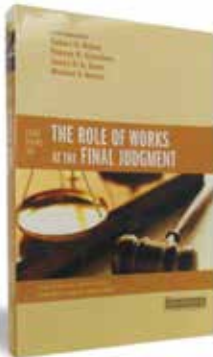
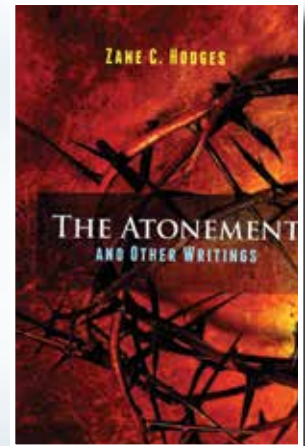
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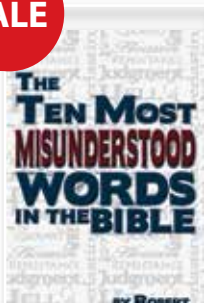
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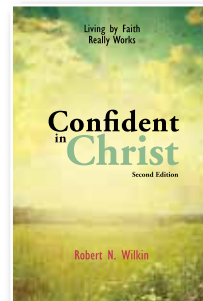
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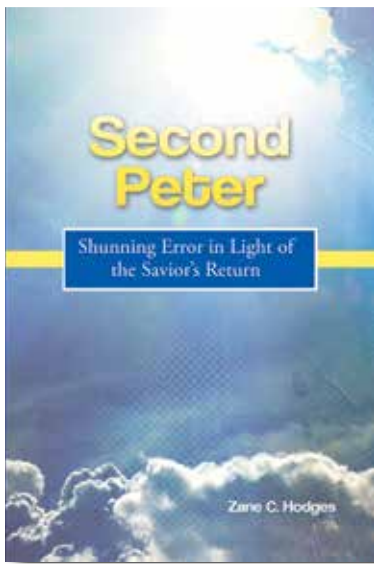
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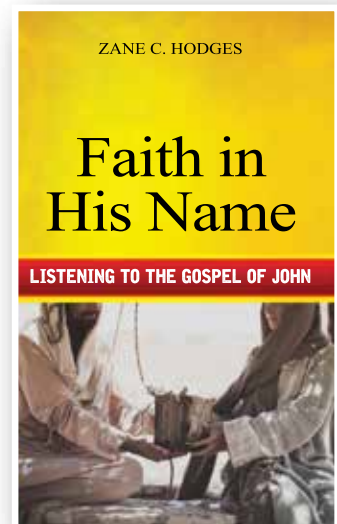
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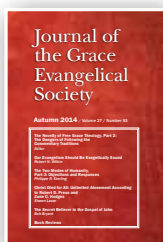
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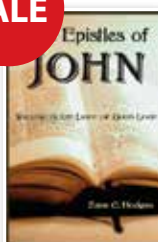


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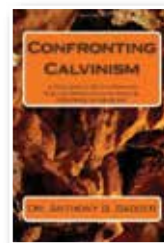


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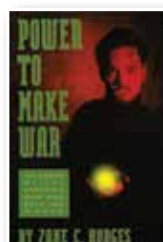


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SUICIDE

BIBLE PEOPLE WHO WANTED TO DIE

By Marcia Hornok

A 46-year-old believer, whose husband died after a debilitating illness, felt like she could not go on. She said, “I don’t know if it was self-pity, if I was seeking negative attention, or if grief made me feel like I would self-destruct. My gut-wrenching sadness at times seemed unpreventable and untreatable. Often the words of the Bible were meaningless to me—I guess I was numb. Sometimes I wished I could end my life, and even planned how to do it. Why didn’t I call someone? Because I didn’t want pity. I wanted to be strong and resilient, and for me, I think, that was pride.”

Several Bible people also become suicidal. What was the result?

REBEKAH: FAMILY CONFLICTS

Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth [Hittites]; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth... what good will my life be to me?...So Isaac sent Jacob away” (Gen 27:46; 28:5).

Rebekah’s depression resulted from hostility between her twin sons and probably her own guilt in causing that. Her plot to deceive her husband into giving the Covenant Blessing to Jacob, resulted in Esau determining to murder Jacob

after Isaac died. (His death seemed imminent at the time.)

Whether Rebekah verbalized her depression to Isaac because she did feel that way or she exaggerated to protect Jacob from Esau is not clear from the text. Either way, Isaac lived 80 more years, but Rebekah died without seeing Jacob again.

SOLOMON: LIFE IS VANITY

God had granted Solomon a “wise and understanding heart,” yet at one point he stated,

Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.... Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:17, 20).

Solomon wrote ten more chapters about life being futile, but came to the correct conclusion in 12:13, “Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”

ELIJAH: PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY EXHAUSTED

Elijah defeated 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, causing Israelites to acknowledge the





Lord as God. However, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were not convinced. They promised to execute Elijah by morning. “But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, ‘It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!’” (1 Kgs 19:4). Note—if he really wanted to die, he could have turned himself in!

When God made him confess how he felt, Elijah said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts;...I alone am left; and they seek to take my life” (1 Kgs 19:10). Elijah felt isolated and ineffective. But God fed him “Angel Food Cake,” let him sleep, corrected his faulty thinking that he was the only one true to God, and sent him back to work with a new companion. By the way, Elijah never did die.

JOB: GOD IS UNFAIR

Job’s sufferings caused him to curse the day he was born and wish to die. “Why did I not die at birth?...Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice

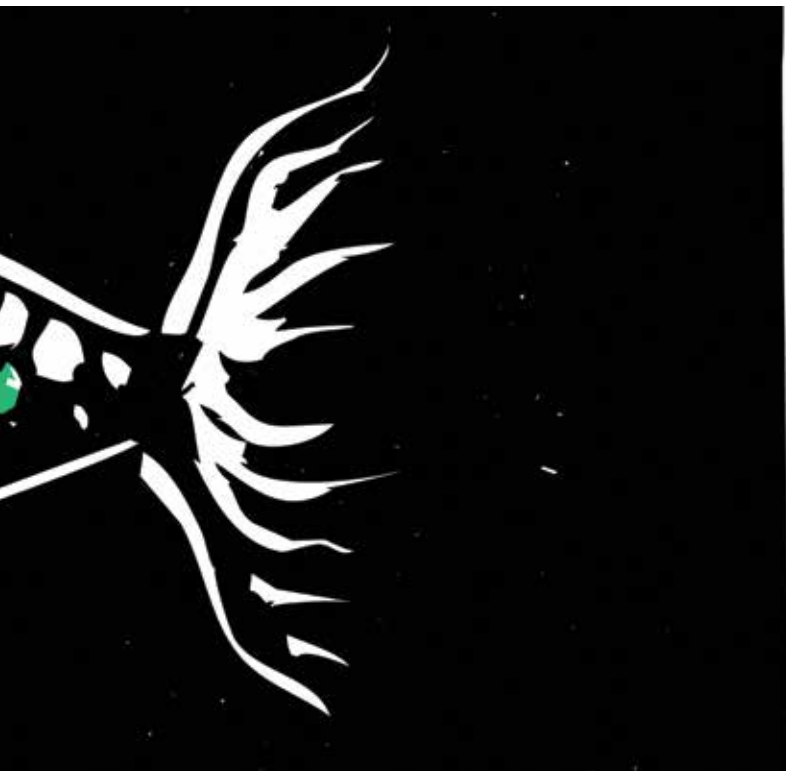
exceedingly and are glad when they can find the grave?” (Job 3:11, 20-22).

Job kept bringing his questions to God, who eventually “answered” him with a series of questions, which Job could not answer. This taught Job that he did not need to know God’s reasons, but to rest in God’s compassion and mercy (Jas 5:11).

JONAH: ANGRY AT GOD

Jonah, God’s rebellious servant, wanted Ninevah destroyed, not evangelized. So God gave Jonah a time-out in a dark, turbulent, slimy, and stinky place. Jonah repented and preached in Ninevah. They repented, and God withheld His judgment—just what Jonah feared! “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the Lord, and said...‘Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!’” (Jonah 4:1, 3).

Jonah’s last recorded words were, “It is right for me to be angry, even to death” (Jonah 4:9). Scripture does not say what happened to Jonah after that. However, if he wrote the book that



bears his name, he understood the truth of God's compassion (Jonah 4:2).

PAUL: OVERWHELMED BY TRIALS

After his conversion, Saul the persecutor of Christians, became Paul the persecuted. In 2 Cor 11:23-28, he listed some of the beatings, imprisonments, and shipwrecks he endured. About his trouble in Asia he said, "We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor 1:8).

But Paul had learned that when he was weak, God's grace was sufficient to give him strength (2 Cor 3:5; 12:9-10). In fact, Paul said that facing death had a distinct benefit: "Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead" (2 Cor 1:9).

WORKABLE SOLUTION: TRUST GOD AND TELL SOMEONE

What do we learn from these Biblical examples? Rebekah tried to solve her own problem, but never saw her favorite son again. Solomon journaled his feelings in the God-inspired book of Ecclesiastes. After Elijah's physical needs for

nourishment and rest were met, he took on a ministry partner. Job accepted God's inscrutability and sovereignty. Jonah may have stayed angry. Paul resolved to keep his eyes on God. Those who fared best entrusted themselves to God and moved forward.

Yes, believers can despair of life and wish to die, but none of these Bible people died when they wanted to or took their own lives. The key may have been that they all verbalized (or wrote about) their feelings, whether to God or to another person.

Instead of ending her life, the 46-year-old widow mentioned above went to a grief support group for six weeks. It helped her adjust to her losses. She eventually learned to be content as a single mother, and 16 years later God gave her another happy marriage.

Anyone can become so depressed or hopeless that they despair of life. But taking one's own life solves nothing and causes overwhelming grief for those who love you. Your situation is not impossible. In time it will change. God will help you as you let Him and others know your feelings and needs. Suicide hotlines are available 24/7 online or at 1-800-273-TALK.

When you experience "the sentence of death" like Paul did, trust in God not yourself. And don't be too proud to open up to others. It will be therapeutic.

Psalms 31:15 says that our times are in God's hands. If God determines when and how we die, we will die on time. ■



Marcia Hornok writes from Salt Lake City, where her husband Ken pastored Midvalley Bible Church for 39 years. They enjoy the blessing of living within walking distance of 10 out of 12 of their grandkids.

All Who Come to Jesus Have Everlasting Life

(John 5:39-40)

By Bob Wilkin

[Chapter 12 from the forthcoming book:
Faith Alone in 100 Verses]

“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 have life” (John 5:39-40).

LAW KEEPING WON'T RESULT IN EVERLASTING LIFE

The expression *searching the Scriptures* is only found twice, here and in Acts 17:11, the famous Berean passage. In Acts 17:11 it is a good thing to search the Scriptures to find the truth. Here it is a bad thing to search the Scriptures merely to seek justification for your work-salvation thinking.

The Jewish leaders believed in salvation by law keeping. They searched the Scriptures so that they might make sure they understood all of the commandments and that they knew which were the most important. You will recall that Jesus was asked what the greatest commandments

were. This was asked so that the listeners could feel better about themselves.

The Jewish religious teachers thought that “in them [the OT Scriptures] you think you have eternal life.” They did not believe the faith-alone message. They believed that faith in the one true God was necessary. But that alone would not save anyone. They believed that faith in God must be wedded with a life of good works. Sounds familiar? Lots of people in Christianity believe that today.

THE OLD TESTAMENT TESTIFIES THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

The words “and these are they which testify of Me” are meant to draw the audience to faith in Christ. They should have been searching the Scriptures, but not to make sure they were doing enough. They should search the Scriptures to see if what Jesus is saying is true (cf. Acts 17:11).

The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Jesus was born there. He was to spend time in Egypt. Jesus was in Egypt while a toddler. Messiah was to be born of a virgin. His was a virgin birth according to the testimony of angels and of his parents. He was to heal the sick. Jesus did that. The Christ was to teach with authority. Jesus did that too.

Though yet future to the time Jesus was speaking, He would soon go the cross and then rise from the dead, both in fulfillment of Scripture.

BEING WILLING TO COME TO JESUS FOR LIFE

Legalists typically are not open to the faith-alone message. I was raised in a sinless-perfection group. I became an extreme legalist. I was closed to the faith-alone message until a few weeks before the start of my senior year in college. A friend from the group came to faith in Christ and said to me, “Bob, is it possible your view of the gospel is wrong?” That shook me up. I suddenly became willing to believe something different than I’d been taught. I was afraid. But I prayed for God to show me the truth and I went with my friend to a Campus Crusade for Christ meeting and a month later I came to faith.


What an indictment for the Lord to say, “But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” Finally, the long-awaited Messiah was in Israel. And most of Israel was unwilling to believe in Him.

The sad result of being unwilling to believe in Jesus is the failure to gain what they wanted, everlasting life: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life.” Though religious, they were not born again. Though they read the Bible, they were not born again. Though they tried hard to obey God, they were not born again.

The expression *coming to Me* in John’s Gospel refers to believing in Him for everlasting life. Compare John 6:35, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

FAITH-ALONE, APART FROM WORKS

The answer is in the Bible to those who are willing to accept it. The million dollar answer is not which are the two greatest commands in the Bible. To gain everlasting life one needs to believe in the Messiah, Jesus. It is that simple. Faith in Jesus, plus nothing.

If you know a legalist, or if you are one, why not pray about this? Ask God to show them/you if the faith-alone message is true. 



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.





Future Salvation in the Book of Hebrews

By Ken Yates

[Chapter 1 of the forthcoming commentary on Hebrews]

CHRIST IS THE KING

The first four verses of Hebrews are often called the prologue. In it, the author introduces the readers to the two offices of Jesus Christ discussed in detail in the book: King and High Priest.

Jesus is both.

This sets the stage for the book. Because of the greatness of Christ, if His people listen to His words, they can expect great rewards. If they disobey Him, they can expect severe negative consequences.

THE PROLOGUE (1:1-4)

1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and

the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

God has revealed Himself to His people. To the Jews, God spoke to the **fathers by the prophets** (v 1). This is a reference to the OT and strongly indicates that the original readers, though now Christians, were Jewish.

To the Jews in the OT, God spoke in **various times** and **various ways**. The words include the idea that God spoke by revealing Himself in parts. That is, the revelation of Himself in the past was in fragments and not complete. He did this in many ways—we can think about how God did this through the prophets. He spoke to them through things like dreams, visions, thunder, a

burning bush, angels, and even a *still small voice* (1 Kgs 19:12).

As wonderful as these revelations were, things have changed. God has now spoken in the **last days** (v 2). This indicates that He has now given His final revelation of Himself. There won't be any more revelation.

Contrary to popular opinion, the last days did not begin in 1948 or 1967. The last days began with Jesus' ascension into heaven. The ministry of the Apostles took place during the last days (cf. Jas 5:9; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18; Rev 22:12, 20).

The reason there won't be any more revelation is that now God has **spoken** to us in **His Son**. This means that God's revelation of Himself is no longer in fragments. It is complete. There will be no more because He has given the perfect revelation. In His Son, God has said His final word.

The OT was given through prophets and angels (Acts 7:53; Heb 2:2). The original readers rightfully held the OT in high esteem. If this is the case for

what was only in fragments, how much more should they hold the words of Jesus Christ in high esteem? As the author will shortly say—and it is obvious—the Son is much greater than the OT prophets and angels.

Here the author introduces another idea that will be important in the book. As mentioned in the introduction, the readers were Jewish Christians who were thinking about abandoning Christianity and going back to Judaism. The author says that the revelation found in Christianity in the NT, as given by Jesus Christ, is much greater than what God has said in the past in the OT. Christianity is far superior to Judaism.

The description of Jesus Christ in the rest of the prologue shows why He is the perfect and final revelation of God. In the OT there was the office of the prophet. Jesus Christ is God's perfect prophet.

First of all, Jesus is the **heir of all things**. The idea behind these words is found in Psalm 2, from which the author of Hebrews will quote in v 5. In this Psalm, the Son is the King. What the Son will inherit are the nations of the earth. This points to a future day when Christ will own and rule the world to come. A seven-year Tribulation will follow the rapture of the church. After the Tribulation, Christ will return and rule upon the earth for one thousand years. Afterward, He will create a new heaven and earth and will rule forever.

It is only right that He would be the King of the world to come and that this kingdom would belong to Him. After all, He **made the worlds**. The word for *worlds* is literally “ages.” This could refer to the fact that Christ made all the worlds—all the planets, the earth, the stars, etc. Or it could refer to both the seen and unseen worlds, including the spiritual world. If the Jews saw angels as being very important, they are reminded here that Christ created them, since they are a part of the spiritual world.

The idea that Christ created the *ages* could also signify that He is the One who is carrying all of history—all the ages of time—to their conclusion. He will bring in His kingdom, over which He will rule. His word will bring all this about.

Whatever the meaning of the word “worlds” is, one thing is clear—Christ created all things. One day He will inherit all that He made. It will belong to Him.

The greatness of Jesus Christ is also seen in His description in v 3. He is the **brightness of His glory**. The glory of God shines forth in Jesus Christ. The idea of glory probably relates to God's power. The power of God was seen in Jesus. We saw this in the miracles He performed, including raising the dead. It was also seen on the Mount of Transfiguration where the disciples observed His glory.

Jesus is also the **express image of His person**. The idea in the Greek is that Jesus is the exact representation of God. If we

want to know what God is like in essence and character, we only have to look at the Son. Everything that God is, Jesus is. Jesus specifically taught that the one who sees Him had seen the Father (John 14:9).

This is why Jesus is the perfect and final revelation of God. He *is* God. Many have commented that this description of Jesus Christ is one of the clearest statements in the Bible that Jesus Christ is God. There could be no better revelation. The prophets and angels of the OT could not even hope to be on par with Him.

The power of Christ's words is also seen in that He upholds **all things by the word of His power**. The whole universe is held together by what He says. He is bringing all of history to its goal—His kingdom. When One like that speaks, He should be obeyed! To abandon His teaching and publicly renounce Him to return to Judaism would be the height of foolishness.

But Jesus is even more than the King who will inherit everything. The author of Hebrews introduces the idea of the other office that Jesus holds—that of High Priest. He states that **He had by Himself purged our sins**. Associated with this idea is the fact that Jesus **sat down at the right hand** of God. The author of Hebrews will spend a great deal of time discussing in chaps. 5–10 that Jesus is our High Priest. Our High Priest sacrificed Himself for His people. This sacrifice paid for the sins of His people once for all.

Also, this sacrifice was perfect. It was so complete there is no need for any more sacrifices. That is why He has “sat down.” His work is finished. There is no more that needs to be done for the sins of His people.

The fact that He is at the right hand of God shows that He occupies the most exalted position in the universe. He has supreme authority. Jesus said that He would occupy that position (Luke 22:69; Matt 22:43-44). It anticipates the authority He will have forever.

The amazing thing is that He had to die to bring this about. The One Who is described in the prologue, the One Who is the Creator and the all-powerful King of the world to come, did that for His people.

This One is **so much better than the angels**, and He has a **more excellent name** than they do. No angel is seated at the right hand of God. No angel has made purification for the sins of God’s people. No angel has His name.

The **name** that Christ has inherited is **Son**. The author will discuss that name in vv 5-14. As will be seen, this name means He will be the King of the eternal kingdom to come. That is not true of any angel.

The phrase **much better** is a favorite in the Book of Hebrews. It is used thirteen times in the book. The basic argument is that Christianity is much better than Judaism. Judaism, including sects of Judaism like the one found at Qumran, placed a great deal of importance on the angels. But

here the author already indicates how much greater Christianity is than Judaism, and Christ is than the angels. He is God. As such, His sacrifice is greater than any OT sacrifice. He is greater than any king or high priest found in Judaism. He is greater than any revelation found in Judaism. Listen to Him!

In the following verses, the author of Hebrews expounds on the **name** Jesus Christ has inherited—the Son. This title will drive the discussion throughout the first chapters of the book.

JESUS CHRIST, THE SON, IS GREATER THAN THE ANGELS (1:5-14)

For to which of the angels did He ever say:

*“You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You”?*
And again:

*“I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son”?*

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

“Let all the angels of God worship Him.”

And of the angels He says:

*“Who makes His angels spirits
And His ministers a flame of fire.”*

But to the Son He says:

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;

A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.

You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;

Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You

With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

And:

*“You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.*

They will perish, but You remain;

And they will all grow old like a garment;

Like a cloak You will fold them up,

And they will be changed.

But You are the same,

And Your years will not fail.”

But to which of the angels has He ever said:

*“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”?*

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?(Heb 1:5-14)

To make his case that Jesus is greater than the angels, the author appeals to the OT. This would make sense if he were writing to people who had high regard for those Scriptures. The revelation found in the writings of Judaism makes a case for the supremacy of God’s Son.

THE SON IS KING (PSALM 2 AND 2 SAMUEL 7)

In the prologue, the author stated that Jesus has a name greater than any angel. That name is here identified. In v 5 it is given. Jesus is the **Son**. But it is also obvious here that Jesus is compared to the angels. God has never called an angel by that name.

The prologue has just stated that Jesus is God. Since God is eternal, Jesus has always been God. However, we see here that Jesus inherited the name of *Son* in a special sense at a specific

point in time. This special sense is understood by the way the author of Hebrews quotes from the OT. He uses two passages. One is from Psalm 2. The other is from 2 Sam 7:14.

First, he quotes from Psalm 2 which is an example of an “Enthronement Psalm.” In these Psalms, a man in the OT becomes King of Israel. On the day he becomes king of the nation, he inherits the title of “son.” As the King of Israel, He becomes the son of God upon earth.

The title **Son**, then, carries with it the idea of King. The idea of the King being the Son of God on earth was part of the promise that God gave to David in 2 Sam 7:14, which the author of Hebrews quotes in the second part of v 5. The descendants of David who sat on the throne of the nation would be the “sons” of God. They were the representatives of God. God said these kings would be His sons and He would be their **Father**.

Of course, these earthly kings of Israel only foreshadowed the real King who was to come. They pointed to Him. Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 2, just as He is the ultimate fulfillment of the promise God gave to David in 2 Samuel.

But what is the meaning of the phrase from Psalm 2, “**today I have begotten you**”? It is easy to see how this applies to the kings in the OT. On the day they were crowned king, they became a son of God in a special way. But if Jesus was always God and is eternal, how

does it relate to Him? How can it be said that He was **begotten** on a certain day?

It seems highly likely that what the author has in mind is the day that Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father (1:3). On that day He had done everything necessary to be the King of the world to come. He had purged His people’s sins. He had done all that was needed to ensure that men and women would reign with Him in His coming kingdom, an idea that will be discussed in detail in chap. 2. Because of His completed work, Christ entered a new relationship with His Father and His people. On the day of His exaltation to the right hand of His Father, all the prerogatives of being King were His. He was declared the Son of God in this special sense at that time. This is the same point made in Rom 1:4 in which Paul states that Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

In the rest of the OT quotes that follow in this chapter, the author will continue to discuss the idea that Jesus is the King. A major point in this section is that no angel will rule the world to come. Jesus, since He is the King, will.

But in these quotes from the OT, there is also the idea that the King will defeat His enemies. This idea is present in Psalm 2 which the author uses here in v 5 (see Ps 2:1-3, 9-12). This is important because the original readers of Hebrews

were being persecuted by the enemies of the King.

JESUS IS THE FIRSTBORN SON (PSALM 97)

In v 6 the author says that God will bring His **firstborn son into the world**. This most likely refers to the time when Christ returns to rule over the world to come (see 2:5). In the OT the firstborn son had authority over all other sons. Christ will have that authority. Christ will inherit all things on that day (1:2).

In the second half of this verse, he quotes from Psalm 97. This Psalm also speaks of the time the Messiah sets up His kingdom, that is when Jesus returns (see Ps 97:1-6). As with Psalm 2, Psalm 97 also states that when Christ returns, He will defeat all His enemies (Ps 97:3, 10-11).

The main point the author makes here, however, is that the Son, Jesus Christ, will be the King. The angels will not be kings. In fact, the angels will **worship Him!** If the readers were thinking about turning away from Christ and going back to a religion that emphasized the role of angels in the kingdom of God, they might want to think again! In the following verses, the author compares the role of Jesus and the role of angels in that kingdom.

THE ROLE OF ANGELS (PSALM 104)

Here in v 7 the author quotes from Psalm 104 in which we see that God’s **angels are spirits**.

The word for *spirit* can also be translated “wind.” That may be preferable here. The reason this is the case is that angels are also called a **flame of fire**.

The point here is that angels are a part of God’s creation, just as wind and fire are. Jesus Christ is God, and therefore He created everything, including angels. That is why they worship Him.

As part of creation, they can be changed. In the following verses, we will see that Jesus the Son is not part of creation. He does not change.

Another aspect here is that God can change the works of His hands to do His will. God **makes** the angels do His bidding.

Taking all these things together, we see that angels will serve the King. The King creates them. They, like all of creation, can be changed. The King, who is the Son, is infinitely greater.

THE SON IS GOD AND HAS COMPANIONS (PSALM 45)

In comparing the role of Jesus Christ to the angels in the world to come, the author turns to Psalm 45 here in vv 8-9.

As with Psalms 2 and 97, this Psalm also says that the King will defeat all His enemies (Ps 45:3-5). Since all of His enemies will be defeated, His **throne** will be established **forever and ever**. He will have no opposition.

In this Psalm Jesus the Messiah is specifically called **God**. He is the One Who created the angels. The Son in Psalm 2, the Son of the promise made to

David in 2 Samuel 7, and the King of Psalm 45 all point to the same Person. As King, since He is the eternal God, He will reign forever.

His **kingdom** will be one of **righteousness**. The Son is worthy to rule that kingdom because He **loved righteousness and hated lawlessness**.

It needs to be noted that unlike Psalm 2, Psalm 45 is not an Enthronement Psalm. It does not speak about when the King is crowned. Instead, it is a marriage Psalm. It talks about the wedding of the King. At that wedding, in particular, at the wedding feast, the King is **anointed** with the **oil of gladness**.

The feast will be a time of gladness. The King will be glad because as a righteous King, He has inherited a righteous kingdom. But the Psalm states that the King will not be alone in this celebration. Others will share in His joy.

Those who share this joy with the King are called **companions**. The picture here is the King who is having a feast. There are those who are at the head table with Him. The Greek word for *companion* (*metachoi*) signifies a close friend. Perhaps an equivalent in our time would be the President’s cabinet. Those in his cabinet are close to the President. (So, too, are governors, senators, congressmen, and even mayors.)

An example of the meaning of this word is seen in Luke 5:7. Peter is fishing with his business “partners.” This is the same word as **companions** used here

in Hebrews. These were his close friends, those with whom he spent his time.

This is an important concept in the Book of Hebrews. When the King returns and sets up His kingdom, He will be particularly close to His **companions**, His close friends.

And who will these close friends be? It will be those who are like Him—those who loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. It will be those who have been faithful to Him.

The author will later use the same word in Heb 3:14 in which He says that believers will be the **companions** of Christ, “*if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end*” (emphasis added).

One can easily see how this applies to the first readers. They were thinking of renouncing Christ and going back to Judaism. If they did that and did not hold steadfast to the end, they would not be the **companions** or partners of the King when He returned. They would be *in* the kingdom, but they would not be in those *positions of honor*.

Once again we can see how this applies to the President in our day. He has those who are particularly close to him. There are many people who are citizens of the United States and live in this country who are not his “companions.” Only those who have faithfully served the President fit this description.

In the Book of Hebrews, this is the first indication of rewards. Jesus will **inherit all things** (1:2). But He will share His

inheritance with His *partners*—those who have been faithful to Him. They will be great in His kingdom. They will have an inheritance in that kingdom. But unfaithfulness will result in the loss of that reward.

THE SON NEVER CHANGES (PSALM 102)

In vv 10-12, the author quotes from Ps 102:25-27. Like the previous Psalms quoted in this section, Psalm 102 also mentions the enemies of the King (Ps 102:8). But the major point here is that the King will never change. Psalm 45 said that His throne will be forever. If He is to rule forever, He must be eternal and not subject to change.

It is interesting that God is speaking in this Psalm. He is speaking about the Son, and He calls the Son **Lord**. Whom would God call Lord? This is another statement that Jesus is God. The **earth and the heavens are the work** of Jesus.

The Psalm goes on to say that the present creation **will perish** (cf. Matt 5:18; 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; 2 Pet 3:10-12; Rev 20:1-3). But Christ will **remain**. The day will come when Christ will roll up the universe like an old coat, that is, **like a garment** that no longer has a use. It will be replaced by another one. This will happen after Jesus rules for one thousand years when He creates a new heaven and earth.

The universe itself **will be changed**, but Christ will remain **the same**. The point is that Christ's kingdom will survive

even the universe. His kingdom will include the millennial kingdom and then will go on into the eternal state.

Of course, this had tremendous application to the original readers. Their present world was persecuting them. They were tempted to give up. The author is telling them that the troubles of this present world are temporary because the present world itself is temporary. They should keep their eyes on the coming eternal kingdom of Christ.

THE SON WILL DEFEAT HIS ENEMIES (PSALM 110)

In vv 13-14, the author concludes his OT quotes which compare Jesus with the angels. In all the Psalms quoted, it was implied that the King would defeat all of His **enemies**.

In v 13, the author quotes from Psalm 110. The day will come when all the **enemies** of the King are placed under His feet—they will become His **footstool**. If God's people, like the original readers, were being oppressed by the enemies of the King, they should find comfort in knowing that one day their King will defeat their persecutors.

Psalm 110 is crucial to the Book of Hebrews. It was alluded to in 1:3, is quoted here, and will be quoted again in 5:6. The Jews believed that the Psalm predicted the coming Messiah. Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians. The author is saying that Jesus is the fulfillment of this Psalm.

The main point here is that when Jesus comes and defeats His enemies, His people will share in that victory. Angels will not, as some Jews felt, rule the world to come. Instead, angels are simply those who **minister to those who will inherit salvation**.

This raises a couple of questions. First, what is the **salvation** here? And second, who are those who **will inherit** that salvation?

The **salvation** here must be understood in this context. In all these Psalms quoted in 1:5-14, **salvation** means *deliverance from the enemies of the people of God*. The King will deliver His people. His people will share in the benefits of that victory.

The salvation here is not salvation from hell. Notice that the author talks about a salvation in the *future*—those who *will* inherit salvation (contra present salvation, John 3:16-17; Eph 2:8-9). Throughout the book, as we will see, the author understands that his readers are believers. A believer already has eternal life and salvation from hell. Jesus made this clear in verses like John 5:24. To the woman at the well, Jesus said that if she believed in Him, she would have eternal life within her, and she would retain it forever (John 4:10-14). Here, in this verse, the author of Hebrews is talking about something the readers *do not yet have*. He cannot be talking about salvation from eternal condemnation because the

believer already has that (John 3:18, 36; 5:24).

The word *salvation* has the basic meaning of “deliverance.” The salvation here refers to the deliverance Jesus will bring His people when He returns—in the future. His people will share in His victory when He defeats His enemies.

Christ’s inheritance is to rule the world to come (1:2). It will belong to Him. But He will share that inheritance with His **companions**. They will rule with Him. Not all believers will rule with Christ. While all believers will experience salvation from hell, not all believers will rule with Christ.

The author of Hebrews is telling his readers to hold on. The King is coming. He will deliver you—save you—from all your enemies. In that victory, He will reward those who have been faithful to Him. We might say they will share in the spoils of His victory. What a great *salvation* that will be!

Even though many believe that all Christians will be equal in the kingdom, the NT does not teach that. In His parables, the Lord taught that some believers will rule over ten cities, some five cities, and some will not rule over any. Paul taught that only those believers who are faithful to the Lord and suffer with Him will reign with Him (Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:11-13). These are the “companions” of the Lord. They are faithful to the Lord in the midst of persecution by His enemies. Christ promises to “save” them from that persecution. They

are to hold firm to the end. They are the ones that wait for the righteous kingdom He will bring, in spite of the difficulties the enemies of the King throw at them.

All believers are offered this “salvation,” but not all will obtain it. Those that obtain it are those that will experience deliverance from their troubles when the King returns. That is the point of the Book of Hebrews. Only those who remain faithful to the King will share in His rule. The warning passages in the book are directed toward those believers who are contemplating being unfaithful to Him and throwing all that away.

Angels serve those who are called to reign with Christ. Angels will not rule the world to come; faithful men and women will. Because men and women will rule the world to come, the Son had to become one of them. That is the subject of the second chapter of Hebrews.

APPLICATION

It may be difficult for the modern-day reader to put himself in the shoes of the original readers of Hebrews. Many of us have not experienced persecution for our faith. We have never been faced with the temptation to reject Christianity for our safety.

However, the message here in chap. 1 is timeless. In Christ, we see the coming eternal King. When we believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life, we receive it as a free gift. However, Christ

offers His people even more. He calls every believer to be one of His intimate companions in His kingdom. Christ will own the kingdom over which He rules, and He wants to give His followers a share in that inheritance. There is a difference between being in a place and inheriting that place. There is a difference between being in the kingdom and being great in the kingdom.

Imagine if, when the King returns, He made you a partner with Him in ruling His kingdom. Imagine being in the cabinet of the King. Being faithful to Him in this life is difficult, whatever age in which we live. But He promises to come and deliver us from these things and reward faithfulness towards Him. Not all believers will receive this “salvation” from Him. All believers will be in the kingdom, but as the Book of Hebrews will spell out, including in the warning passages, some believers will experience the loss of eternal rewards. ■



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