

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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CAN WE BE SURE THAT WE'LL PERSEVERE?



PLUS IS LORDSHIP SALVATION A SAVING MESSAGE? / RESCUED / EATING AT THE KING'S TABLE /
SPIRITUAL VIBRANCY / OWNING OUR THEOLOGY / IS ANYONE UNREACHABLE? / AND MORE!

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FROM THE EDITOR

By the time you get this issue, you'll still have time to attend the National Conference. It will be on May 20-23rd at the Hope Center in Plano, TX.

You should come.

I don't say that because it's a money maker for us. Not at all! (Oh man, not at all.) First timers are free. And if you've been before, and you'd like to go again but can't afford it, I tell you what—when you register online select the “student/scholarship” option and you'll get in for free.

This isn't about money. It's about strengthening hanging hands and feeble knees (Heb 12:12).

That's what the National Conference does for me.

From an outsider's perspective, all the work the GES team (esp. Bethany and Mark) puts into the conference just to host two hundred people or so may not seem worth it.

But it is to us.

We put on the National Conference because it is a fruitful time of encouragement, good Bible teaching, and creative thinking.

Every year I make new friends. Every year I deepen old friendships. Every year I feel inspired and encouraged to continue this work preaching God's free grace.

Bible conferences might seem like a thing of the past. But Bible conferences are about developing human relationships, and those never go out of fashion. We need each other. Consider this a reminder that God built you for fellowship. In a world full of merciless legalism, law, and works salvation, you need to hear someone else speak a word of grace to you. You need to be in a place where God's free gift of salvation is unashamedly celebrated for what it is—amazing grace.

You probably need the Conference. Think about it. Every year, people take vacations in tropical destinations to charge their batteries so




Meet Me at the Conference


Shawn Lazar, **EDITOR**

they can face the drudgery of work back home. I think the National Conference serves the same role: to renew your spiritual batteries before you have to go back home where you might be one of the few advocates for the promise of life in a culture starved for grace.

You are warmly invited.

I hope to see you there. 





Is Lordship Salvation a Saving Message?

BY BOB WILKIN

While working on my autobiography, I wrote about the early years of GES. During that time some of my board members believed that Lordship Salvation is a saving message. Don't misunderstand me. They were against Lordship Salvation. They felt it was false teaching. However, they believed that Lordship Salvation was a problem for sanctification, not for justification.

Since that time, I've met many in Free Grace circles who agree. There are many Free Grace people who call Lordship Salvation preachers our brothers in Christ and who regard their evangelistic message as a saving message.

GES had a big falling out at our 2006 annual conference, our biggest ever. Zane Hodges and Bob Bryant said in plenary messages that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. Actually, Zane gave

a similar message back in 1997 at our annual conference. And he had written about it many times. But in 2006, the issue sparked a fire.

In a rap session on Wednesday afternoon, most of the 360 conferees were in a big meeting room interacting. The discussion was supposed to be about everything taught thus far in the conference. But it became all about whether a person is not born again until he knows that the salvation he has received from the Lord is irrevocable. I decided to ask for a show of hands to the question, "How many were sure you were secure forever when you believed in Christ?" About half raised their hands. "How many were *not* sure you were secure forever when you believed in Christ?" Again, about half raised their hands.

I remember talking with Zane Hodges about this. Why is it that for twenty years we'd all been

united, and now suddenly we were divided? His answer was very insightful, in my opinion. He said, “At the start we were united around what we disagreed with, Lordship Salvation. Now we are divided about what we agree with.”

I think that most of the people who said they were born again before they believed their salvation was secure would say that Lordship Salvation is a saving message. (As an aside, they all indicated that they had come to believe that they are secure. They just thought that gaining that belief was a nice sanctification bonus, not a condition for the new birth. I’d say they all were born again when they believed that their salvation was irrevocable, not when they prayed some prayer, walked an aisle, gained a love for God’s Word, stopped cussing, felt a feeling, or even believed that Jesus is God and that He died for our sins and rose again. I think they have a flawed understanding of when they came to faith.) Indeed, many if not most of them would say that they were born again under a Lordship Salvation message.

How can this be if Lordship Salvation proclaims a faith-plus-works message? Some (many?) in Free Grace circles believe the following is true: Anyone who believes that Jesus is God and that He died on the cross for our sins and rose bodily from the dead on the third day is born again.

Well, Lordship Salvation people believe that. So do Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, and so forth. Most who call themselves Christians believe that.

Now there are plenty of Free Grace people who say that it is not enough to believe in the deity of Christ and His substitutionary death and resurrection. One must believe in Him for everlasting life (John 3:16; 5:24; 1 Tim 1:16). If a person believes in Jesus’ deity, death, and resurrection and yet believes in Lordship Salvation or works salvation, he is not yet born again.


However, there are many more who call themselves Free Grace who think that Lordship Salvation is a saving message.

What do you think? Is a person born again if he thinks that faith in Christ is not enough to be born again? If a person believes you must also

surrender to Christ, commit to Him, turn from all your sins, and persevere in following Him until death, is he believing the saving message?

Remember Paul’s words in Gal 1:6-9 about those Judaizers who were proclaiming in the churches of Galatia what he calls a *false gospel*. Lordship Salvation is essentially the same issue that got the Apostle Paul fired up! The Judaizers certainly preached the deity, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If they had not, they never would have received a hearing in the church of Galatia. But they preached that a man had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to make it into the kingdom (Gal 5:4; cf. Acts 15:1). So, too, Lordship Salvation people today say that you must submit to Christ, turn from your sins, commit yourself to lifelong obedience, and then if you follow through and do persevere to the end, you will gain kingdom access. While that is not exactly the same message, it is cut of the same cloth.

Lest anyone misunderstand me, before I close I will say a word about my understanding of the spiritual condition of Lordship Salvation people. I believe that some of them are born again and some of them are not. The born-again ones are those who at some time in the past believed the faith-alone-in-Christ-alone message. Then they were later misled. For example, I believe John MacArthur falls in that category. The ones not born again are those who have never in their lives believed in Christ alone for everlasting life.

Is Lordship Salvation a saving message? No. It is not. That is why it is so important that we share far and wide the promise of life. 



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 The Power of Repentance (available soon).

Owning Our Theology

By Ken Yates

In 1 John 3:15, John writes, “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Those of us in the Free Grace movement maintain that this verse deals with fellowship with the Lord. A believer can indeed hate his brother. If he does, he is out of fellowship.

However, there is a different, much more popular, way of understanding this verse. That theology says that if a person claims to be a believer but hates his brother, he is a liar. That person cannot be a believer. A born again Christian may hate another believer for a short period of time but will repent of that sin if he is really saved.

RACISM AT SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

I am an alumnus of an Evangelical seminary that promotes such a theology—Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Southern Seminary recently experienced a moment when its theology confronted reality. In the past, this institution had a long history of supporting slavery.

In an open letter, the current president of the seminary, Dr. Albert Mohler, acknowledged that racist history. He confessed the past sins of the school. He said that this school “expressly defended and even praised [slavery] as divinely ordained.” The president went on to say that all the founders of the school owned slaves and taught the inferiority of the black race.



SHUTTERSTOCK

They passed this legacy down, and for many decades the school advocated for white rule and white supremacy and called for the segregation of their institution and society at large.

Black Christians could not come to their school. Churches were segregated. Blacks were inferior. These teachings were promoted by the men who founded Southern Seminary.

The president said that these men also taught that “repentance” is an “evangelical grace” and “is essential to the gospel.” However, the founders never repented of their hatred towards black believers. In fact, they passed their legacy of hate on to the next generation.

Mohler then admitted that this leads to a hard question. The answer to that question is “not easy.” How could the school’s founders, those who had passionately defended Biblical truth and the gospel of Jesus Christ, also own slaves because of their racist ideology? After all, these men have buildings on campus named after them. For over 150 years they have been called great men of God by the institution. Their portraits hang in places of honor at the school. Their writings have been studied by generations of Evangelical leaders in order to gain a greater understanding of the Scriptures.

While Mohler’s honesty is to be commended, there is even a more basic question. These men hated an entire race of people. At least some of these people were believers in Jesus Christ. They destroyed the unity of churches. They wreaked



havoc in families. They denied black preachers a chance to study theology in their seminary. They even taught the righteousness of such actions and supported their hateful views with the Bible. In addition, they never took advantage of the “evangelical grace of repentance.”

This was not a hate that lasted for a little while. It lasted their whole lives and even was passed down to the men they discipled.

So, let’s ask the more basic question. According to Southern’s own theology, were these men born again Christians? How about all those who followed in their footsteps, who lived the same way, for over 100 years? This would include the parents and grandparents of many present day teachers at the seminary.

Obviously, I don’t know. If they had ever believed in the free gift of eternal life by faith apart from works, then they were born again. This is true regardless of their views on slavery and hatred towards others, including other believers.

My Free Grace Theology teaches that believers may unfortunately hate other believers. They can do it for a lifetime and even pass that hatred on to others. There will be many believers in the kingdom who lived like that. I would not be surprised at all to see these men in

the kingdom. Eternal life is a free gift that can never be lost, regardless of how a believer lives. That is my theology, and I gladly own it.

But what about the popular theology that says 1 John 3:15 does not allow that? This theology says that hateful people, like the founders of Southern Seminary, are not believers at all. That leads to a number of questions. Should unbelievers be our theological heroes? Should Christian institutions honor them? Should we use the theological writings of unbelievers to instruct Christian pastors today? I would think that the answer to these questions would all be “no.” That answer would be consistent with such a theology. If that is their theology, they need to own it as well.[GFI](#)



Ken Yates is Editor of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society and GES’s East Coast and International speaker. He has written a new book, Hebrews: Partners with Christ (available June 2019).

The Benefits of the Cross: Actual or Potential?

By Shawn Lazar

I was talking to a friend about the different views of the atonement in Free Grace circles. We came around to the issue of *potentiality* versus *actuality*. What did the cross actually accomplish? What did it potentially accomplish?

I came up with an illustration for the differences of opinion about the atonement that exist in Evangelical circles, especially between Calvinist, Arminian, and Free Grace views.

SNAKES IN A MALL

Imagine if poisonous snakes escaped from a pet store and bit everyone at the mall. Thankfully, there is a vaccine. It took years of research and millions of dollars, but a vaccine was developed. But who in the mall would get it?

In the Calvinist view, only the elect get the vaccine. Theoretically, there's enough for everyone, but only the elect actually get it.

In the Arminian view, the vaccine is available to all, but only believers actually get it.

In my Free Grace view...the story is a little more complicated.



MORE THAN ONE VACCINE

In my Free Grace view, I have to change the scenario a little.

It turns out, to be cured, you need more than one vaccine.

In fact, you need three separate vaccines.

Who gets them?

It depends.

The first vaccine is given to everyone in the mall, whether he wants it or not.

The second vaccine is only given to people who meet a condition.

And the third vaccine is only given to people who have received the first two and who must also meet two more conditions.

Make sense so far?

Let me translate that into theological terms.

DIFFERENT BENEFITS, FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE, UNDER DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

Everyone agrees we're all sinners (Rom 3:23) and that if something isn't done, we'll be



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lost forever. So Jesus died on the cross for sin. But what did the cross achieve? And who gets the benefits?

Calvinists say there is one big benefit of the cross—i.e., salvation—and only the elect get it.

Arminians say there is one big benefit of the cross—i.e., salvation—and while it is potentially available to everyone in the world, only believers actually get it.

The Free Grace view I defend differs from both.

It begins by stating *there is more than one benefit of the cross*. There are different benefits. And crucially, the different benefits are given to different people under different conditions.

Where is that in the Bible? Consider—

First, there is the benefit of the removal of *judicial condemnation*. Jesus took away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He did that for everyone (i.e., the world), not just for some. He did it actually, not potentially. It is a done deal. No one in the world will ever be judicially condemned for sin. Jesus took it away.

Second, there is the benefit of *everlasting life*. That benefit is only given to believers (John 3:16-18). It is potentially available to all, but only believers get it when they believe.

Third, there is the benefit of *ongoing fellowship forgiveness*. That is potentially available to all *believers*, but only those believers who walk

in the light and confess their sins will receive that benefit (1 John 1:7-9).

So those are three different benefits, given to different people, under different conditions. There are other benefits of the cross, but those are three important examples.

Do you see how this Free Grace view differs from what we've inherited from the Reformation?

Do you see how it forces you to go back to the Bible and read it a little more carefully?

I think it is time for the Free Grace movement to rethink the Biblical evidence about the cross's benefits. We need to ask some basic questions, such as: How many benefits are there? To whom are they offered? Are there different conditions? Are the benefits conditional or unconditional? Permanent or temporary? For this life or the next?

Wouldn't you benefit from a study of the cross's benefits? 



Shawn Lazar is Editor of Grace in Focus and co-host of Grace in Focus Radio, available on iTunes and Stitcher.

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CAN WE BE SURE THAT WE'LL PERSEVERE?

BY BOB WILKIN



Recently I ran across a quote by a Calvinist. He said that he was sure he was born again and eternally secure “without a doubt.” He went on to say that he was sure he would persevere, going so far as to say that even if he tried to walk in rebellion against Christ, he would be unable to do so because God guarantees to keep him walking with Christ.

Is that correct? Can we be sure that we will persevere in faith and good works?

The Bible makes it clear that we *cannot* be sure we will persevere. The Apostle Paul was not sure he would (1 Cor 9:27). If he couldn’t be sure, then we can’t be either.

There are scores of warnings in the NT against falling away (see, for example, Matt 24:45-51; 25:1-13; 14-30; Luke 19:16-26; 2 Tim 2:12; 4:10; 2 Pet 3:17; 1 John 2:28; 4:17-19; Rev 2:25-26; 3:11). These are warning against something that could happen to us.

I have debated multiple Calvinists (and one Arminian) who have said that they were not sure they would persevere.


I have only met one person who told me he was sure he would persevere—an Arminian Charismatic, one who believed that everlasting life could be lost. But he told me that God told him personally he would not fall away. God gave him a special promise that he would persevere and keep his salvation.

I remember Dr. James Dobson, an Arminian, talking about his Arminian father who nearly died during a medical emergency. He ended up living another year or so. But Dr. Dobson reported on the radio that God appeared to his father while he was recovering and told him that he would definitely persevere. Dr. Dobson pointed out how

comforting it was for his father to know he was secure in his salvation.

I agree, it is comforting to know that we are secure in Christ and cannot lose our salvation. But the good news is that we do not need any other special revelation than that which we already have in the Bible in order to know that we are secure in our salvation. Jesus promised, “He who lives and believes in Me will never die” (John 11:26). I believe in Him. I know I will never die spiritually. Whether I persevere or not, I am saved once and for all. So are you if you believe His promise of life.

Perseverance is commanded in the Bible. But it is not guaranteed. Christians can fail to persevere. However, even if we do fail to persevere, we remain eternally secure (John 11:26; 2 Tim 2:12). What we lose if we do not persevere is God’s blessings in this life and the eternal rewards that we could have received at the Judgment Seat of Christ, including especially His approval and the right to rule with Him in the life to come.

So, can we be sure that we will persevere? No. We can’t. But we can be sure that we have everlasting life that can never be lost. And that assurance can produce in us such a profound sense of gratitude that our walk with Christ will continue as long as we retain our gratitude and our love for our Savior, Lord, and Judge. 

Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He perseveres year after year at the Huntsman World Senior Games in Saint George, UT.

Top 5 Killers of Spiritual Vibrancy

By Summer Stevens

Walking closely with God brings joy, peace, comfort and fulfillment. But sometimes our journey with Jesus feels hollow and devoid of life. We may find ourselves missing the closeness and spiritual intimacy that we once enjoyed, but unsure how we lost it or how to get it back. Here are the top 5 killers of a spiritually vibrant life and how to regain sweet fellowship with God.

SIN

Persistent, unrepentant sin in our lives is one of the biggest killers to enjoying spiritual intimacy with God. This type of sin holds hands with our pride and self-righteousness. Sometimes these are “big” sins that we refuse to address, but more often we cling to the quieter sins of discontentment, worry, or offense. Releasing them to God means a loss of control in our lives or being faced with extending forgiveness to someone that we don’t want to forgive.

If your spiritual life has been dry, take a quiet time of confession and ask God to bring to mind any sin in your life (pray Ps 139:23-24). We sin because we believe, ultimately, that the sin will be beneficial for us—that it will bring us more fun, satisfaction, or safety than we could experience by doing things God’s way. Repent of your faulty belief system (i.e., not believing in God’s love, His provision, His goodness) and, as Jas 5:16 says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”



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ISOLATION

We were made to live in community with other believers. The work of God in the world today is happening primarily through His church. If you are not actively involved in the mission of your local church, you are missing out on what God has for you. You have talents and gifts that your church needs, and you need the church for fellowship, prayer and purpose. Many of us have been hurt by the church, and Satan has used this to separate us from investing in the Body. Many times we struggle to find a church that aligns perfectly with our beliefs.

Don’t let Satan win! You cannot experience spiritually vibrancy alone. Speaking to the church, Paul writes in Eph 2:10, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Enjoy fellowship with other believers and also with God through investment in your local church.

DISTRACTIONS

Our culture offers the opportunity to be entertained every minute of the day. Netflix, social media, the news are at our fingertips, and we fill up the little extra spaces on our calendars with good things like kids’ sports, church events, volunteering, and recreation. None of these are bad, but they can become a drain on our spiritual lives when we go to them for life, instead of going to

Jesus. At the end of a rough day, often we want to flip channels or scroll through Facebook or some other mindless distraction. Or maybe we want to eat ice cream or take a nap.

God wants our hearts. He wants us to look to Him for comfort and fulfillment. A spiritually vibrant life with God requires that we have the mental space to commune with God and listen for His Holy Spirit's leading and prompting. If you feel like your soul is in a spiritual desert, ask yourself where you have been going for life. If it's not God, pray Psalm 63 to Him, and ask Him to make this your story. When you pray and read your Bible, put away your study notes and devotionals and just spend quiet time interacting with God through His Word.


EXHAUSTION/BURNOUT

If you feel like you've been doing all the "right things" and yet you still feel distance from God, check your exhaustion meter. After Jesus' marathon healing session in Mark 1, we are told that Jesus, "having risen a long while before daylight, went out and departed to a solitary place, and there He prayed" (v 35). Jesus was human, and He felt exhaustion, even after doing all the "right things" for the glory of God. He needed to be replenished and restored. A few chapters later, we read how, after a full day of teaching, He fell asleep at the stern of a boat, apparently out of sheer exhaustion, despite a raging storm on the sea (4:35-38).

God knows how hard you're working. He sees your heart's desire to serve Him. He loves you. But working yourself to the point of burnout does not glorify God. I haven't seen very many beautiful pictures of people at the edge of burnout. More often they are wary, irritable, and very, very tired. Jesus tells us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt 11:30). If you find yourself feeling like following Jesus is a weight upon your shoulders, meet with other people who love you and can help lift your burdens so you can enjoy a season of rest and replenishment and rekindle your spiritual vibrancy.

SORROW

If you have experienced a loss of a loved one, a divorce, an empty nest, illness, betrayal, an aging parent, or the loss of a job or church family, you may feel swept into sorrow and depression and unable to get out. The joy in your relationship with God may be replaced with hurt, bitterness, or simply the feeling of lethargy or emptiness when you approach God through His Word or in prayer. Satan will do whatever he can to derail your spiritual effectiveness and rob you of joy. Your sorrow may be public which often means you have support from friends and prayer, but if your struggle is a personal or private struggle, loneliness and isolation can further add to your discouragement and spiritual dryness.

When the author of Hebrews wrote to the church about their persecution and discouragement, he urged them not to neglect meeting together (10:25). Share your struggles with your church, they can support you and pray for you during this time. Find creative ways to immerse yourself in Scripture, whether through memorization of helpful passages (for example, on God's faithfulness and care for His people: Deut 31:8; Zeph 3:17; 1 Cor 10:13; John 16:33) or by reading alternate versions like *The Message* paraphrase. Play music that will reach you where you are and can remind you of God's character. Many who have battled depression will tell you that serving others is the best way to get your mind off your own troubles and help someone else. Finally, pursue counseling with a qualified Christian who can help you see God's continued love for you during your time of sorrow and help lead you back to a fulfilling vibrant relationship with Him once again. 



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.

Is Anyone Unreachable?

By Shawn Lazar

We all have a ministry from God. In fact, you're in full-time ministry right now. So...how are you doing? What are you doing? Whom are you reaching?

One of the things I try to emphasize at church is that everyone should be self-consciously serving God in their lives. Not everyone has a visible ministry on Sunday mornings. You might not be the pastor, worship leader, or deacon. But your ministry is visible to *someone* during the week—to the different neighbors you meet in your different vocations as parents, children, co-workers, bosses, employees, citizens, and so on.

You are ministering to people every day, whether you know it or not.

So what is your ministry?

TAKING A RISK

This week a friend shared a blog post called “I Went to a Strip Club with a Pastor’s Wife” by Anna McCarthy.¹ It is a good read. It demonstrates that it is possible for ordinary Christians, doing simple things, to reach the unreachable with God’s love.

Long story short, the author was pregnant at the time, and she went with a group of Christian women to visit strip clubs to offer gift baskets and food to the dancers. To their surprise, the wives were allowed into the club to visit with the dancers. McCarthy was surprised to learn these women were just...women. They had terrible jobs, but otherwise they were just normal people with kids and bills and ordinary health concerns.

After consistently going to the strip clubs—and showing their genuine goodwill to the girls—they were slowly accepted by the dancers. The wives got permission to set up a prayer box in the

changing room. Eventually, they got permission to start a Bible study! And the dancers attended! All within the strip club!

In a truly heart-breaking moment, one of the dancers told the wives they were not like the other churches. What were the other churches like? As McCarthy says, “Apparently other churches send them hate mail. ALL THE TIME.”

Hate mail!

What about sending grace mail?

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

I don’t know about you, but I would not have thought it was possible to reach dancers inside a strip club. I would have thought it was impossible to do ministry in there.

But these wives did it.

They were already neighbors to these dancers. The wives just decided to be *loving* neighbors.

A gift basket here. Some food there. A genuine concern expressed through prayer. Treating the dancers like human beings loved by God.

Who can’t show that kind of gracious, loving kindness?

It doesn’t take a special talent. It just takes love and concrete acts of goodwill.

YOUR GOOD WORKS

Are there any unreachable or untouchable people around you? Is there a group of marginalized people that other churches inundate with hate mail?

You might think it’s impossible to reach them with the message of grace. But why not try to reach them by *showing* grace first?

And remember, the same God Who opened some prison doors to let Peter out can just as easily open doors to let grace in. ■



Shawn Lazar lives in Denton, TX with his wife Abby and their three children. They enjoy spending their free time doing endless loads of laundry, dishes, and vacuuming. Actually, they don't enjoy that.

1. See <https://faithit.com/i-went-to-strip-club-with-pastors-wife/>





Ken teaching through John at Ethnos 360

Ethnos 360 Bible Institute Waukesha, WI March 3-23

My daughter Kathryn and I (Ken) went to the Ethnos 360 Bible Institute in Waukesha, WI. Ethnos 360 was formerly known as New Tribes Missions. I taught the Gospel of John as an elective course to about 30 students. Kathryn was a great help in the discussion questions that were part of the course and in grading the assignments. These students are primarily young, a few years removed from high school. Many of them are planning on serving as missionaries in various places around the world. The organization is definitely Free Grace friendly. The students do come from different backgrounds, and, for some at least, a Free Grace understanding using the Gospel of John was new. As the class went on more students began asking questions. It was a great experience for Kathryn and me. Everybody at the school was great. Special thanks go out to Andy, Chuck, and Dave for all their help. A very special thanks go out to the folks who worked in the cafeteria!

Victor Street Bible Chapel The Transformed Life March 17

Romans 12:1-2 is quite well known. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The whole chapter is powerful. I (Bob) posted a slightly condensed transcript of my sermon on our blog. You can check it out. Plus the audio should be online by the time you get this.

We don't change ourselves. God does the transforming work. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and changes the believer who is open and who is in a solid Bible-teaching church.

Final Revisions to Repentance Book

During March, I revised the book (working title: *The Power of Repentance*) in light of feedback from Shawn Lazar, Ken Yates, Diane Boring, Paul Carpenter, and Dr. Wayne Brindle, recently retired New Testament



Run to win!

professor from Liberty University. Many thanks to all of them.

Shawn will be typesetting it early in April, and we hope to have it to the printer in time for our annual conference May 20-23.

Harmony with God by Zane Hodges is a classic and is the best work available on repentance, in my opinion. My new book is trying to deal with the issue in a different way. I am hopeful it becomes a helpful companion to *HWG*. I think you will enjoy it. It has been in my mind for thirty-five years (I wrote my dissertation on this subject from 1983-1985).

Radio for Resurrection Sunday

Shawn and Bob recorded ten shows in March for Resurrection Sunday (aka Easter). It was a joy to prepare these messages.

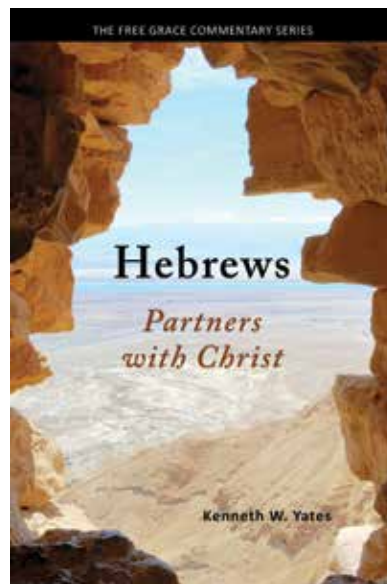
You will be able to hear them on our website, on iTunes, and Stitcher.

We are currently on five stations. We are hoping to add several stations in the next few months.

We are looking to get into internet radio.

An idea Shawn has and which we are considering is to add in one-minute radio spots three days a week on nearly 120 stations around the country (BOTT radio network is one option). One minute is just enough time to convey some great content. It even allows us to point people to our website.

We are excited to see how this ministry grows.



New commentary coming soon!

Completed Another Marathon

On March 31, I completed my seventh marathon (UT Arlington Marathon). Yeah. The good news: It was my second fastest time (5:41:50). It was nearly an hour faster than my last two marathons. And I came in first in my age group (Men's 65-69). The bad news: The only woman in Women's 65-69 beat me by ten minutes and the three men in Men's 70-74 all beat me handily. Rumor has it that several people pulling IVs beat me. But I finished, and I didn't get hurt.

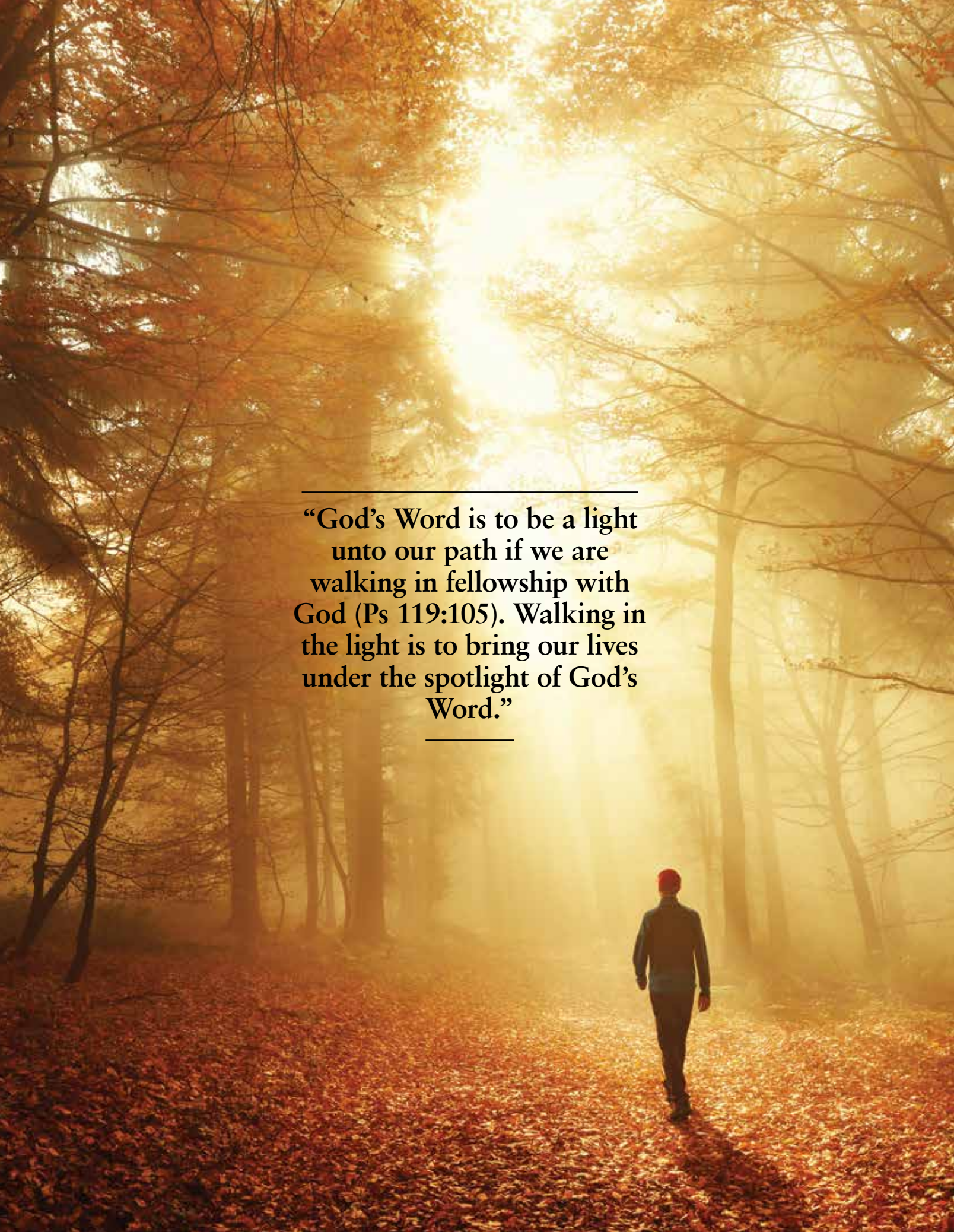
NOTES AND LETTERS

"GES has been very helpful in aiding me to grow in God's grace. I really love the GES website and all of the resources. Thank you for all you do in service to the Lord. I hope to visit Dallas someday. But if not, we will have a blessed future." ~email

"Thank you for all you do through the blog and Grace in Focus." ~B. G., North Carolina

"Thank you for all you do at GES! There are very few ministries that get the simple gospel right. The radio ministry can help get the message out even more!" ~email

"Hi Shawn, Thank you for both books, Chosen to Serve and Beyond Doubt. Two paths you describe in Beyond Doubt exposed so much of my 'church' experience." ~D.W., mail



“God’s Word is to be a light
unto our path if we are
walking in fellowship with
God (Ps 119:105). Walking in
the light is to bring our lives
under the spotlight of God’s
Word.”

How Can We Have Assurance We Are in Fellowship with God?

By Bob Wilkin

This is Appendix 4 from the forthcoming book,
The Power of Repentance.

What is the relationship between confession, repentance, and fellowship with God? What precisely must one do to have and maintain that fellowship? How does a born-again person know that he is currently in fellowship with God?

God has given us some broad principles to give us assurance that we are in fellowship with Him. The first four principles are essential to being in fellowship. Someone can follow one, two, or even three of these principles and yet not be in fellowship. All four are needed. The fifth principle concerns assurance that we are experiencing *mature fellowship* with God.

PRINCIPLE #1: LOVING GOD IS VITAL TO FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM (1 JOHN 1:4; 4:19)

First, you must love God to be in fellowship with Him. The Lord Jesus indicated that the greatest commandment is this: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37//Mark 12:30).

The word fellowship (Greek, *koinōnia*) has a basic sense of sharing. When we fellowship with other Christians, we are sharing experiences with them (a meal, worship, prayer, etc.). Fellowship is a relational term. When we are in fellowship with

God, we share His way of looking at life (principle #2), and we recognize that our life is lived in communion with Him. His Spirit energizes and motivates us. One of the central motivations for a believer in fellowship is love for God. John said, “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). As he reflected on Christ’s death for us, Paul said that “the love of Christ constrains us” (2 Cor 5:14).

If a believer does *not* love God, then he is *not* in fellowship with God. Almost everyone in Christendom recognizes that fact.

However, the opposite is not true. The fact that someone loves Jesus does not mean that he is necessarily in fellowship with Him. It is possible to have great love for Jesus and a strong desire to please Him and yet promote works salvation (or other false teachings), not confess one’s sins, and not assemble each week with other believers.

PRINCIPLE #2: WALKING IN THE LIGHT IS NECESSARY FOR FELLOWSHIP (1 JOHN 1:3-4, 7)

Second, fellowship with God requires *walking in the light*, as opposed to walking in the darkness. Hodges suggests that “to walk in the light must mean essentially to live in God’s presence, exposed to what He has revealed about Himself. This, of course, is done through openness

in prayer and through openness to the Word of God in which He is revealed.” In many spheres of Evangelicalism today there is an anti-doctrinal sentiment. Many Evangelicals think that doctrine is bad since it can divide people. Therefore, many put an emphasis—or the entire emphasis—on loving God (principle #1).

But Scripture shows that only those who “walk in the light” (as opposed to walking in darkness) are in fellowship. Only then does “the blood of Jesus cleanse us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7).

God’s Word is to be a light unto our path if we are walking in fellowship with God (Ps 119:105). Walking in the light is to bring our lives under the spotlight of God’s Word.

That means, of course, that we must regularly be exposed to the teachings of God’s Word. Typically, that occurs in our local church (see principle #4), though today most people have the Bible in their own languages and can supplement the teaching they receive with personal Bible reading.

Part of walking in the light is continuing to believe *the core doctrines* of the Christian faith. The core doctrines include the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, Jesus’ bodily resurrection, and justification by faith alone, apart from works. Some would include the inerrancy of Scripture as a fundamental truth. If a person rejects any fundamental doctrine, then he is not in fellowship with God (cf. 2 Cor 11:3; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tim 1:18-20; 4:16; 2 Tim 2:16-18; Titus 1:9).

We should not confuse walking in the light with obeying His commandments (compare 1 John 1:7 and 1 John 2:3-11). John is speaking of the mature believer when he refers to those who obey His commandments (1 John 2:3-11). A brand-new believer can walk in the light, even though he does not yet know or apply most of the commandments.

The second greatest commandment, loving your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:39//Mark 12:31), falls under principle #2 (as well as principles #3-5). Anyone walking in the light is loving his neighbors (1 John 3:16-18; 4:20).

PRINCIPLE #3: CONFESSING OUR SINS IS REQUIRED FOR FELLOWSHIP (1 JOHN 1:9)

Third, one must confess his sins. The issue of confession is rather fuzzy for most Evangelicals. Is it enough to acknowledge to God that I am a sinner and I’ve sinned this week? Many churches have public readings in which the entire congregation confesses their sinfulness.

There is no indication in 1 John 1:9 that a weekly confession at church is what God has in mind. Certainly, it is fine to confess our sinfulness at church. But God wants us to be open and honest about our sin as soon as we recognize it.

King David said, “When I kept silent my bones wasted away all day long” (Ps 32:3). He was talking about the time, nearly a year, after he committed adultery and murder. He kept silent about his sin and he was in pain all day long. Only when he confessed his sin to God did he experience God’s forgiveness: “I acknowledged my sin to You...and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Ps 32:5; see also 2 Sam 12:1-15, esp. v 13, “I have sinned against the Lord”).

According to 1 John 1:9, our forgiveness and cleansing are conditioned upon our confession of our sins as we become aware of them (“If we confess...”). Therefore, we not only confess the general fact that we sin and fall short of God’s glory (Rom 3:23), but we also confess the specific sins of which we become aware (cf. 2 Sam 12:7, 13; Ps 32:3-5; Prov 28:13). I. Howard Marshall says, “To confess sins is not merely to admit that we are sinners, but to lay them before God and to seek forgiveness.” Similarly, Smalley says, “The use of the plural, ‘sins’ (*tas hamartias*), probably indicates that the confession of particular acts of sin is meant in the context, rather than the acknowledgement of ‘sin’ in general.” A century earlier Westcott wrote that the confession “extends to specific, definite acts, and not only to sin in general terms.”

The other contextual indication that specific sins are to be confessed is the expression “all unrighteousness.” God *forgives us our sins*, the sins we confess, and *cleanses us from all unrighteousness*. While many commentators see these expressions as synonymous, the word *all* before

unrighteousness suggests otherwise. Hodges says that *all unrighteousness* “is broader and covers any latent attitude or outlook that is sinful in character, whether or not it has found expression in overt sin...the cleansing that follows [confession of specific sins] *covers everything* that needs cleansing.” None of us can possibly confess all our sins. Hodges says, “No one but God can ever possibly know the full extent of our sinfulness, so that we can only actually confess the sins of which we are aware. God does not ask more of us than that.” The sins which we confess are but the tip of the iceberg.

There is no special prayer of confession of specific sins given in Scripture. The words of the Lord’s prayer, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” are general in nature. What God is looking for is for us to be honest with Him.

Confessing the sins of which we are aware is a vital aspect of fellowship with God.

PRINCIPLE #4: GOING TO CHURCH IS ESSENTIAL FOR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (ACTS 2:42; HEBREWS 10:23-25)

Fourth, one must gather with other believers regularly. While we may respect and admire monks who spent years in isolation in a cave, the truth is that asceticism does not work (see, for example, Col 2:20-23). Fellowship with God occurs in a corporate context, not in isolation.

The local church is the place in which believers are to gather and encourage one another until Christ returns (Heb 10:23-25). To forsake such assembling together is to violate a crucial fellowship principle.

I realize that some today have difficulty finding a solid Bible teaching church close to them. In that case I’d suggest moving to a place where there is one. If that is not feasible, then gather with your family for the Lord’s Supper, prayer, and a message from God’s Word each week.

Some people treat their home Bible study as church. If you were to add in the Lord’s Supper and baptism, that study becomes a home church.

I. Howard Marshall says, “Persons who cut themselves off from fellowship with other Christians cannot have fellowship with God.”

The early church in Jerusalem was growing steadily. Luke says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread [i.e., the Lord’s Supper], and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Fellowship with God flourishes in a context where people regularly receive the teaching of apostolic doctrine, where the Lord’s Supper is presented, and where prayers are uplifted.

PRINCIPLE #5: LIVING RIGHTEOUSLY DEMONSTRATES MATURE FELLOWSHIP (1 CORINTHIANS 2:14–3:3; 1 JOHN 2:3-11)

Fifth, mature fellowship with God manifests itself in a holy life. Many Evangelicals equate fellowship with God with Christian maturity. In that view immature Christians are not in fellowship with God. Only mature Christians are in fellowship with God.

That would mean that all new believers, who are by definition “babes in Christ” and not yet spiritual believers (1 Cor 2:14–3:3), are out of fellowship. But that is incorrect. A new believer begins the Christian life in fellowship (Acts 10:43). If he continues to love God, walk in the light, confess his sins, and learn about Christ at church, he remains in fellowship with God, even though he is spiritually immature.

There is a subtle distinction in First John between being *in fellowship with God* (1 John 1:6-10) and *knowing God* in our experience (1 John 2:3-11). Only the mature believer knows God experientially. Hodges explains the distinction in this way, “Just as a claim to fellowship with Him is false if we ‘walk in darkness,’ so too a disobedient lifestyle falsifies any claim to intimate knowledge of Him.”

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS AFFIRMATIVELY?

Based on the five principles given above, we can generate some fellowship questions. Answer the first four positively and you know you are in fellowship. If you can also answer question five

affirmatively, then your fellowship with God is mature. Here are the key fellowship questions:

1. Do you believe fundamental Bible doctrine?
2. Do you love God and wish to please Him?
3. Do you confess your sins to God?
4. Do you fellowship with other believers each week?
5. Do you manifest a transformed life?

I realize that some would say that if a person is not yet manifesting significant transformation in his life, then he cannot be in fellowship. However, Paul indicated that it is not surprising for “babes in Christ” to continue to live like unbelievers until they have had enough time to grow (1 Cor 3:1-3). So, for the first year or so, a believer is a baby Christian. He is in fellowship with God if he walks in the light, loves God, confesses his sins, and fellowships weekly with other believers. But spiritual maturity is yet future for him.

If someone has been a believer for four or five years, as the Corinthians had been when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (the first word in the Greek text of 1 Cor 3:3 is *eti, still*, “for you are still carnal”), and he is still in spiritual diapers, then his growth has been stunted. That does not necessarily mean that he is out of fellowship with God. He is culpable for his continued spiritual immaturity. But he may love God, walk in the light, confess his sins, and assemble regularly with other believers.

CONCLUSION

I have not mentioned repentance thus far in this appendix. That is because believers only need to repent if they depart from fellowship with God. For the believer who is in fellowship with God, he needs to walk in the light, love God, confess his sins, and assemble regularly with other believers in order to stay in fellowship with God. Repentance only comes into play if he turns away from the Lord (cf. Luke 15:11-24; Jas 5:19-20).

If you are a perfectionist, you may have trouble with the ambiguities in what I wrote above. What is the full list of fundamental doctrines I must believe to be in fellowship? How do I know if

I’m loving God with my whole heart, soul, and mind? Do I confess my sins in the right way? Am I attending the right church?

If you are struggling with questions like these, I would encourage you to realize that God is not out to trip us up. He loves us and wants us to be in fellowship with Him. He has not made it difficult to know if we are in fellowship.

But the second thing you should realize is this: God has given each local church a group of men whose job is to oversee the spiritual lives of the flock. In the NT, these men are called *elders* or *overseers*. Maybe your church calls these people *pastors*, *deacons*, or *the board*. Whatever they are called, they are tasked with making sure that those who are members of the body are in fellowship with God. If they consider you a member in good standing, then they are saying that they believe you are in fellowship. If they permit you to partake of the Lord’s Supper, and they do not exercise church discipline against you, then you can take comfort that someone external to you believes you are in fellowship with God.

I was raised under a lot of perfectionism. When I came to faith, I found it hard to envision God loving me just as I was. Oh, *I knew He accepted me just as I was*. But for a time, I thought He must be dissatisfied with me as my earthly father was. Only as I matured in the faith did I realize that God the Father is not like my earthly father. I came to see that He was satisfied with the gradual progress I was making in the Christian life.

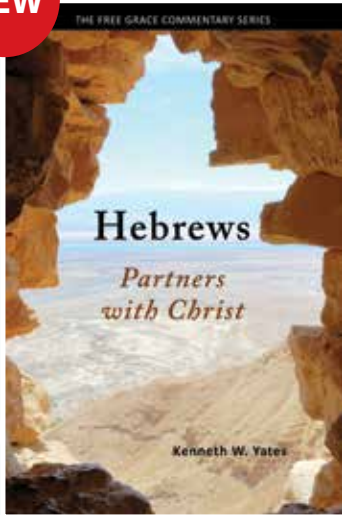
I’d love to be perfect right now. I bet you would too. But that day is yet future (1 John 3:2). Until then, let’s walk in fellowship with God. It is better than anything this world has to offer (Luke 15:11-32). ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, in fellowship with his wife of 42 years, Sharon, though sometimes he gets banished to the outer darkness. This article is taken from his latest book, *The Power of Repentance*.

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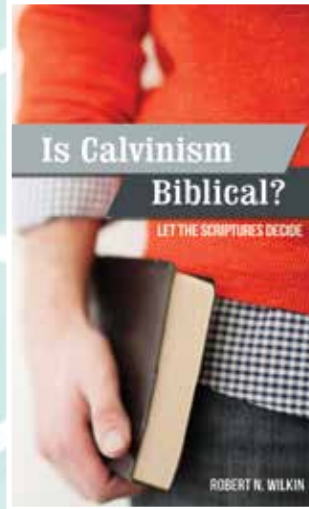


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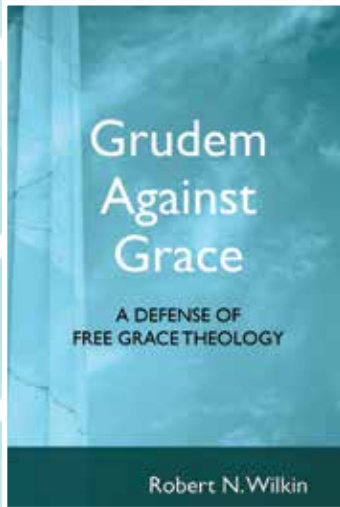
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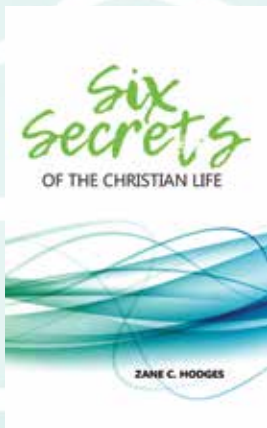
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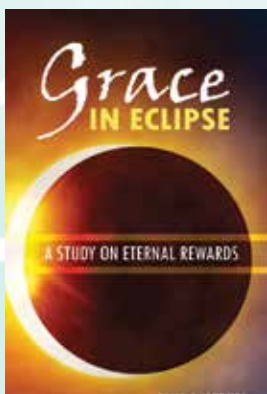
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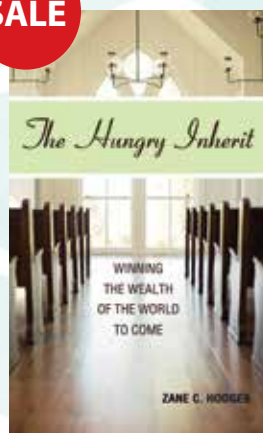
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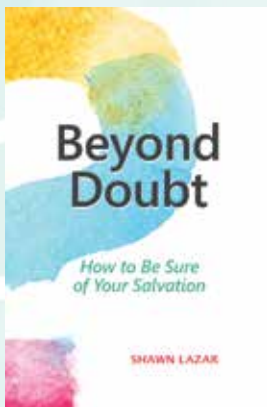
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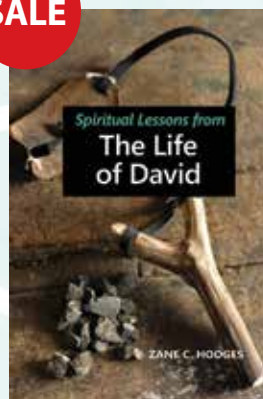
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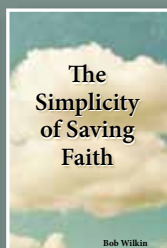
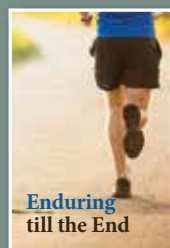
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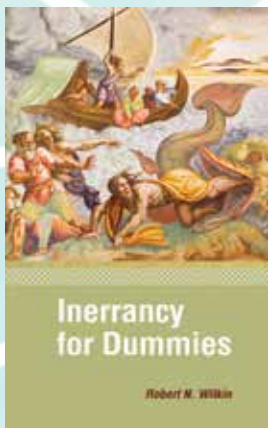
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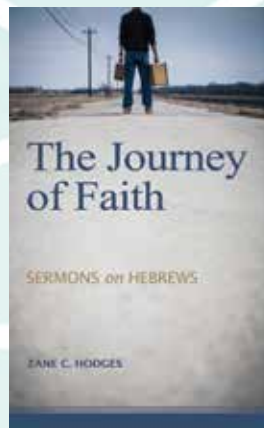


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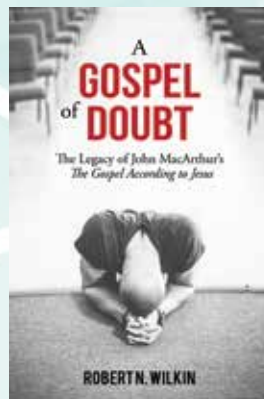


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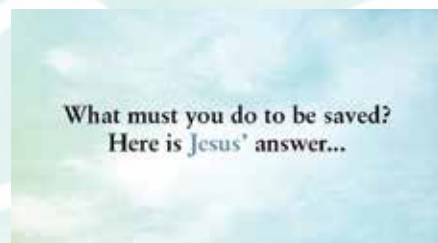
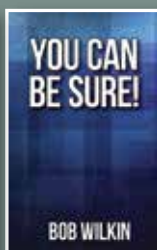


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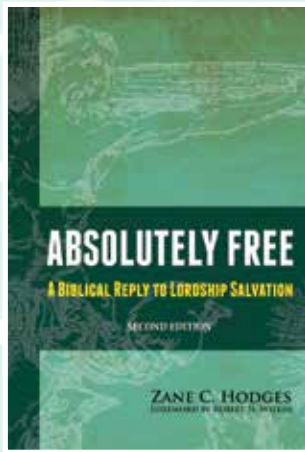
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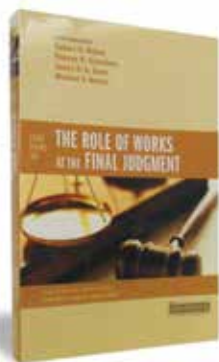
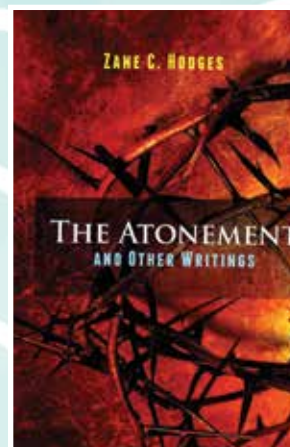
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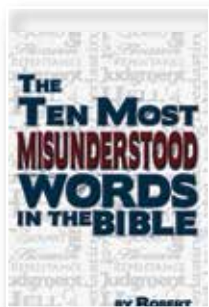
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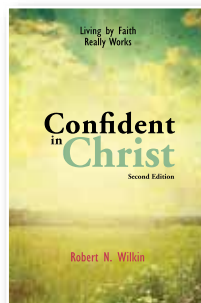
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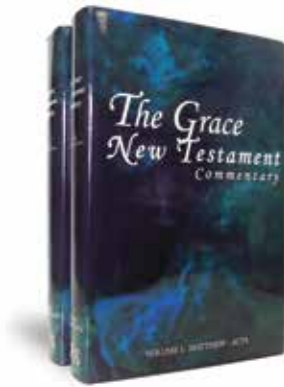
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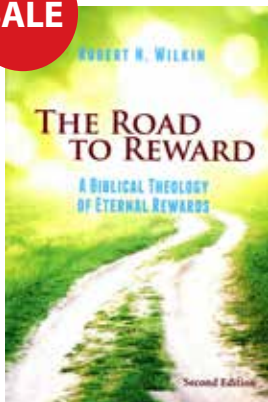
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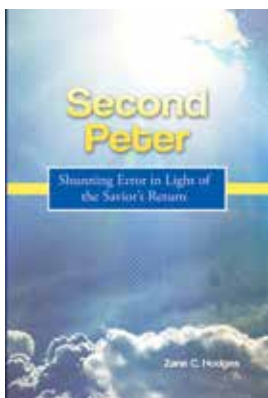
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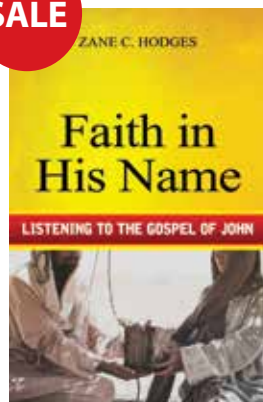
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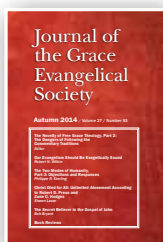
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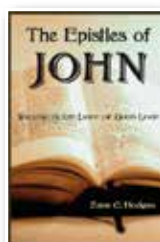
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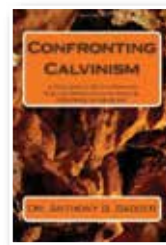


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The Parable of the Laborers

(Matthew 20:1-16)

By Ken Yates

Recently I received a question about the parable found in Matt 20:1-16. The person wanted to know the meaning of the parable. It *seems* to argue against the doctrine of rewards.

In the parable the Lord speaks of a landowner that hires laborers to work in his vineyard. The landowner hires five groups of workers. The first group of workers worked the whole day. The last group only worked for one hour. The other three groups worked different amounts of hours, depending upon the time of day the

landowner sent them into his vineyard. But they all received the same amount of pay. It seems, at first, that this argues against the idea that there will be different levels of rewards for believers. That is exactly how many expositors interpret it. Some even say that the reward here is “going to heaven,” which all believers receive.

I have always found this parable to be interesting. I know that it does not teach that there will be no rewards in the kingdom. I also know that it does not teach that all believers will be rewarded equally. I know these things because the NT teaches very clearly that there will be different rewards for different believers (see, for example, Luke 19:15-26; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 22:12). The Bible never contradicts itself. This is how I responded to the excellent question.

MY ANSWER


I think the first thing we see is that there is a connection between this parable and what goes on before. In the last verse of Matthew 19, immediately before the parable in question,

the Lord says “the first will be last and the last, first.” Then, at the end of the parable, Jesus says “the last shall be first, and the first last.” We also see another connection between the end of chap. 19 and this parable, because the parable starts off with the word “for.” (Remember, when you see the word “for,” you have to ask what the word “for” is there for.)

Another thing we need to notice is this whole parable and context are talking about rewards. It is not talking about receiving eternal life. The parable is talking about doing work in God’s field. Eternal salvation is completely free. In leading up to the previous verses (19:28-30), Peter specifically asks what rewards will be given to those who follow Christ, and Jesus speaks about sitting upon thrones, which is a reward (19:27-28).

With that context in mind, there are a couple of ways to understand the parable.

First, the rewards believers will receive are completely dependent upon God’s grace and discretion. A person who believes late in life can serve the Lord and be rewarded, at least in some ways, as much as those who served the Lord longer.

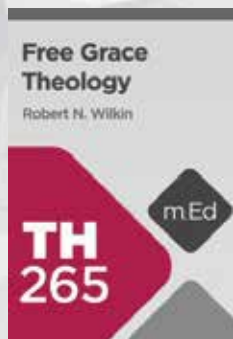
Second, the other way this parable can be understood combines 19:27-30 with the parable. Peter and the other disciples started serving the Lord from the very beginning of Church history. Jesus promises them great rewards. But that was 2000 years ago. What about believers today? The parable would be teaching that believers of any age, whenever they live in the Church Age, can be rewarded as well for their faithfulness to the Lord. It does not matter when we enter into God’s field of labor; what matters is that we are faithful when we do. God is gracious and will reward all who do so. 



Ken Yates is the pastor of Little River Baptist Church in Jenkinsville, SC. He teaches at Bible institutes all over the world on behalf of GES.

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Rescued

By Marcia Hornok


Many people think that receiving eternal life and “qualifying” for heaven when we die is like being in a deep ditch with slippery sides. We can’t get out on our own. So God reaches down while we try to scramble up as much as we can; He will grab us and do the rest.

This concept has two problems: 1) God does not need our help! When Jesus offered Himself by crucifixion, as the sinless sacrifice for our sins, He cried out, “It is finished.” This was an accounting term used when a debt had been paid. Jesus “paid in full” the penalty for our sinful rebellion and disobedience against God when He took the punishment we deserved.

2) This analogy is found nowhere in Scripture. A better analogy for eternal life pictures us as drowning in sin. We are going down for the last time and cannot save ourselves. We must be rescued. The nail-pierced hand of Jesus reaches out to us. Will we respond to Him by faith or not?

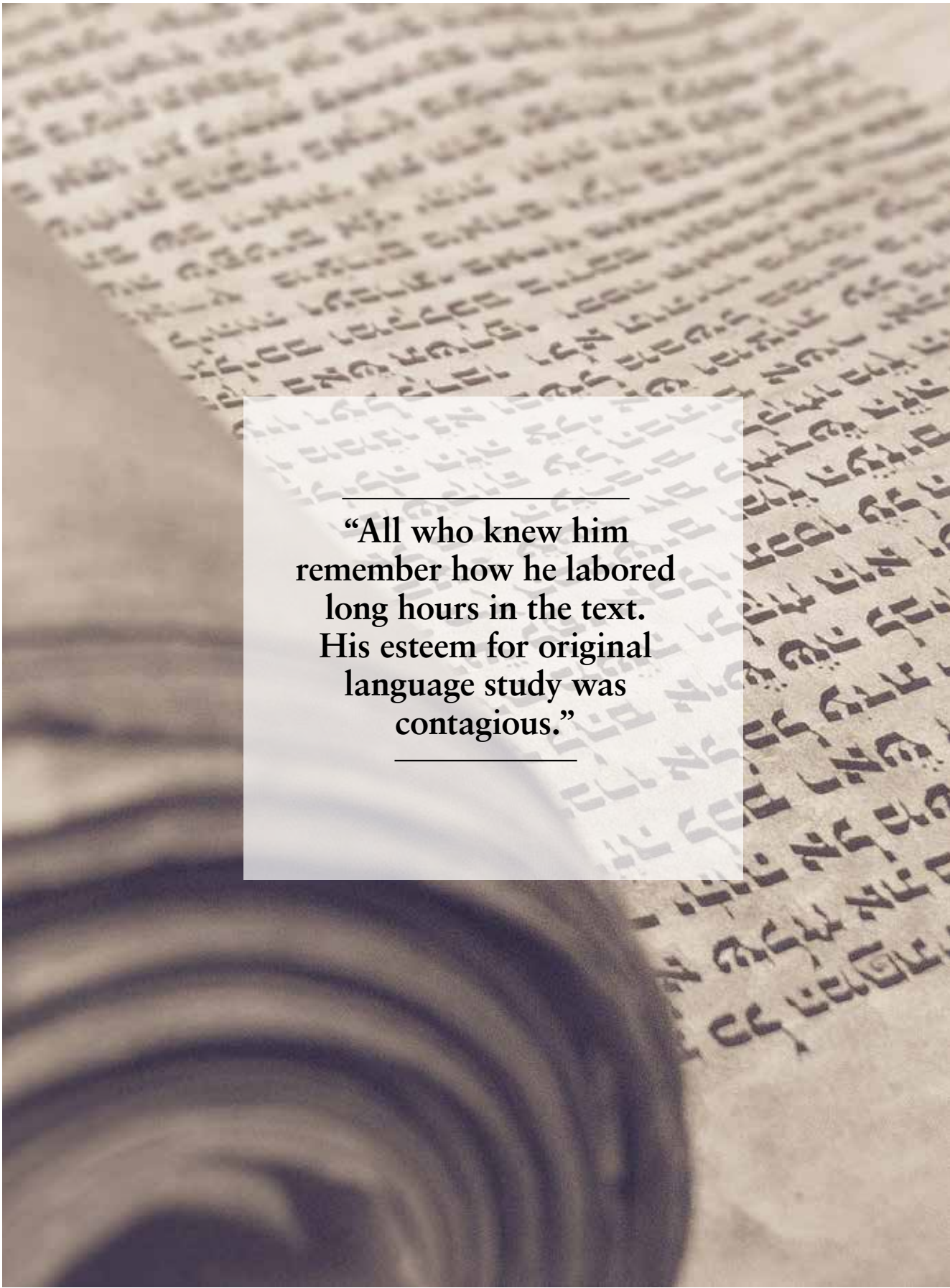
The Philippian jailer of Acts 16 felt so hopeless, he drew his sword to take his own life, until Paul stopped him. “What must I do to be saved?” he asked. Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” They added no qualifications—no steps he could take to make himself “worthy” of eternal life. It was not a case of him doing his part and God doing the rest. The jailer could do nothing except believe only in Jesus.

Do you understand that God offers forgiveness and salvation as a free gift? “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9). We can do nothing to earn or deserve salvation or pay God back. When we believe in Christ alone for eternal life, He rescues us from sin, gives us His righteousness, and saves us forever.

Where are you spiritually? Still in the ditch trying in vain to claw your way up the slippery bank? Or have you believed what Jesus said and been rescued? 



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 grandchildren. Her books include Fruit of the Spirit: Inspiration for Women from Galatians 5:22-23.



“All who knew him
remember how he labored
long hours in the text.
His esteem for original
language study was
contagious.”

George Meisinger Memorial

By John H. Niemelä

On March 12, 2019, Dr. George Meisinger, a longtime friend of grace, went into the presence of the Lord. He was born in Eugene, OR, on April 21, 1938.

George graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1968 and for four decades pastored churches in Minnesota and California. All who knew him remember how he labored long hours in the text. His esteem for original-language study was contagious. He motivated many young men in his congregations to enroll in seminary. (At one point in my studies, George disciplined me and four others who were enrolled at Dallas Seminary.)

In 1992 a decision was reached to start a school. Soon Chafer Theological Seminary (CTS) was born in Orange County, CA. From the beginning, the school emphasized the original languages. George, the founding President of CTS, made sure that the school took strong stands against Calvinism and Lordship Salvation. It has promoted a grace message since its founding.

At the governing board's direction, George moved the school to Albuquerque, NM, in 2007. He continued to serve as president until 2017.

In 2013 George was diagnosed with cancer. As long as his health permitted, he kept up his studies, teaching, and research for a book on King Saul.


I thank God for how He used George in my own life, since first walking through the doors of Maranatha Bible Church while a student at the



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University of Minnesota. George had a major role in my decision to study Greek and Hebrew, to go into vocational ministry, and to go to Dallas Seminary. In addition, it was he who invited me to join the faculty of CTS. Also, while on faculty, George sent me each year to the GES annual conference to represent the school.

His advice as I left for seminary was, "Don't miss Hebrews with Hodges; that class changed my theology."

Through George Meisinger, many have come to appreciate grace. We can rejoice at how the Lord used him to champion issues that are near and dear to us. 



John H. Niemelä is President of Message of Life Ministries.

Grace in Focus Radio Update

Bob and Shawn have started co-hosting a radio show and podcast called...Grace in Focus!

So far the feedback has been great.

We are so excited about this next step in GES's ministry.

We want to reach people wherever they are. We're hoping that by producing a radio show and a podcast, we will get the grace message to a new audience and a wider listenership.

The shows are under 15 minutes long and deal with Free Grace topics in a way that anyone can understand. They will be available in two formats: on radio show and as a podcast.

RADIO

We are adding more stations. Please pray for doors to open. Grace in Focus Radio is broadcasting Monday to Friday here:

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Shawn is slowly working on negotiating new contracts.

We are humbled and amazed that donors have come forward to say, "I will pay to air Grace in Focus Radio in my area."

So far, our 15 minute slots have cost anywhere between \$22 to \$55 per day. Depending on the size of your town, and the size of the station, it might cost as little as \$500/month to bring Grace in Focus to your neighbors.

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TEACHING SERIES

So far, we have done series based on Bob's books *Confident in Christ* and *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*. We also completed a series going through 1-3 John.

SHARING AND PRAYING

You can help us grow this aspect of the ministry by telling people about the podcast and sharing it on social media. Anyone can listen to them on their phone or computer. We think these will appeal to people who wouldn't necessarily read a magazine, journal, or book.

Also, please pray that Bob, Shawn, and the rest of the GES team remain energized and motivated to do this.

We are currently considering also doing a 1-2 minute show that we could contract with a couple hundred stations. That is more within

our budget. Please pray that God would give us wisdom for that potential project.

Over the last few years, GES has ramped up our output. Bob and Shawn are now writing a daily blog and putting out a daily podcast, on top of producing all of GES's other materials. They can only do that while upheld by your prayers. This country absolutely needs to hear the unvarnished grace of God.

Thank you for your continued support! 



Is Continuous Drinking Required for Everlasting Life?

By Bob Wilkin

GRAMMAR QUESTION

I received this email question from a reader:
In the article “The One Who Believes: Is Continuous Faith Required to be Born Again?” by Bob Wilkin in the second footnote regarding John 4:13, Wilkin mentions:

“Amazingly, Wallace says *ho pinōn* here means, ‘everyone who continually drinks...,’ *ibid*, p. 621, text. Of course, he must say that since he recognizes, though does not say, that *ho pinōn* is a synonym for *ho pisteuōn*, which he has already said refers to continuous belief.”

While I found Bob’s article very helpful, can you please elaborate a bit more on how we know that *ho pinōn* here does not mean “everyone who continually drinks...,” but rather means everyone who drinks once, i.e. one drink would quench your thirst forever? Hope you can help.

CONTEXT TELLS US

We sometimes are led to believe that the Greek present tense means that continuous action is taking place. That is not true in the indicative mood (e.g., he drinks). It *sometimes* refers to such action. The context, not the verb tense, tells us.

And it is not true for articular participles, either (e.g., he who drinks or everyone who drinks). *There are two rock-solid proofs* that the drinking in John 4:13-14 cannot mean *he who*

continually drinks. (John 4:14 uses an aorist subjunctive, but it clearly is used synonymously with *ho pinōn* in John 4:13. So in this article I sometimes speak of John 4:13, but clearly the same point is true of v 14.) But before I get there, let’s see proof of the fact that the present tense in the indicative mood and in participles need not refer to continuous action.

PRESENT INDICATIVE

The present indicative often does not refer to continuous action or even to action taking place in the present. Wallace himself lists *instantaneous presents* (also called punctiliar presents) where present indicatives refer to “an action [which] is completed at the moment of speaking. This occurs *only* in the *indicative*. It is relatively common” (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 517). Examples he gives are Mark 2:5 (“your sins are forgiven”); John 3:3 (“I say to you”); Acts 9:34 (“Jesus Christ heals you”); Acts 25:11 (“I appeal to Caesar”). Wallace also lists *progressive presents* which refers to “a scene in progress” (p. 518). This too is not action that is continuous. It is ongoing, but has a definite and soon stopping point (e.g., Matt 25:8; Mark 1:37; Acts 2:8; 3:12; Rom 9:1).

Wallace later discusses *historical presents*, which “describe a past event” (p. 526); *perfective presents*, which “emphasize that the results of a past action are still continuing” (p. 532); *conative*



presents, which “portrays the subject as desiring to do something, attempting to do something, or at the point of almost doing something” (p. 534); *futuristic presents*, which “describe a future event” (p. 535).

PRESENT ARTICULAR PARTICIPLES

Present articular participles often do not refer to continuous action.

Wallace says that in the case of anarthrous participles, they “behave just as they do in the indicative [except] now the point of reference is the controlling verb, not the speaker” (p. 614). See above paragraph to see how indicatives are used in the present.

Concerning articular participles, he speaks of some that function as adjectives and some that have a *substantival* use: “It functions in the place of a substantive[noun]” (p. 619). That is the category in which he gives the example of John 4:13. Many of the examples he gives clearly do not refer to continuous action: Mark 6:44 (“those who ate the loaves”); Luke 1:45 (“blessed is she who believed”); John 6:39 (“this is the will of the Father who sent me”); Acts 1:16 (“those who arrested Jesus”). However, those are all aorist articular participles. But he also mentions 2 Thess 2:6-7 regarding “the one who is restraining.” That is a present articular participle and it does not refer to ongoing continuous action since Paul says that the restrainer will be taken away during the seven years of the Tribulation: “until He is taken out of the way” (2 Thess 2:7). Wallace also mentions Luke 2:18, another present articular participle: “And all those who heard [*hoi akousantes*] it marveled...” Obviously that does not refer to continuous action.

Wallace might have mentioned Mark 6:14, “And he said, ‘John *the Baptist* [*Ioannes ho baptizōn*] has risen from the dead.’” That is a present articular participle. Obviously, John was not continuously baptizing

people since he was dead. We still call him John the baptizing one nearly 2,000 years after his last baptism.

PROOF ONE

John 4:13 proves that continuous drinking is not in view.

In verse 13 the Lord Jesus is speaking of *drinking normal water*. He says, “whoever drinks of this [natural] water will thirst again.” He cannot possibly mean, “whoever continually drinks of this [natural] water will thirst again.”

As long as you continuously (or iteratively, that is, every hour or so) drink, you will never thirst. Jesus is saying that one drink of natural water will temporarily satisfy your thirst, but it will not eliminate your thirst forever. It is only a temporary fix.

PROOF TWO

John 4:15 proves that John 4:14 does not refer to continuous drinking.

In John 4:15 the woman said, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.” Clearly, she understands Jesus to be saying that one drink of His living water would mean, 1) she would never thirst again, and 2) she would never need to draw regular water again.

The Lord does not correct her, nor does the Apostle John who is reporting this incident. The woman is correct in understanding that once she drinks His living water, then she will never thirst again. She will be secure the moment she drinks it (= the moment she believes in Jesus; compare John 6:35, “He who believes in Me will never thirst”).

A FINAL POINT

One final point deserves mention. Let’s say that *ho pinōn* means, as Wallace suggests, “everyone who continuously drinks” (p. 621), and thus it takes continuous believing to be born again so that one will never thirst (v 14). When

“The woman is correct in understanding that once she drinks His living water, then she will never thirst again. She will be secure the moment she drinks it.”

would a person fulfill that requirement? At a moment in time? Certainly not. He has not continuously believed yet. After a day of continuous drinking? Nope. After a year of continuous drinking? No. A decade? No. Five decades? No. If a person ever stopped drinking prior to death, he would not fulfill the requirement of continuous drinking.

So, if what Wallace is saying is true, a person is not born again unless he continues in faith until death.

This leads to tough questions. How can you have assurance before death that you are born again if a lifetime of continuous faith is required? What happens if a believer were to go through a time of doubt? Since he is not drinking then, is he unregenerate in Wallace's understanding? What about someone who has a mental condition that causes him to stop drinking, like paranoid schizophrenia, OCD, or Alzheimer's?

Does God give people with mental illness a pass on the continuous drinking requirement?

At the very moment of faith (drinking) a person is born again once and for all. That is the message of John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35; 11:25-27. At the moment of faith a person "has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). Paul said, "By grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph 2:8). A done deal. Paul didn't say that you will be saved if you continue to believe. It doesn't take a lifetime of faith before the new birth occurs. ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He teaches at Victor Street Bible Chapel in East Dallas.



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By You

Send us your letters with your ideas, suggestions, criticisms, and encouragements!

“GES has been very helpful in aiding me to grow in God’s grace. I really love the GES website and all of the resources. Thank you for all you do in service to the Lord. I hope to visit Dallas someday. But if not, we will have a blessed future.” ~email

“Thank you for all the work you do through the blog and *Grace in Focus*.” ~B. G., North Carolina

“Dear friends at GES, I was so lost I thought God was so far away that I had no hope. Then I found your magazine *Grace in Focus* and I have got a new outlook on salvation. I was told God was a punishing God and if I did not live a perfect life I was bound for hell. I found sin in my life so I thought that there was no hope for me. But you gave me two books that changed my life. *Is Calvinism Biblical?* and *A Free Grace Primer* have let me see God has made salvation and eternal life a reality for me.” ~S.S., Modesto, CA

“Thank you for another encouraging and God-centered message, Shawn Lazar and team. These are very different messages to what is commonly taught in churches in Melbourne, Australia. Thanks for your efforts in writing and encouraging others near and far—these are appreciated!” ~S.R., Melbourne, Australia


“I feel like I should express a little what it means to me to get the magazine. The Free Grace approach has literally given me ‘relief.’ I was unsure of certain Scripture. Well I am sure and certain now! The simplicity of the gospel is there, but we have the tendency to make them harder than they are...A friend of mine who introduced me to you guys...was the inspiration for me to rethink the old traditions that I grew up with



in church. He provided me with Zane Hodges’s book *A Free Grace Primer*. It is a great book for me. I appreciate your gift of love through the magazine. I will continue to study and be prepared to give an answer for my faith in Jesus Christ when asked.” ~R.C., mail

“Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Love your publication, *Grace in Focus*! Blessings to you all!” ~L.T., Daisytown, PA

“Thank you for all you do at GES! There are very few ministries that get the simple gospel right. The radio ministry can help get the message out even more!” ~email

“Hi Shawn, Thank you for both books, *Chosen to Serve* and *Beyond Doubt*. Two paths you describe in *Beyond Doubt* exposed so much of my “church” experience.” ~D.W., mail. 

Send your letters to GES, PO Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202

Eating at the King's Table Forever (2 Samuel 9)

By Shawn Lazar

What is grace? Here's an illustration from the Old Testament, from 2 Samuel 9.

Jonathan, son of Saul, was King David's best friend. After Jonathan died, David wanted to show kindness to someone in Jonathan's family:

"Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (v 1)

It turns out Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth who was lame in both feet. David sent for him.

Mephibosheth didn't think very much of himself. He compared himself to a "dead dog" (v 8). After all, he was the crippled grandson of a failed king—two strikes against him.

And maybe that was a fair evaluation. But David had no intention of being fair. Instead, he wanted to show grace—favor that Mephibosheth did not deserve, but which was earned by another:

"Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake..." (v 7).

When the king summoned him, Mephibosheth must have feared the worst. He would not have imagined the grace coming his way:

"[I] will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually... I have given to your master's son all that belonged to Saul and to all his house. You therefore, and your



sons and your servants, shall work the land for him, and you shall bring in the harvest, that your master's son may have food to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread at my table always...he shall eat at my table like one of the king's sons" (vv 7b, 9-11).

Restored.

Treated like a son.

Eating at the king's table forever.

What a wonderful illustration of God's grace to you in salvation!

You may be lame in both feet and come from a checkered family. But God shows you kindness, for Jesus' sake. He gives you eternal life and adopts you as a son (John 1:12). He invites you to eat with Him forever. **GL**



Shawn Lazar is Editor of Grace in Focus and co-host of Grace in Focus Radio, available on iTunes and Stitcher.

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