

# The Truth Will Set You Free

(John 8:30-32)

by Bob Wilkin





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## Letter from the Editor

You may have noticed that our magazine has been changing. That is particularly evident in this issue. Shawn's aim has been to give the magazine a cleaner and more professional look. I believe the new look is a great improvement. I hope you agree.

In this issue we have a voice from the past from Dr. Art Farstad. The article, "Are You a Saint or An Ain't?" was published exactly twenty years ago in what was then our newsletter. Art was the first editor of our Journal and he was a GES Board member as well. I don't know if I knew a kinder or more loving person than Art. In this article you see his wit and wisdom in action.

Shawn may stretch you a bit in his article dealing with atheistic claims by the famed Dr. Stephen Hawking. But he writes in a way that is easily understandable and quite practical.

Dr. René López tackles the subject of election in an excellent and concise article on a very tough subject. He shows that there is a Biblical alternative to traditional Calvinist and Arminian interpretations of election.

My article is on a supposed problem passage in John's Gospel. John 8:30-32 is really not a problem passage. Instead, it conveys the wonderful truth that freedom from sin's bondage comes experientially only when we abide in Jesus' word.

There is also a correction of a review I did in our Journal of Dr. Jody Dillow's latest book, *Final Destiny*. And we have added a Q & A section with two questions about Proverbs and parenting, and whether homosexuals can be eternally saved.

Enjoy.

# The Truth Will Set You Free (John 8:30-32)

by Bob Wilkin

### INTRODUCTION

Often this passage is misconstrued to teach that there is such a thing as people who believe in Jesus and yet are not born again because their belief does not result in perseverance. Yet the passage teaches a remarkably different message that should not be missed.

This passage shows that the Free Grace position does not promote sin. It promotes holiness. The only way to escape the clutches of sin's bondage at the practical level is by abiding in Christ and His truth. Doctrine matters.

The issue in this passage is whether those who believe in Jesus will experience freedom from sin's bondage. While we are free positionally (Romans 6), we only will be free in our experience if God's Word takes up residence (Robert Munger: *My Heart, Christ's Home*).

### THESE ARE REAL BELIEVERS

Notice that it is the Apostle John, not the new believers themselves, who says that they believed in Jesus. John says this not once, but twice. Thus if we take the text at face value, these people are born again. They are what some would call *real believers*. I don't like that expression since it tends to convey different types of faith (head vs. heart faith, Spirit-generated vs. flesh-generated, miracle faith vs. repentant faith, etc.). In any case, these people really believe.

But this is not the way that most commentators understand these verses. In fact, commentators are nearly united in belief that these are *false professors* who have a sort of faith, *miracle faith* some call it, that is not *true faith*.

D. A. Carson concludes concerning the faith in John 8:30-32:

John had already introduced the theme of fickle faith. In 2:23, the many people who believed in his name when they saw the miraculous signs Jesus was doing turn out to have untrustworthy faith (2:24-25)...Some believe in Jesus: whether or not their faith is genuine cannot be determined by the linguistic expression selected by the Evangelist. But Jesus now lays down exactly what it is



Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

that separates spurious faith from true faith, fickle disciples from genuine disciples: *If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples* [italics his]. The verb rendered 'hold' is *menō*, to abide, to remain—a theme of critical importance that returns in a concentrated way in chapter 15. *In short, perseverance is the mark of true faith* [italics added], of real disciples. A genuine believer remains in Jesus' 'word' (logos), his teaching (cf. notes on 1:1): i.e. such a person obeys it, seeks to understand it better, and finds it more precious, more controlling, precisely when other forces flatly oppose it" (*The Gospel According to John*, Eerdmans, 1991, pp. 347-48).

Leon Morris discusses several interpretations which he ultimately rejects including the following:

1. The faith in John 8:30 is real faith and that in John 8:31 is false.
2. The faith in both John 8:30 and 31 is real.
3. These are not the words of John at all, but the words of a clumsy redactor.

Morris then gives his view, which is the same as that of Carson:

It is best to think that John is speaking of men who had made an outward profession, but that in this particular case it did not go very deep. Jesus' words then are meant to drive home to formal and casual adherents something of the meaning of true discipleship. If men in any sense believe in Him it is important that they be led to see *what real faith means* [italics added] (*The Gospel According to John*, Eerdmans, 1971, p. 455).

A few sentences later Morris adds, "the test [of real faith] is 'abiding'" (p. 456).

*continued on p. 4*

If these are indeed genuine believers, contrary to what most commentators say, then how do we explain what the Lord says in the verses which immediately follow John 8:30-32? Note what Jesus goes on to say to “them”:

- 1. “You seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you” (8:37).
- 2. “You seek to kill Me” (8:40).
- 3. “You are of your father, the devil” (8:44).
- 4. “You do not believe Me” (8:45).
- 5. “Why do you not believe Me?” (8:46).
- 6. “You are not of God” (8:47).
- 7. “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me” (8:49).

First, it is clear that the people in vv 33-47 are *not* the same as those in vv 30-32. In vv 30-31, John twice says that the people to whom he was referring believed in Jesus. Yet in vv 45-46, the Lord says that the people He was speaking to did not believe Him. These must be two different groups or else John did not realize he was contradicting himself, which is impossible since this is Scripture.

Second, if we follow the third person plurals (they, them) in the entire chapter, we find that there is a larger hostile group that runs through the whole chapter (see John 8:2, 4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 28, 33, 34, 39, 41, 42, 59) and there is a smaller group in vv 30-32 that believes in Jesus. Clearly vv 30-32 are parenthetical. Verse 33 resumes the discussion with the hostile group.

Third, being a disciple of Jesus is not the same as being a believer in Jesus. In order to believe in Jesus one must simply believe in Him. In order to be a disciple of Jesus one must abide in His teachings, which includes, of course, the teaching of His Apostles. The reason why commentators stumble here is because they equate the condition of discipleship with the condition of regeneration.

Fourth, John 3:16 says that “whoever believes in Him” has everlasting life. And the Apostle John in 8:30 says that “many believed in Him.” The Greek is identical. Thus those in v 30 have everlasting life. Otherwise John again is not only sloppy, but contradicts himself, which is impossible.

Fifth, as Carson shows, this understanding of John 8:30-32 is influenced by one's understanding of John 2:23-25. If one

misinterprets John 2:23-25, he will then bring his faulty interpretation to John 8:30-32, which is simpler and clearer. This is reversing the analogy of faith.

Sixth, the experience of freedom from bondage to sin is not something all believers enjoy. To equate that freedom with the new birth is a serious error. The following sections explore more carefully this issue of freedom from sin's bondage.

“The experience of freedom from bondage to sin is not something all believers enjoy. To equate that freedom with the new birth is a serious error.”

FREEDOM (EXPERIENTIAL) FROM SIN’S BONDAGE, NOT FREEDOM FROM THE PENALTY OF SIN, IS IN VIEW

If one reads vv 30-32 without prejudice, the interpretation is clear: Those who believe in Jesus are capable of being set free, but that freedom only emerges as the believer abides in Jesus’ teachings.

This is borne out by the exchange that follows. First, the unbelieving Jews in the larger audience say, “We have never been in bondage to anyone” (v 33). Second, Jesus says, “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (v 34). Therefore, the issue in v 32 of being set free is being set free from slavery to sin.

Let’s now consider the issue of abiding in order to be set free.

FREEDOM (EXPERIENTIAL) FROM SIN’S BONDAGE REQUIRES ABIDING IN GOD’S WORD

Here and in Romans 6, we find that abiding in Jesus’ teachings is necessary in order to experience freedom from sin's bondage. In both places we find that believers are not automatically set free in their experience from sin's bondage.

In vv 31-36 the Lord touches on both kinds of freedom from sin's bondage, positional (vv 34-36, speaking to unbelievers) and experiential (vv 31-32, speaking to believers). Paul gives a detailed explanation in Romans 6.

“Whoever sins is a slave of sin” is parallel to 1 John 3:9. The born-of-God part of us never sins. Sin comes from the flesh, not the new birth. Obviously everyone sins (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). But that is not what the Lord is saying here. He is saying that there is such a thing as someone who is, in his position, free from sin and never sins as an expression of that inner self, often called the new nature.

Unbelievers need to be set free from bondage to sin in their experience. But believers need to experience that freedom. That is clear in John 8:31-32 and Romans 6:

- 1. “He who has died has been freed from sin” (Rom 6:7).
- 2. “Reckon yourself to be dead indeed to sin” (Rom 6:11).
- 3. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies” (Rom 6:12).
- 4. “Sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom 6:14).
- 5. “You were [before the new birth] slaves of sin” (Rom 6:17).
- 6. “Having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:18).
- 7. “Present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness” (Rom 6:19).
- 8. “When [before the new birth] you were slaves of sin” (Rom 6:20).
- 9. “Having been set free from sin and having become slaves of God” (Rom 6:22).

It is impossible to read Romans 6 without seeing that there are two types of freedom from sin's bondage, experiential (Rom 6:11, 12, 16, 19) and positional (Rom 6:7, 14, 17, 18, 20, 22).

And we find in both Romans 6 and John 8 that the means to this victory is by abiding in the teachings of Jesus and His Apostles. Romans 6 is all about how we view ourselves. Do we see ourselves in light of God's Word? Or do we view ourselves in light of what the world says about us?

I remember when the book *Birthright* by David Needham came out. I read it and went to Zane and told him I didn't like it because it promoted Lordship Salvation. I

“While we need to desire to please and obey God, the way in which we do that... is by realizing who we are in Christ and then allowing God’s Word to transform us.”

was shocked by Zane's reply. He told me something like this:

Lordship Salvation is not the point of the book, though it is there. The real point of the book is a fantastic point and hence this is a fantastic book. Needham argues that believers are at the core of their beings sinless. He argues that believers should not see themselves as slaves of sin, but as slaves of righteousness. Needham rightly argues that it is vital for believers to recognize who they really are. If we think we are slaves of sin, we will likely live that way and not be bothered by what we view as inevitable. If we believe we are free from sin's bondage, then we likely live free and not tolerate slavery to sin.

Remember Rom 12:1-2. From where does transformation of life come? Paul says it comes by the renewing of our minds. It is a mental issue. It comes from God's Word and from abiding in it.

This leads to a related point on how we are to live out our freedom from sin's bondage.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOT PRIMARILY A MATTER OF DETERMINATION TO OBEY

I don't recall discussing the issue of the place of the will and of determination in

the Christian life with Zane until long after I studied under him. When we were in church together at Victor Street Bible Chapel in Dallas we discussed this issue. At the time, around 1992, I thought that obedience was primarily a matter of practice (i.e., the spiritual disciplines) and desire and determination, like what is needed to finish a marathon.

Zane told me he believed that my view was essentially a legalistic view. If I just determine not to do the evil and determine instead to do the good, then I am trapped in a Romans 7 experience. Focusing on the commands produces enslavement to sin, not freedom from it.

Zane explained that while we need to desire to please God and to obey God, the way in which we do that is not by ratcheting up our determination. It is by realizing who we are in Christ and then allowing God's Word to transform us. Back then he pointed me to verses that he later championed in *Six Secrets of the Christian Life*, Rom 12:1-2 and 2 Cor 3:18.

So while a determination to obey is a fine thing in one sense, we must recognize that in itself it is actually insufficient. We need the Spirit of God to apply the Word of God to our thinking, and to renew our minds, so that the desired transformation will occur.

I found this a radical and thoroughly Biblical teaching then. And I see now that it is rooted in the Lord's teachings in John 8:30-32.

FREE GRACE THEOLOGY IS NOT ANTINOMIAN AND IT DOES TEACH ACCOUNTABILITY

Implicit in the teaching of John 8:31-32 and Romans 6 is that we are called to live in our experience as we are in our position. Believers are free from sin's bondage in our position. Thus we should reckon that it is so and live like who we really are.

Also in the background of John 8:31-32 and Roman 6 is the issue of accountability. How we live matters. We reap what we sow.

APPLICATIONS

A number of applications come to mind:

- 1. Believers should not only have assurance of everlasting life, but also assurance that we are no longer slaves of sin in our position.
- 2. Believers should have an ongoing mindset that they are slaves of righteousness and that they are no longer slaves of sin.
- 3. We should recognize that the Christian life is primarily a battle of the mind.
- 4. Realize that dedication, as valuable as it is, is an insufficient means of victory in the Christian life. Indeed, dedication without a renewed mind actually produces slavery to sin in one's experience.
- 5. Do not question your own assurance of everlasting life, or that of anyone else,

on the basis of lifestyle and works. Assurance of everlasting life is found simply in believing what the Lord has promised. It has nothing to do with our works or our freedom from sin in our experience.

6. Pray for God to give you a renewed mind and pray that He causes you to abide in God's Word.

7. Go to a church that is clear on the free gift of everlasting life and the costly yet blessed value of abiding in Christ's teachings.

## CONCLUSION

The words, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," are not magical words that refer to any and all kinds of truth and any and all kinds of freedom. They are powerful words that refer specifically to the truth the Lord Jesus and His Apostles taught and to the specific freedom from bondage to sin in one's experience.

Yes, perseverance is a condition for freedom from sin's bondage in our daily lives. It is not a condition of everlasting life. But abiding daily in Jesus' words is required for

us to experience victory in our Christian lives.

I grew up in an alcoholic family. For years I had a victim mentality. I thought I was a victim in life. Woe is me. I can't be a nice guy, a good husband, a good employer, or someone who is easy to get along with

"While I'm not what I'm going to be, I am far more than I used to be."

because I am damaged goods. But later I came to see that such thinking is unbiblical. I am not my past experiences. I have been damaged, yes. But I am a slave of righteousness. God can transform my life and He does as long as I abide in the teachings of God's Word.

I sometimes slip back into a victim mentality, but for the most part I now see myself

as a slave of righteousness. I realize that my eternal self is sinless.

While I have trouble at the emotional level viewing my life in a positive sense, I realize that I have changed a lot over the last 40 years as a result of the transforming power of God's Word in my life. While I'm not what I'm going to be, I am far more than I used to be. God has changed me for the better. *Please be patient, God is not finished with me yet*, is of course true. But I know who I am and I am not a slave of sin.

May we praise God for our freedom. We are free to live righteously. We are free to please God. We are free to live in such a way that one day soon the Lord will say to us, "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19:17).

*Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.*

# Gravity or God?

by S. C. Lazar

## EXPLAINING DESIGN AWAY

In 2010, Stephen Hawking, the famed Cambridge physicist and cultural icon, published a book (co-authored with Leonard Mlodinow) entitled *The Grand Design*, in which he purported to explain the origin of the universe without reference to God. He claims, in short, that the universe created itself. In reply, John C. Lennox, professor of Mathematics at Oxford, and lecturer at the Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics, has written *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?* With doctoral degrees from Cambridge, Oxford, and Wales, Lennox has proven to be an able apologist against the so-called "New Atheists," and this book is no exception.

## EXPERTS DON'T ALWAYS KNOW WHAT THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT

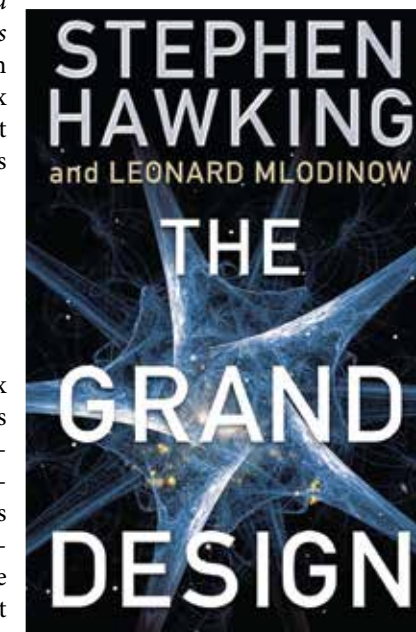
In *God and Stephen Hawking*, Lennox begins by warning his readers to always distinguish between a scientist's professional findings, and the amateurish philosophical pronouncements they sometimes make under the guise of scientific authority (Hawking's book being a vivid example of the latter). And so, Lennox does not take issue with Hawking's science *per se*, so much as the philosophical conclusions he erroneously deduces from it. A prime example of this is Hawking's astounding claim that philosophy is "dead." This is what Hawking wrote:

Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. It has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly in physics. As a result scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge (p. 18).

This pronouncement of philosophy's demise is astounding if only because Hawking seems blissfully unaware that he is thereby *making a philosophical claim!* It is, as Lennox writes, "a classic example of logical incoherence" (p. 18).

For any scientist, let alone a science superstar, to disparage philosophy on the one hand, and then at once to adopt a self-contradictory philosophical stance on the other, is not the wisest thing to do—especially at the beginning of a book that is designed to be convincing (p. 19).

And so on it goes through the rest of Lennox's critique. He repeatedly takes Hawking to task for making philosophically dubious claims. Of particular interest are the criticisms Lennox presents

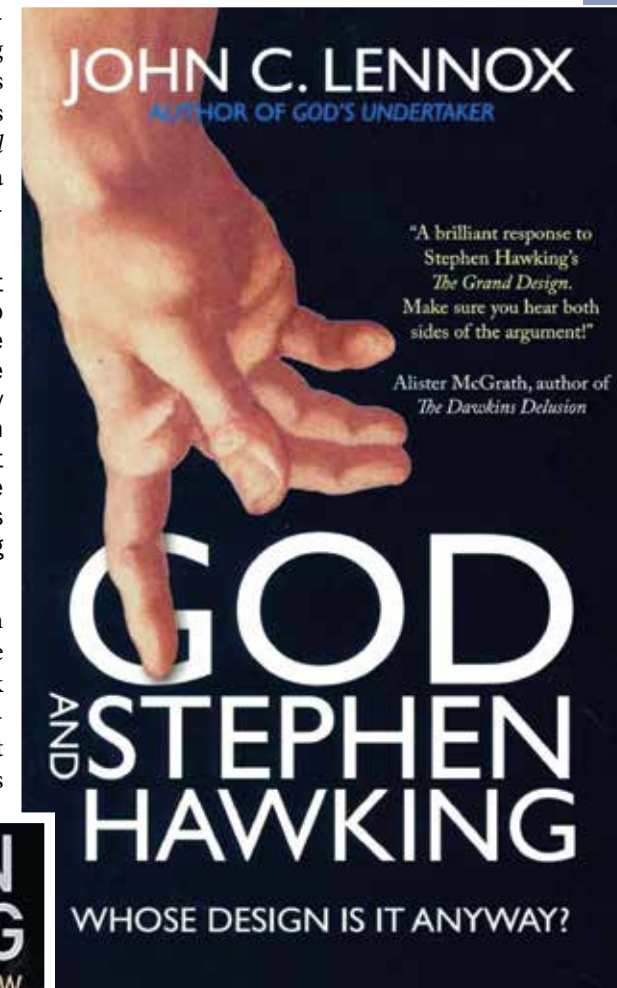


in the second and third chapters, which address the explanatory limits of physical laws, and the existence of a 'multiverse'.

## GRAVITY DOESN'T CREATE ANYTHING

In chapter 2, Lennox exposes the logical errors that underlie, and ultimately undercut, Hawking's atheistic conclusion.

The major thrust of Hawking's argument is this: "Because there is a law of gravity,



the universe can and will create itself out of nothing" (p. 29). Gravity makes it unnecessary to postulate God's existence as the ultimate cause of the universe.

But Lennox points out that this conclusion involves several logical problems. Contrary to his claim to explain the existence of the universe "out of nothing", Hawking seems to assume the existence of a great many things, including (i) the law of gravity, (ii) gravity itself, and (iii) the universe (!), thereby invoking as explanatory causes *the very things that demand explanation*. As Lennox summarizes the problems:

He [Hawking] says the universe comes from a nothing that turns out to be a something (self-contradiction number one), and then he says the universe creates itself (self-contradiction number two). But that is not all. His notion that a law of nature (gravity) explains the existence of the universe is also self-contradictory, since a law of nature, by definition, surely depends for its own existence on the prior existence of the nature it purports to describe (p. 31).

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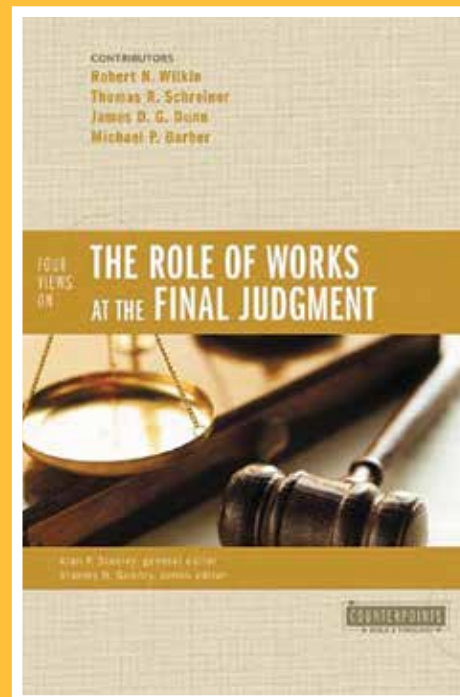
## COMING THIS SUMMER FROM ZONDERVAN!

Bob was invited to contribute a chapter to *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*. The book also includes chapters by world renowned New Testament scholars James D. G. Dunn and Thomas Schreiner. And, boy, do the sparks fly! Here's an excerpt from the publisher's description:

Through a discussion of Biblical texts, this book presents four perspectives on the role of works at the final judgment including: Robert N. Wilkin: Works will determine rewards but not salvation... Thomas R. Schreiner: Works will provide evidence that one actually has been saved... James D. G. Dunn: Works will provide the criterion by which Christ will determine the eternal destiny of his people... Michael P. Barber: Works will merit eternal life.

Please pray with us that God will use this book to reach the wider Evangelical community with the message of Free Grace!

\$17.99, 240 pgs. ISBN: 0310490332



## LAWS ARE NOT AGENTS

The mistake of appealing to *laws* to explain the existence of *things* is further compounded by Hawking's ensuing claim that theoretical physics, and M-theory in particular, actually predicts that laws will bring things into existence out of nothing:

M-theory predicts that a great many universes were created out of nothing. Their creation does not require the intervention of some supernatural being or god. Rather, these multiple universes arise naturally from physical law (p. 36).

But as Lennox replies, Hawking's appeal to the causal power of laws involves the category mistake of confusing two different kinds of entities: laws and personal agents. While laws may *describe* natural phenomena, *they do not bring them into existence*. Laws as such are without causal powers (p. 41).

For example, physical laws may explain how a jet engine *functions*, but they cannot *create* a jet engine. That requires personal agency, a *someone* to bring the *something* into existence. Understanding physical laws may illuminate how the universe functions, but they do not explain where it came from.

## UNIVERSALLY DESPERATE

In chapter 3, Lennox continues the discussion by addressing Hawking's appeal to 'multiverse' theory. In recent years, physicists have increasingly come to marvel at how the life-sustaining nature of our universe depends on certain physical constants which, if only slightly altered, would make life impossible. The precision with which the constants are set have led Christians to point to such "fine-tuning" as evidence of design, implying the existence of a



Dr. John Lennox

Designer. In reply, atheists have sought to explain away such fine-tuning by invoking the existence of a 'multiverse'.

The basic idea is this: while one finely-tuned universe is extremely unlikely, it is not as unlikely given an infinite number of

**“While laws may describe natural phenomena, they do not bring them into existence.”**

alternative universes.

Consider an analogy. If you flipped a coin only once, it would be highly unlikely for it to land on its edge, rather than on either face. But if you flipped it a trillion times, chances are it would land on its edge at least once. Similarly, however unlikely

a single life-bearing universe may be, if there are an infinite number of universes, it is not unlikely at all. In fact, given an infinite number of universes, one would *expect* one or more to be life-sustaining. Hence, a multiverse explains fine-tuning without the need for a Creator. Or does it?

In reply, Lennox suggests the multiverse hypothesis is not only dubious science, but more importantly, it only succeeds at pushing the question of origins back by one step. Rather than ask where this universe came from, proponents of the multiverse must now endeavor to explain where the multiverse came from. After all, physical laws are no more capable of creating a multiverse than they are a universe.

## SUMMARY

Lennox addresses a number of other issues, ranging from the inadequacy of Hawking's concept of God, to the perils of anti-realism in science, and includes defenses of the existence of miracles and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book is easily read in one sitting, and despite its brevity, does a fine job of answering Hawking's claims. *God and Stephen Hawking* can be recommended to anyone interested in the scientific evidence for the existence of God, the rationality of Christian belief, and the ongoing apologetic dialogue with the 'New Atheists.'

*S. C. Lazar is Director of Publications at Grace Evangelical Society.*

*\*This review was reprinted with slight revisions from the Spring 2012 issue of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society. Subscriptions are available on the order form.*

# Election Is Fair

by René López

When speaking about issues like election, predestination, and human choice, the question, "Is God fair?" inevitably comes up. For centuries, both theologians and laymen have argued whether or not God predestines people to eternal life (or both to eternal life and eternal damnation). Other questions related to this issue are:

- "Does God's election guarantee that people will come to faith in Christ and receive eternal life?"
- "How does one reconcile free choice and predestination?"
- "If God knows who will accept Him ahead of time, how do we have a choice?"

The answers that we find in Scripture are clearer than many would like to admit.

## ELECTION DOES NOT GUARANTEE JUSTIFICATION

First, one must concede that God elects some and not others, and He often does not share His rationale for doing so, especially when the predestined person is sinful (Rom 9:17-23). The following are some men that illustrate the fact God doesn't share His rationale for choosing sinful humans: Abraham, Jacob, Jeremiah, Jesus' disciples, and Paul the apostle.

Second, however, is the question of whether election guarantees justification or eternal life. Although a number of elect people come to faith and are ultimately justified (as the previously mentioned group demonstrates), Scripture never logically assumes or shows that an elect person (or nation) will *always* become justified or receive eternal life. Election and justification are not synonyms in Scripture. Hence, being *elect* does not necessarily result in being *justified*.

The Greek verbs and noun (*eklegomai*, *eklogeē* or *eklektos*) translated "to



choose," "to elect," or "election," occur a total of fifty-one times in the NT. It is neither possible nor necessary to look at all usages here. Examples can be given to

show that an elect person or nation is never guaranteed justification. In the OT, God chose the nation of Babylon to discipline Israel (see Habakkuk). Likewise, He chose King Cyrus of Persia

to help Israel and to subdue the nations (Cyrus is even called God's "shepherd" and "anointed" in Isa 44:28 and 45:1). But neither of these sovereign choices proves anything regarding individual or corporate justification.

A famous passage used to support the idea that God predestines people to

eternal life is Romans 9. Countless theologians and pastors use this chapter to prove the predestination of individuals based on God's choice of Jacob over Esau. But this

could not be further from Paul's point.

Interpretive evidence found in the immediate and overall context in chapters 9–11 shows otherwise. We must remember that these chapters are contextually

addressed to respond to the Jewish question of why God chose to bless the Gentiles and to abandon Israel, not how God is predestining anyone to eternal life (see 9:24-26; 10:19-21; 11:11-36). Thus, Paul's purpose for writing chapters 9–11 is twofold: (1) To vindicate God for temporarily excluding national Israel from His present

*continued on p. 10*



plan in light of His promises to the church in 8:28-39, and (2) To curb the arrogance of Gentiles who have received mercy, since Israel in the future will again be grafted into God's plan. Paul's answer covers God's dealing with Israel's past (Rom 9:1-29), present (Rom 9:30–10:21), and future (Romans 11).

Having the context in mind helps us see why God chose Jacob over Esau. The issue here is God's sovereign choice to make and bless one nation above another: Jacob (representing Israel) over Esau (representing the Edomite Gentiles). But this choice does not guarantee that everyone belonging to a certain group will be justified. Clearly, all Israelites are not heaven-bound and neither are all Gentiles. This choice, nevertheless, proves God's right to choose, which was not influenced by anyone. Hence, before the children were even born, or had done any good or evil, God chose. God makes this clear by going against the cultural norm of the day where the younger would serve the older. Instead, His sovereign choice in the matter was that, "*The older shall serve the younger*" (Gen 25:23). Hence, the Edomite descendants of Esau served the Israelite descendants of Jacob (1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:14; 1 Kgs 11:15-16; 22:47). Through God's choice, Jacob receives the blessing. Although individuals are free to choose or reject God, being sinful they reject Him (Rom 3:10-12, 23), unless God reaches out to them first. But that was an issue already addressed by Paul in the wrath, condemnation, and justification section of Rom 1:18–4:25, not here. Although God elects Israel and rigorously pursues them by grace, He does not coerce them to believe in the Messiah who guarantees them eternal life (which is the reason they found themselves in this predicament). Individuals have an option to receive or reject Jesus Christ for eternal life, or else how could anyone make sense of Paul's point regarding Israel in Rom 9:33–10:4?

### GOD ELECTS FOR SERVICE, NOT SALVATION

Although God secures the eternal destiny of those within the elect who believe (OT saints believed in the coming Messiah for eternal life), the main point here is a sovereign choice to separate a group of people for His service, in order that they preach justification and bring about the salvation of the nations (Rom 11:25-36).

Hence, God's choice of Jacob (Israel) over Esau (Edom) represents national election, as seen in Mal 1:2-3, "*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.*" The term *hated* here is an idiom understood as *loving less* (Gen 29:30-31; Matt 6:24; Luke 14:26; John 12:25). The two concepts of *love* and *hate* here are not to be viewed as feelings but a decision God took to bestow His mercy on Jacob's, not Esau's, descendants. Paul's point here is to show that God remained true to His electing purpose in passing judgment on Esau's descendants, the Edomites, who rightly deserved it. Instead, He had mercy on Jacob's descendants, the

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Israelites, who also rightly deserved judgment, but received grace (unmerited favor). Thus, since God's electing purposes and promises to Israel (Rom 9:6b) cannot fail, this should put their worries to rest, which was the point that gave rise to this entire section (Romans 9–11).

Also, as a result of God choosing Isaac over Ishmael (Rom 9:7-9), and then choosing Jacob over Esau (vv 10-13), the question of God's fairness naturally arises: *Is there unrighteousness with God?* Paul strongly replies: Certainly not! (cf. Rom 3:4; 6:1). The issue here is not God's justice but His sovereign choice to have mercy on those He elects to serve Him in some specific task. He has mercy on whomever He wills, as He indicated to Moses (Exod 33:19). Therefore, it really does not depend on man's conduct (i.e., "not of him who wills, nor of him who runs"), but is solely based on God who shows mercy. God is not unfair to choose one over another since His choice is based strictly on mercy; rather, we should wonder

why God chooses *anyone* to serve Him (since He doesn't need anyone). Election is clearly unto service for Him. In fact, Israel was chosen to call others (Gentile nations) to God's blessings (Gen 12:3; 18:18-19; Exod 9:14, 16, 29; Ps 72:17; Jer 4:2), which they failed to do, and therefore incurred God's curses (Deut 28:15–29:28).

### GOD ELECTS TO CALL OTHERS TO BLESSINGS

We must always keep in mind that contextually God's choice to have mercy on one nation over another has nothing to do with selecting individuals to justification, but to call others to blessings. Romans 9 clearly refers to earthly privileges and promised blessings that include the preaching of the message of eternal life. God's bypassing of Ishmael and Esau does not mean they could not be eternally saved. However, those that form part of spiritual Israel, who inherit the promises of God (cf. 9:5), are the elect that also place their faith in Christ and who become blessed and have the responsibility to call others to these blessings. Even though Romans 9–11 refers to the historical destiny of different nations and not individual salvation, Paul is obviously concerned for every Israelite's justification (Rom 2:1–4:25; 9:1-6, 30-33; 10:1-4; 11:26-27). However, the issue here is calling a nation to blessings in order to share those blessings with others. But since they failed, God saw fit to elect another group called the Church (composed largely of Gentiles) to accomplish this task (Rom 11:11-25). Fortunately for Israel, because God is gracious He will again return to them and fulfill His promises and plans (Rom 11:23-32). How incredible is God (Rom 11:33-36)?

So is God fair? Absolutely. In fact, He is the standard by which we measure fairness. However, the content of Romans 9–11 is not concerned with His fairness in terms of eternal destinies of individuals, but with the amazing grace and mercy He has shown in choosing us to serve Him.

*Dr. René López teaches at Liberty University and Dallas Theological Seminary.*

# Are You a Saint or an Ain't?

by Art Farstad

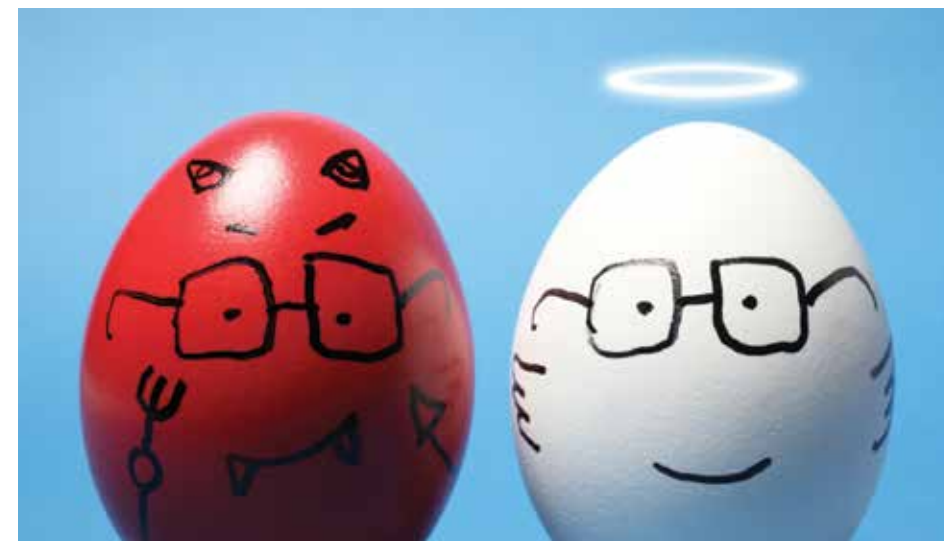
Many well-meaning Christians are not well taught on this supremely important and practical subject. A common phrase heard in Christendom (and sadly even by supposedly evangelical Christians) is "I'm a *Christian*, but I'm no *saint*." The idea is that while we can expect a person to go to church, give money, and keep away from the grosser sins, don't expect too much more.

Actually, if you're not a *saint*, you're not *saved*! Don't misunderstand this: we are not saying that if you're not very *saintly* you're not saved.

First Corinthians is addressed to the church "at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor 1:2). Yet just read the epistle! The Corinthians were proud, divisive, litigious, careless and selfish at the Lord's Supper and *agape* (love feast), and permissive of gross sin (incest) in one of the believers.<sup>1</sup>

Why would Paul call the Corinthians "saints" if they were so unsaintly? The answer lies in the different usages of the root words that are used for *sanctification* in both Testaments.

English, unfortunately for us, used Anglo-Saxon-based words (*holy*, *holiness*) and Latin-based (*sanctify*, *sanctification*, *saint*, *saintly*) to translate the same cluster of words in the original. In the OT the words are from the Semitic root *qdsh*. In



the NT they translate words with the *hagi-root*.<sup>2</sup> The basic meaning of all these words is the same: "to set apart for a special use." In contexts of "sanctification", this will be for a good use, and one for God's will and pleasure.<sup>3</sup>

Sanctification involves a believer's conduct and character. It is both *negative* and *positive*.

Too many conservative Christians accentuate the negative, as in the somewhat light-hearted (but often accurate) summary of some people's idea of sanctification: "I don't drink, don't smoke, don't chew, or run with those who do."

To be sure, there is a strong negative side to the doctrine. We are to be separated or set apart from evil. First Thessalonians 4:3 speaks of progressive sanctification as having to do with turning away from immorality—so rampant in today's culture, as it was in the days when the NT was written.

However, we should not merely become set apart *from evil*, but we should be positively set apart and dedicated *to God*. In OT times a person could sanctify his house (Lev 27:14), part of his field (Lev 27:16), or his firstborn (Num 8:17). If OT believers could do so, surely we NT believers should be able to set apart our homes, cars, and possessions, for God's use! We can dedicate

our children through prayer and a consistent example. In the final analysis, though, they will have to consecrate their own lives to Christ's holy service.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> There is no suggestion that the incestuous man was unsaved, but rather that he might be removed in death if he didn't change his ways.

<sup>2</sup> As in our English derivative, *hagiography* (a biography of a saint). This double

set of root words needlessly complicates things, although giving a richer vocabulary than possessed by any other tongue.

<sup>3</sup> That the word doesn't always mean "*make saintly*" is clear from the fact that the Hebrew root *qdsh* is used for those set aside to be cult prostitutes, including sodomites!

*Dr. Art Farstad was a Bible scholar, linguist, the editor of the New King James Version of the Bible, and the first*

*editor of our Journal. He went to be with the Lord on 9/1/1998.*

*\*Editor's Note: This article originally ran in our newsletter 20 years ago (May/June 1993). It is an excerpt from "We Believe in: Sanctification," JOTGES (Autumn 1992).*

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## Correction Concerning Jody Dillow's New Book, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*

By Bob Wilkin

In the Autumn 2012 issue of our journal, I favorably reviewed Dr. Dillow's new book. However, in doing so, I showed that Rom 3:23 is still true of me. I was a false witness, albeit unwittingly.

In my review, I mentioned three things with which some *JOTGES* readers would not agree: his views on repentance, kingdom entrance, and Gehenna. I misrepresented his view on both kingdom entrance and Gehenna.

What I suggested is that Jody argued that unfaithful believers will miss the Millennium and that Gehenna refers to temporal judgment. Neither of those suggestions

is true. I have revised the review and will be publishing the entire corrected review online and in our Spring 2013 issue of the journal. Here, however, is the part of my revised review that deals with Jody's view of kingdom entrance and Gehenna:

**Entering the kingdom.** Dillow repeatedly suggests that entering the kingdom does not refer to entering the kingdom *per se*—since he believes that even faithless believers will indeed enter the kingdom (see, for example, pp. 277-78), but to *richly* enter the kingdom as one who will rule with Christ (e.g., pp. 100, 139, 241-64, 335, 882). It may even refer to entering into a rich experience of life now (pp. 252-55), which in his view is essentially the same as entering into a kingdom way of living here and now (pp. 255-56). This is how he understands Matt 5:20, Matt 7:21-23, the rich young ruler's interaction with Jesus, and many other texts as well. While such a view is certainly not inconsistent with the Free Grace view, it is hard for this reviewer to see why entering the kingdom does not simply refer to entering the kingdom. When a *rich entrance* to the kingdom is in view, it can be directly stated as

in 2 Pet 1:10-11. In addition, the alternate Free Grace understandings of texts like those mentioned above seem more consistent with the context (c.f. Matt 7:15-20 with Matt 7:21-23).

**Gehenna.** Dillow suggests that Gehenna does not refer to Hades or the lake of fire. He suggests that it has three different references: to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (pp. 867-70), to the judgment of faithless believers either at the Bema or as temporal judgment in this life (pp. 870-77), or as a metaphor for burning internal sinful desires (pp. 877-79). However, I do not find any single piece of evidence cited to be a compelling argument that Gehenna does not refer to Hades or the lake of fire. But there is tremendous value in the various books and articles cited and I do believe that more work is needed on this important word, which is only found in the Synoptic Gospels (11 times) and in James 3:6.

I have apologized to Jody and he has graciously accepted. I also apologize to you, the readers. Hopefully even this mistake will turn out for good, causing more people to read his book, which is available for purchase from our store.

## GES Speakers Available

Do your church members have questions about assurance? Are they curious about the Millennium or need clarity in doing evangelism? Then invite a Free Grace speaker to your Church or conference!

**Bob Wilkin** (PhD, DTS) is our Executive Director.

**Ken Yates** (DMin, Erskine; ThM, PhD Cand., DTS) was a chaplain in the Army for 20 years, and retired as a Lt. Col. He is free to travel on the East Coast.

**Shawn Lazar** (BTh, McGill; MA, PhD Cand., VU Amsterdam) is the Director of Publications at GES and is free to travel all over the US and Canada.

If you would like Bob, Ken, or Shawn to speak at your church, please call us at 940-270-8827 or email [bethany@faithalone.org](mailto:bethany@faithalone.org).



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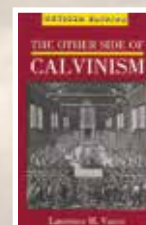
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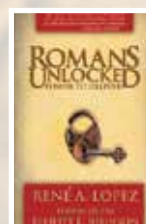
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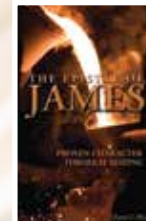
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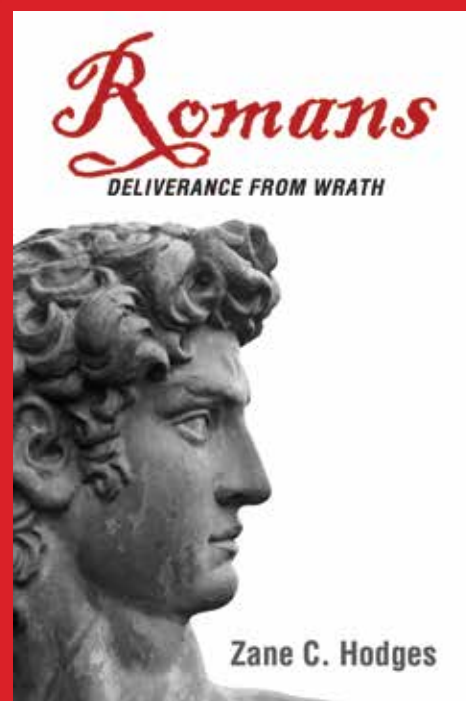
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