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DIVORCE: ARE WE MISSING THE MAIN POINT?

(Mark 10:11)



PLUS ROMANS 2 / TIPS FOR SEMINARY STUDENTS / THE TERM "FREE GRACE" / SPIRITUAL GPS /
TESTIMONIES / TOP 5 REASONS TO VISIT ISRAEL / HOSPITALITY / NETFLIX / MORE!

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Robert N. Wilkin, Ph.D.

EDITOR AND DESIGNER
Shawn Lazar

OFFICE MANAGER
Bethany Taylor

CIRCULATION
Mark “Brohawk” Gray

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FROM THE EDITOR

To have 20/20 eyesight is to see at 20 feet what the average person sees from 20 feet. My physical eyesight is a bit north of 20/500. That means that, without glasses, I see at 20 feet what the average person sees about two football fields away. But with glasses, I'm seeing 20/25, meaning I see at 20 feet what the average person sees at 25 feet. Not too bad.

The year 2020 should remind us that our *spiritual vision* is very important. Our progress in the Christian life, in sanctification, depends on us being able to see clearly what God is saying in His Word (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 3:18).

Sadly, there are people who regularly attend church who are effectively spiritually blind. Remember that the Lord Jesus spoke of the legalistic teachers in Israel as “the blind leading the blind” (Matt 15:14; Luke 6:39). While unbelievers can correctly understand and apply some aspects of God’s Word, they miss the free gift of everlasting life, the Biblical way to please God, the doctrine of eternal rewards, and the big picture in the Bible.


I remember once having a discussion with a pastor friend we’ll call Rudy. We had each heard the other preach on numerous occasions. I was urging Rudy to do more verse-by-verse Bible teaching, like J. Vernon McGee. I liked his use of illustrations, but I felt that he spent too little time in the actual text. Rudy was urging me to spend more time with illustrations and especially with applications.

I explained to Rudy that I thought one of the major applications of most passages in the Bible is to believe it and incorporate it in our worldview. Think of Ephesians. It has three whole chapters on application (Ephesians 4-6). But before that it has three whole chapters on doctrine (Ephesians 1-3). The main applications of any passage in Ephesians 1-3 is to believe it and have it become part of our mind-set.



20/20

Bob Wilkin, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

We at GES are committed to teaching God’s Word clearly. We want our readers and listeners to improve their spiritual eyesight. 20/20 is a nice goal. It would be good to have the spiritual vision of an average spiritual believer (1 Cor 2:14-16). However, did you know it is possible to see better than 20/20? Some have 20/15 or even 20/10 vision. The person with 20/10 vision sees at 20 feet what the average person sees at 10 feet. The famed hitter Ted Williams was reputed to have 20/5 vision! As believers, our spiritual eyesight should become better the longer we walk with the Lord. GES is here to help you improve your spiritual vision. 

Tips for Prospective Seminary Students

BY BOB WILKIN

Fourteen years ago, I taught a discipleship group for seminarians. I sought to help them avoid some of the pitfalls of seminary education. In this article I will share some of the tips I gave to those I was mentoring. These tips apply to both seminary students and Bible college students.

Historically conservative seminaries and Bible colleges have been changing over the years. In this article I will point out some of the teachings that come out of these schools and that are, in my opinion, detrimental.

LORDSHIP SALVATION

Lots of schools which were formerly Free Grace or at least Free Grace friendly now say that to be born again one must turn from his sins and submit his life to the Lord Jesus Christ, making a decision to follow

and serve Him. That teaching is inconsistent with John 3:16 and over one hundred verses in the Bible.

FINAL SALVATION

When I was in seminary, I was taught that our salvation was final the very moment we believed in Christ for everlasting life. Once saved, always saved. Today it is increasingly common, especially among Calvinist professors, to speak of *initial salvation*, which is by faith alone, and *final salvation*, which is by works. You won't get final salvation unless you persevere in *The Race Set Before Us* (cf., the book by Schreiner and Caneday). That teaching is part works salvation and part Lordship Salvation. It is very dangerous since it denies the promise to the believer of

everlasting life that can never be lost.

GIST AND CORE TRUTH

The doctrine of inerrancy has been gradually changing over the past thirty years. Today many leading conservative schools teach that some of the details of Jesus' teaching were never intended to be taken as the actual words of Jesus. Instead, what the Gospel writers have given us is the gist of His teachings, the core of His instruction. The main points are accurately presented. But many of the fine details are not meant to be taken as something Jesus said. The Gospel writers, in this view, altered what Jesus said in order to express their theology. This view has gained a lot of support among students. It makes it easy to handle discrepancies between



the gospels. They can be swept away since they are not part of the core teaching. The gist is right, even if some details are not. The danger, of course, is that the Bible no longer is fully accurate. Now we need people with special theological training to tell us what was said and what was changed by the Gospel writers.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Back in the day, we did not have groups and classes on what is now called *spiritual formation*. We were taught back then that God's Word would renew our minds and thereby we would be transformed (Rom 12:1-2). Today, however, theology students are often required to participate in spiritual formation, which is the application of contemplative spirituality. Many spiritual practices not taught or commanded in the Bible are being passed down to the next generation of Christian leaders. In my opinion, this is very dangerous. It is bringing in the practices of ancient Catholic mystics and of Eastern religions.

POETIC HISTORY

Is the creation account history? The flood? According to many leading conservative Bible scholars today, the answer is, it is not history in the general sense, but it is history in a specialized sense. They call this specialized type of historical reporting *poetic history*. What this means is that details in the creation account are not necessarily meant to be taken

literally. What is surely being taught in Genesis 1-2 is *that God created*. Those chapters are not trying to tell us the details like whether creation occurred over six days or six million years, whether Adam was created from dust, whether Eve was created from Adam's rib, whether there was a talking serpent, and whether there was forbidden fruit. Some conservative scholars would see some or many of those things as being historically accurate. But others would say that none of those details are meant to be taken literally. What most current conservative scholars agree upon, however, is that we should not conclude that every detail in the creation account is literal history. The same with the flood. While Genesis 6-9 presents a worldwide flood, many conservative scholars believe that it was a local flood. The modified view of inerrancy in conservative schools today is of great concern to me.

CHANGES IN DISPENSATIONALISM

Even at historically Dispensational schools, Dispensationalism is often not being taught. Instead, a modified form of Dispensationalism called *progressive dispensationalism* is being taught. In this view Jesus is currently ruling as the Davidic King in a sense. The idea of *already, not yet* is prominent. The kingdom is already here. Yet the kingdom is not yet here. Of course, those two ideas are contradictory. Both can't be true, at least not in the same sense. This shift in the teaching

of Dispensationalism at many conservative schools is something incoming students must consider. In many cases they will need to study classic Dispensationalism on their own since they won't be studying it in class.

NEW FORMS OF PREACHING

It used to be that conservative schools for the most part taught verse-by-verse Bible preaching. Today the shift is toward finding a core truth in a passage and preaching that core truth with little attention to the words of the passage. In the place of walking through the passage, the preacher finds clever ways to communicate the core idea. This includes illustrations, jokes, skits, songs, and short video clips. A great sermon today is one that captures the attention of the audience, keeps them interested, and conveys the core truth. Unfortunately, even people in Bible churches today can be uninformed about the actual meaning of key Bible verses. This all starts in seminaries and Bible colleges where homiletics is being taught.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Forty years ago, at my alma mater when I was there, women were not allowed in the Master of Theology program. I do not think that it is inherently wrong for women to earn Th.M. or even Ph.D. degrees. I have no issue with women teaching in Bible colleges and seminaries since those are not churches. I see no prohibition of women

working in parachurch groups, writing books, or teaching men and women in Bible studies or conferences. The NT merely prohibits women teaching in the meeting of the local church (or serving as elders in the local church). However, more and more conservative theological schools are graduating women who are becoming senior pastors and elders. Male leadership in local churches is beginning to wane. Part of the reason is what is being taught in conservative theological schools.

LET THE BUYER BEWARE

Though we often don't think of education as something we purchase, it is indeed one of the greatest purchases a young person can make. The average college graduate in 2018 in the U.S. has a student debt of \$38,000. The average debt for those obtaining a degree from graduate school (like seminary) is an additional \$57,600. That means that someone getting a college degree and then a master's degree from a seminary likely has a total debt of \$100,000. That is more than a young person will spend on any other purchase in their lifetime, other than buying a home. Yet often students enter theological studies as though they were not purchasing something. Bible college and seminary students should take great care to learn precisely what it is their prospective school is teaching. Better yet, they should have five or ten *prospective schools* and compare them all. One mistake I see is students who assume

that because a school was great fifty years ago, it must still be great today. Schools change. I remember one of my historical theology professors in seminary who said that all theological schools eventually fall away from the fundamentals of the faith. His hope was that our school would avoid such departure for a long time. That is a good desire and prayer request

“I’ve met people who think that going for higher Christian education is just too risky. I understand the concern. However, I think it is worth the risk in most cases.”

for each school. I pray that for my alma mater. Prospective students ought to put in a lot of study as to what their leading schools are teaching, especially on the types of issues I mention in this article.

It is hard for someone to go to a liberal school to receive his or her doctorate and yet not become less conservative in the process. Many conservative schools want professors who have degrees from the leading theological schools in the world. But those leading schools are not conservative.

Everything I've said in this article applies to doctoral work as well. Seminary graduates

going on for doctoral work should take great care in selecting the school they will attend. I naively thought that I could go to any school for doctoral work and I would have remained conservative. I wanted to go to one of the leading schools in Europe for my Ph.D. Fortunately, my wife, Sharon, told me that we lived in Dallas and right here at home was a great school with a great doctoral program. I ended up going to a conservative school for my Ph.D. I thank God, and my wife, that I did.

I've met people who think that going for higher Christian education is just too risky. I understand the concern. However, I think it is worth the risk in most cases. Some of the schools out there are still truly conservative. And even in schools that are not conservative, it is possible for a student to reject teaching that is inaccurate, especially if the student is involved in distance education, an increasingly popular option today. ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX with his wife of 43 years,

Sharon. His latest book is Turn and Live: The Power of Repentance.

Divorce: Are We Missing the Main Point? (Mark 10:11)

By Ken Yates

If you ask ten theologians their views on divorce and remarriage, you will get eleven different answers. I have engaged in many of these discussions myself. One verse included in all these debates is Mark 10:11. The Lord says, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.”

While this is a straightforward statement, it leaves us with a number of questions. In Mark, the Lord does not mention that adultery is an exception. In fact, there are no exceptions given in Mark 10. But in Matthew, the Lord says that adultery is an exception (Matt 5:32; 19:9). Would the reader of Mark simply realize that if a woman commits adultery, her husband can divorce her?

And what about other exceptions? Paul will say later (1 Corinthians 7) that the Lord did not deal with the issue of a believer who is married to an unbeliever, and the unbeliever wants a divorce. What about a woman who is married to a man who beats her? How about a spouse that abuses his or her children? What about desertion? Are any of these and other situations grounds for

divorce? If any of these exceptions exist, can the divorced believer remarry?

For centuries Christians have discussed Mark 10:11 to address these issues. Is the Lord saying that there are no grounds for divorce and remarriage? Or, are there loopholes? When can we justify divorcing our spouses?

In the context of Mark, I think when we ask these questions, we are missing the main point.

CONTEXT

Mark 8–10 is a long section in Mark that deals with discipleship. In it the Lord is teaching the disciples what kind of believer will be great in the kingdom of God. What the Lord teaches the disciples is hard for them to understand.

The section begins by the Lord telling the disciples they must lay down their lives to be His disciples (8:34-38). To be great means to be a servant (9:35, 37). There are rewards for serving others (9:41). Many who think they are first will be last, and many who think they are last will be first (10:31). Whichever of the disciples wants to be first must become the slave of all (10:44). We



could summarize this teaching by saying that if a believer wants to be great in the kingdom of God, he or she must humbly lay down his or her life in serving others.

We need to keep in mind that the Lord's teaching on divorce occurs right in the middle of this instruction about being great in the kingdom.

THE DISCIPLES WERE CLUELES

All of this teaching on greatness in the kingdom of God goes against what the disciples thought. When Jesus says He will set the example of being a servant by dying on the cross, Peter rebukes Him (8:32). They did not understand what Jesus was teaching them (9:32). They argued about which one of them was the greatest (9:34). They didn't understand what Jesus was saying about divorce (10:10). They thought they could be great without being servants (10:37).

Mark makes it clear that the disciples were not servants of others. Instead of being humble, they looked down on those they deemed unimportant.

THE DISCIPLES WERE NOT SERVANTS

In this section in Mark, we see how the disciples treated others. Probably because three of them were chosen by Christ to see the Transfiguration, some had a big head, and the others resented the fact that they weren't chosen. As a result, there was an argument about who was the greatest (9:34). Immediately after this argument, John tells the Lord that the disciples had told a guy ministering in the name of the Lord to stop doing so because he was not one of the Twelve. This guy was not a part of the "in" crowd (9:38).

When parents brought their children to be blessed by the Lord, the disciples thought these children were not nearly important enough to bother Him. They did their best to keep these children away from the Lord (10:13). When an important man wanted to approach the Lord, they had the opposite reaction. The disciples were amazed that this rich man was not more warmly received by Him (10:17-26).

Clearly, the disciples were men influenced by their backgrounds. Rich and influential men were worthy of their attention. Unimportant people,

“Jesus teaches the disciples that they should not be looking for acceptable reasons for getting rid of a wife. God meant for the marriage between a man and woman to last forever.”

such as children and outsiders, were not on their radar. The disciples did not see any need to serve such unworthies. This attitude was even affecting how they saw each other.

It seems that Jesus’ teaching on divorce gives us another example of how the disciples saw others.

WHAT ABOUT OUR WIVES?

As we see how the disciples failed in humbly serving others, we are told that Jesus taught them about divorcing their wives. The teaching arises when the Pharisees ask Him if it is okay to divorce a wife (10:2). Like children, women were seen as second-class citizens in that culture.

It is well-known that there were two schools of thought among the Jews. One was conservative, the other liberal. These schools argued over what were legitimate reasons for ridding oneself of a wife, according to the Law of Moses.

The Lord responds that God’s design from the beginning was that marriage would last for life. To break God’s design by divorcing your wife and marrying another woman would be to commit adultery.

We can see the importance that the Lord placed on marriage. We live in a day when marriage is not as honored as it should be. Divorce and remarriage are rampant, and we do well to remind ourselves of what the Lord says here in Mark 10.

However, it seems that the teaching of the Lord here is almost always used to answer the question the Pharisees asked. They wanted to know when it was okay to divorce a wife. They wanted to know what loophole they could go through if they wanted to get rid of her. Sometimes, it appears we want to know the same thing. While this is a practical concern, we might be missing the main point.

SERVE YOUR WIFE

I would suggest that the issue of wives in Jesus’ teaching in Mark 10 is related to what He is teaching the disciples about humbly serving others. They thought children were not as important as they were. They thought the same thing about those who were outside their group. Some of them even thought they were better than the other disciples. Societal standards determined who was worthy of their time and effort.

The Pharisees certainly saw wives as less than men. The disciples, being products of the society in which they lived, shared that view. Men could certainly divorce their wives. The only question was what were the reasons the Law would allow?

Jesus teaches the disciples that they should not be looking for acceptable reasons for getting rid of a wife. God meant for the marriage between a man and woman to last forever.

In the context of Mark 8-10, the message seems clear. Since God meant for marriage to last forever, men should humbly serve their wives. Like children and those outside of their group, they are not to be looked down on or seen as less important. If we are looking for the answer to when we can divorce our wives, we are asking the wrong question. We should be asking the main question: how can we serve our spouses? After all, that is what pleasing the Lord and greatness are all about. ■



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.

Bye Bye Netflix

By Shawn Lazar

Since having kids, my wife and I have time to watch maybe one show a night. It often takes two or three nights to finish a movie. But over the last four or five years, finding things to watch has become increasingly difficult. We've had to tune out more and more shows because of their increasingly sexualized content—especially LGBTQ content, even in shows that are supposed to be “family-friendly.” Have you noticed that trend, too?

If so, it's not your imagination!

I've read that GLAAD, the leading organization advocating for homosexual issues, is aiming to have 20% of all characters on TV be LGBTQ by 2025. And Hollywood is bending over backwards to make it happen.

A while ago, Abby and I made the decision that once a show starts pushing an LGBTQ storyline, we stop watching. We probably should have made the same decision over other issues, but this is the one that really stung our consciences. As a result, we've had to stop watching a lot of programs!

Now, we don't watch a whole lot of TV. Since getting married in 2005, I don't think Abby and I have had cable for more than a few months. Instead, over time, we've opted to subscribe to Hulu, Netflix, and Amazon Prime where we could pick specific shows to watch at our convenience. But that's getting tougher.

Our kids watch Netflix. As Netflix starts producing more and more of their own material, the LGBTQ stuff is seeping into everything. Or rather, they're intentionally putting it into everything so that it's becoming unavoidable.

So last month we decided to cancel Netflix. However, I didn't quite get around to doing it...



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until today. I found out that Netflix was showing a Brazilian movie depicting a *gay Jesus*.

That's too much.

Part of the difficulty here is that we live in a mixed society, with people we don't agree with. We have to find a way of living together. But there are limits. I'm not going to give money to a company that openly attacks my Lord and Savior.

We're looking at alternatives, such as PureFlix or VidAngel.


I've been thinking more and more about what the Biblical doctrine of separation is, how it should be applied in the church, and how it should be applied in the modern world. It is clearer to me how it applies to our heart's desires and intentions. It is not as clear to me how it should apply to how we relate to wider society.

I'm looking at how the Anabaptists do it.

I'm looking at how both old and modern Fundamentalists do it.

I'm still thinking, learning, and praying about it.

Paul said, “Be not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). And James said that pure religion involves keeping “oneself unspotted from the world” (Jas 1:27). If Christians keep watching this kind of stuff, the spots will keep forming.

In the meantime, #byebyenetflix; it's just not worth it. 

Shawn Lazar lives in Denton, TX, with his wife Abby and their three children.



Romans 2

A Concise Commentary

By Zane Hodges, edited by Bob Wilkin

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THIS MANIFESTATION [2:1-5]

2:1. Paul now addresses himself to a would-be judge (**you who pass judgment**). He is **without a defense** for himself because he does the same things which he judges.

Paul draws on the vices found in 1:24-32. He certainly does not mean that the would-be judge does every sin in that catalogue. He means that he is guilty of some of what he condemns.

The description in 1:18-32 is not merely a denunciation of those who are regarded as deeply depraved. On the contrary, *Paul will not allow any claim to spiritual superiority* no matter from whom it comes. Paul was not describing *unique cases* of depravity, but the *universal condition* of mankind (cf. Rom 3:10).

2:2. In fact, the only thing a man really demonstrates by his self-righteous judgment of others is that he has an awareness of God's standards. The knowledge of **God's judgment** is not confined to Israel. The moralist in every race attests mankind's awareness of this solemn reality.

The point is that the critique of the moralist exposes an awareness of the divine standard.

If the moralist finds the doers of these evils "deserving of death" (1:32), his conclusion simply confirms that **God's judgment...corresponds to truth**, i.e., it is truly deserved.

The Apostle is not talking here about *eschatological judgment*. Paul is continuing to discuss temporal judgment (1:18). Indeed, the words, "although they know God's righteous standard, that people who do such things are worthy of death" (1:32), make clear that Paul's focus on God's temporal displeasure with sin (that can lead to death) continues from chap. 1 into chap. 2. Moralists can see the temporal judgments that God visits on sinners and can acknowledge their justness.

2:3-4. The moralist is trapped. Since he condemns the sin around him and justifies the "wrath" inflicted on it, how can he himself hope to **escape God's judgment**? After all, Paul's list of vices (1:24-32, esp. vv 28-32) includes the failures of the moralist himself. If he justifies, explicitly or implicitly, *God's judgment* on others, should he not anticipate *God's judgment* on himself?

Just because judgment has not reached *him* yet, does he in fact despise this delay in experiencing consequences as unworthy of his respect? Rather



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does not this display of God's **kindness and tolerance and longsuffering** reveal God's desire that the moralist himself should come **to repentance**? Doesn't he realize that **God's kind behavior** toward him is His way of drawing the moralist *to repentance*?

The idea of repentance here, of course, refers to the need the moralist has to turn away from his own sins to avoid the "wrath" that God exercises against such things (1:18). It has nothing to do with Paul's doctrine of justification. Indeed, this reference to repentance is the only one in the entire book of Romans. Paul cannot be correctly understood when he is read, as many do today, as though he reflected the thinking of contemporary Judaism. On the contrary, his gospel came directly "through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12).

2:5. The unrepentant (*ametanoēton*) moralist is storing up wrath **in a day of wrath**. That does not refer to some future day of eschatological wrath. Instead it refers to the very day in which the moralist now lives since *this is the day* when "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven" (1:18).

Thus the moralist refuses to come to repentance at the very time when God's *wrathfully manifested judgment* is evident all around him. His hardness and his *unrepentant heart* leave him woefully exposed to **the righteous judgment of God**, which the moralist not only ignores, but which he is actually **storing up...against himself**.

The fundamental truth expressed in this concluded unit (1:18–2:5) is that all men, the moralist included, are subject to God's wrath as a result of their sinful behavior. This wrath is not eschatological, but a distressing present reality.

HUMANITY FACES GOD'S IMPARTIAL JUDGMENT (2:6–3:20)

The Nature of God's Judgment (2:6–16)

2:6. The fundamental principle stated here is simple: God **will repay each person according to his works** (i.e., he gets what he deserves). He deals fairly with humanity. The following verses elaborate this basic concept. Mankind can expect to receive whatever those *works* may merit.

2:7. For the first time, Paul refers to **eternal life**. If God judges men *here and now* by means of His wrath, He obviously also determines man's *future* destiny. God will certainly give *eternal life* to any who deserve it **by persisting in good work**.

Unfortunately, however, no one does this (Rom 3:10, 12). Yet the principle remains true that, if there were someone who *did* do good persistently (i.e., perfectly) and who *was* indeed righteous, God would give him eternal life because of that.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught this basic truth (Luke 10:25-28, see esp. "do this and you will live").

The words of Paul in this verse have been absurdly misunderstood as stating a real possibility, contra 3:19-20. What we have here is a statement of *principle*, not of *fact*. In principle, God rewards complete obedience to His law with *eternal life*, but in practice no one ever acquires it that way.

2:8-9. But suppose human beings *do not do* what Paul has described in v 7 (so 1:18-2:6)? If "eternal life" awaits those who persist in "good work," **anger and wrath** are the portion of those whose character is different.

Paul now describes such people as **those who are selfish and disobey the truth, but obey unrighteousness instead**. This description clearly echoes 1:18-32.

Furthermore, Paul wants to make it clear here (for the first time in the epistle) that God's wrath is directed toward such people whether they are Jew or Greek (= Gentile). Indeed, even in the matter of wrath (contrast 1:16), the Jew has priority so that God's manifested displeasure is **for the Jew first**. Here Paul no doubt thinks of his own race in its present condition of servitude and recognizes in them the selfish character that invites divine judgment (cf. 1 Thess 2:15-16).

With good rhetorical effect, Paul here accumulates terms that serve to elaborate and underline his original word *wrath* (see 1:18). In v 8 the

additional word is the synonym *anger* (*thumos*). In v 9, the phrase *anger and wrath* is replaced by the explicative phrase **tribulation and distress**. All these words, of course, are expressive of the present experience of mankind as it lives sinfully under the cloud of divine displeasure.

2:10. Paul has already stated *the final destiny* of those who persist in doing good (of which there are no cases).

But now he wants to contrast *the present experience* that God would award (in contrast to vv 8-9) **to everyone who does what is good**. The "anger and wrath" (v 8) and the "tribulation and distress" (v 9) which afflict sinful man here and now could be otherwise if man did what was right. In that case men (Jews and Gentiles) could expect God to give them **glory and honor and peace**.

Of course, human beings do indeed at times experience glory, or honor, or peace, but never in the full and consistent measure in which God would

give these things if they did *what is good*. (Paul's statement is comprehensive and not to be taken as though it could be fulfilled partially.)

Once again, as in v 7, Paul is discussing a *principle*, not an actual *reality* (cf. 3:12).

2:11. The bottom line of Paul's discussion from vv 6-10 is simple: **there is no partiality with God**. The twice repeated reminder that the Jew stands first in humanity's exposure to divine wrath (vv 8-9) was designed to underline this basic fact. Whatever the privileges of the Jews (Paul will discuss them shortly), his race does not, as a result, receive an "exemption" from the wrath God that is manifested toward the Gentile world (cf. Luke 12:48).

Since God is impartial in His present dealings with mankind, it follows that final judgment will be fair as well. To this theme Paul now turns for a treatment that is fuller than the allusion in v 7.

2:12. Jews and Gentiles will someday face the final judgment of God. Yet in dealing with them,

"...all men, the moralist included, are subject to God's wrath as a result of their sinful behavior. This wrath is not eschatological, but a distressing present reality."

God will impartially take account of their differing responsibilities.

The outcome of that judgment for the Gentiles is already envisaged in the statement that since they **have sinned without the law, they shall also perish [i.e., shall also be eternally condemned] without the law.** The Mosaic Law will not be an issue in the final judgment of those who have not lived under it (see vv 14-16).

By contrast, the Jew who has **sinned under the law shall be judged by means of the law.** God holds men accountable in accordance with the responsibilities they have, not those which they don't have.

One must keep in mind throughout Rom 2:12-16 that Paul is using what may be called *neutral courtroom language*. The words *as many as have sinned under the law* certainly do not imply that *some* who are *under the law* may *not* have sinned (see 3:23). The point is that God will deal differently with sinners inside His law and those outside of it, however few or many they may be.

2:13. Mere **hearers of the law** will not be accounted **righteous before God**. On the contrary, in the Day of Judgment it is only **the doers of the law who will be justified**.

It is a bizarre fact that numerous modern expositors have taken this verse to affirm that there will *actually be* people *who will be justified* because they are *doers of the law*. But this view is completely impossible in the face of the plain declarations of Rom 3:19-20.

Paul is simply stating the basic principles of the last judgment. As the account in Rev 20:11-15 makes plain, at the Great White Throne, men will indeed be “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Rev 20:12). If anyone were to merit acceptance before God based on those books, he would *be justified*. But that acceptance will be granted only to those who have *not* sinned under the law (cf. v 12), but are instead truly *doers of the law*. James himself tells us, in fact, that, “Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (Jas 2:10).

Everyone at the final judgment will have his day in court. But then only *the doers of the law will*

be justified. Of these, however, there will be none (3:20).

2:14-15. Paul now returns in vv 14-15 to the idea of judgment “without the law” for Gentiles that he had set over against judgment “under the law” for Jews, as stated in v 12.

How then, one might ask, can God fairly judge the Gentile world if they have no law to be judged by and, furthermore, if only “the doers of the law shall be justified”?

Paul's basic idea is that Gentile behavior, coupled with their own discussion of that behavior, shows that **the work (= standards) of the law is inscribed on their hearts**. In pagan cultures there is an instinctive sense of right and wrong that often reflects the demands of God's law. Even pagans generally saw evil in actions like murder, theft, extortion, adultery, and lying.

Thus, when Paul states that **whenever the Gentiles, who do not have the law, instinctively do the things that are in the law**, he is referring to the many manifestations of morality that could easily be found in non-Jewish societies such as that of the Greco-Roman world in which he lived. Paul did not hold a view of total depravity that precluded him from seeing any morality at all outside the explicit observance of the law. In fact, the law which God had revealed to Moses fundamentally expressed an innate sense of right and wrong that the Creator had already *inscribed on* all human *hearts*. For Paul, therefore, the image of God was not totally defaced or expunged by human sin.

Thus, although the revealed law of Moses will not be used against the Gentiles in the Day of Judgment, nevertheless **their conscience will be a witness** against them.

The *conscience* and the *discussions* that express it will be like co-witnesses in the divine courtroom.

The doctrine of the Apostle Paul in this text may be traced directly to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ that all of man's words will be accessible on the Judgment Day (see Matt 12:36-37).

Thus, in the judgment of Gentiles, the moralizing *discussions* they have had *with each other* will come into play. In that way, the standards they have used to evaluate the conduct of their

fellow man will become the standards by which they themselves will be judged.

If, for example, a pagan has said to his contemporary, “I think it is wrong of you to deceive others like that,” yet he himself in other circumstances has employed the same kind of deception, the very words of this pagan will condemn him in the Day of Judgment, precisely as Jesus said they would!

2:16. What Paul has been describing will take place **in the day when God will judge men’s secrets**. The phrase *men’s secrets* stresses what is already implied in v 15. If all of the words men have spoken on moral matters will be made known at the judgment—no matter how much the speakers might wish these words to be unknown or undisclosed—then clearly God knows all about every man. *Men’s secrets*, however embarrassing or shameful, will be under scrutiny at the final judgment, precisely as Jesus also declared when He said, “For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light” (Luke 8:17).

Paul declared on Mars Hill that God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:31). This truth goes back to the teachings of our Lord Himself (see John 5:22).

The jarring declaration that *God will judge men’s secrets* should function like a convicting arrow aimed at every heart. For what human being does not have *secrets* that he hopes will never see the light of day? Of course, Paul has not yet explicitly stated man’s universal sinfulness (as he will in 3:9-18) or man’s hopeless estate if his hopes rest in God’s law (3:19-20). But the perceptive unconverted hearer or reader of Rom 2:7-16 must necessarily be disquieted by Paul’s emphatic insistence that in the judgment a person will be awarded whatever he deserves. Anyone who finds

hope in that simple fact has not read this passage with enough care.

But for now, Paul is satisfied to assert that both God’s present dealings with humanity (2:7-11) and His future judgment of humanity (2:12-16) are and will be totally impartial for Jew and Gentile alike.

The Vulnerability of the Jews (2:17-29)

2:17. Adopting here (as he did in 2:1-5) the popular Greco-Roman diatribe style, Paul hypothesizes an imaginary Jewish interlocutor who represents the quintessential Jewish perspective about the Jewish position vis-à-vis his God. Such

a person would in fact be quite proud to **bear the name “Jew”** and precisely because he possessed God’s special revelation, **the law**, he could rest his religious hopes on that very law. In fact, he could quite openly **boast in God**, since it was to his racial group that God had given Torah.

2:18-20. In contrast, therefore, to the Gentiles, this quintessential Jew would claim to **know** God’s **will** (revealed in Torah) and therefore to be able to **discern the things that really matter**. In the phrase *the things that really matter*, Paul implies the disdain in which a Jew would hold not only the standards, but also the aspirations of a non-Jew.

The phrase **because you are instructed** and the words **and you have confidence** are tied rather closely together. Since this typical Jew can *discern the things that really matter* as a result of being *instructed out of the law*, he has confidence in his own capacity to help others to escape their ignorant blindness.

Paul heaps up with superb rhetorical effect a series of self-designations that lay bare the Jewish sense of superiority to his Gentile counterparts. He himself, he thinks, is **a guide, a light, an instructor, and a teacher**. By way of demeaning contrast, the Gentiles to whom he brings his wisdom are **blind, in darkness, ignorant, and babes**.

**“In the final analysis,
says Paul, Judaism in
its spiritual reality is an
inward religion and not
an *outward* one.”**



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Paul has no need to point out specifically the vanity latent in such condescending contrasts.

As he similarly said in the previous verses, Paul says, **you have the formulation of knowledge and of truth in the law**. He highlights how such a person builds his prideful self-esteem through the *information* he has acquired out of the law. But that is only *hearing* and is not the same as *doing* the law (cf. v 13).

Though the sacred writings of the Jews were a source of pride to the Jew, those very writings condemned him (3:19-20).

2:21-23. So, says Paul, does *your performance* match up well with your confident self-assessment? Of course, it did not, as the following series of interrogations makes clear.

You might **teach another person**, Paul says, but **don't you teach yourself?** Have the commands that forbid you **to steal** and **to commit adultery** taught you not to do these things? In the third question of the series, however, Paul gives his interrogation a special slant. True, the Jew who claimed to **despise idols** may never have bowed down to one, but what about gaining financial profit from the false worship of the Gentiles?

The words **rob temples** no doubt refers to the willingness to receive property stolen from temples for the purpose of reselling such items for a profit. An observant Jew might even

rationalize that in this fashion he was helping to “deconstruct” some pagan practice. In so doing, of course, the Jew in question participated in a theft.

The bottom line was clear. Despite his inclination to **boast in the law**, by his behavior in disobeying the law the Jew was engaged in conduct that disgraced God. The final question in the series furnishes a biting climax: **Do you dishonor God by transgressing the law?** What could be more disgraceful than to claim special privilege and standing before God, while at the same time bringing Him grave dishonor?

2:24. Paul does not leave this last question (v 23) unanswered, however. Thinking no doubt of Scriptures like Isa 52:5 and Ezek 36:22 (but paraphrasing their idea), Paul emphatically affirms that Jewish conduct has led the Gentiles to blaspheme “*the name of God*.” This observation is a *coup de grâce* to Jewish pride in possessing God's law and was confirmed by their own Scriptures. In so stating, Paul prepares the way for the climaxing assertion found in 3:19-20.

Paul for the first time in this subunit refers explicitly to circumcision. From one standpoint, the term *circumcision* could stand for the Jews' commitment to the entire law (cf. Gal 5:3). This inherent connection between circumcision and law-keeping seems implicit in these verses. But

from another point of view, mere circumcision was sometimes thought of as virtually enough in itself to win the approval of God. This idea, however, Paul wishes to emphatically deny.

2:25. If someone regards circumcision as the basis for his relationship to the God who “will repay each person according to his works” (v 6) and with whom “there is no partiality” (v 11), then the profitability of circumcision accrues only **if you do the law**. But suppose **you are a transgressor of the law**, that is to say, you “have sinned under the law” (v 12)? In that case, circumcision’s profitability before God vanishes and the Jew is reduced to the level of the Gentiles who “have sinned without the law” (v 12). Or to put it another way: **your circumcision becomes uncircumcision**.

2:26-27. The converse is true as well. If disobedience to the law nullifies the advantage of circumcision, obedience to the law by a Gentile would make him as acceptable before God as if he had been circumcised. Thus **if an uncircumcised person should keep the righteous standards of the law**, he could expect to be justified before God. In that case, obviously, **his uncircumcision would be credited as circumcision**.

But, as before, there are *no such people*. It should be carefully noted that Paul’s statement is hypothetical (a third-class condition in Greek).

Paul’s supposition here furnishes the ultimate irony for any Jew who thought himself superior to the Gentiles by the mere fact of circumcision, or by the mere fact of possessing God’s law. Thus *the physically uncircumcised person* would judge the *circumcised* person. Certainly, this was a role reversal that most religious Jews probably had never conceived of before.

The advantages of Scripture and circumcision were his, but his condemnation by an obedient Gentile would still be fully deserved. It remained true that “as many as have sinned under the law will be judged by the law” (v 12). If there were a fully observant Gentile there in that day, he would join in condemning the sinning Jew.

The point of Paul’s hypothetical proposition is obvious. The self-confident Jew should consider the reality that once he is *a transgressor of the law*, he not only has no advantage over a Gentile,

but he would actually be worthy of condemnation by any Gentile who was not *a transgressor of the law*, even though the Gentile was uncircumcised. This is another way of affirming the utter impartiality of God (cf. v 11), however much a Jew might imagine that God would be partial to him in the judgment.

2:28-29. Jeremiah’s point (Jer 9:26; see also 4:4; 6:10) is precisely Paul’s point. Israel is no better than the uncircumcised Gentiles, since Israel is “uncircumcised in the heart.” Thus Paul is simply pointing out that what it really means to be **a Jew** is not determined by what is **outward in the flesh**. Nor is **circumcision** a mere matter of **the letter of the law**. On the contrary, a true Jew is one **who is inwardly**, and true **circumcision is of the heart in the spirit**. In the final analysis, says Paul, Judaism in its spiritual reality is an *inward* religion and not an *outward* one.

It follows therefore that the source of one’s praise is crucial. The zealous practitioner of Judaism might well revel in the praise he drew **from men** (see Matt 23:5-7; Luke 11:43), but this was nothing more than empty human glory. True praise could not come *from men*, **but only from God Himself**, since God alone knew the heart. If he was honest, he would realize that his own heart, like those of his ancestors, was after all truly uncircumcised.

Here ends Paul’s direct address (in diatribe style) to the proud, self-confident Jew (vv 17-29). Paul sweeps away all pretext that the Jew somehow will have special advantages in the Day of Judgment. He will not. In his own way, he is as uncircumcised as any Gentile.

Thus, the bottom line of the entire subunit (2:6-29) has been established. God is indeed utterly impartial regarding His dealings with, and His future judgment of, humanity. Even the Jew has no special claim on Him by virtue of knowing the law or because of circumcision. ■



Zane Hodges was a Bible teacher and Professor of Greek at Dallas Theological Seminary. He passed away in 2008.



Friends—both new and old—in Camden, NJ!

New Jersey/Pennsylvania Regional GES Conference Camden, NJ November 22-23

This was one of our best, if not our best, regional ever. There were seven speakers and all the messages were excellent. We covered 1-3 John in 12 thirty-minute messages.

We met at Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church. Cliff Freeman is the Pastor and he gave two great messages in the conference. And the church served as excellent hosts, with many people on hand to guide parking and to make sure conferees were able to find their way around the church, from the hall to the hoagies!

Along with Cliff, other speakers were Pastor Doug Brock (NY), Pastor Nathanael Stevens (PA), Pastor Lucas Kitchen (LA), and Ken Yates, Shawn Lazar, and Bob Wilkin.

People came from as far as Ohio, Maine, and New York. There was a lot of interest in us having another conference next year either in Philly or somewhere in the Northeast.

The audio from this conference should be on our website by the time you read this.



Bob schmoozing.

Bayside Community Church Tampa, Florida November 2-3

Sharon and I really enjoyed our time with the folks at Bayside Community Church in Tampa. We flew in on Saturday and had a chance to walk along the bay in



The speakers: Ken, Nate, Lucas, Shawn, Cliff, Bob, and Doug.



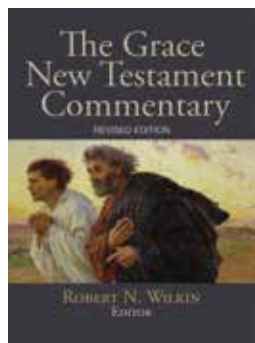
Rapt attention, while Bob works on his crossword.

the afternoon. Beautiful scenery and beautiful weather. After a nice supper (thank you Jim and Molly), I spoke at a special Saturday evening session on "Grace, Works, and Eternal Security." I spoke for 45 minutes and took questions for 15 minutes. Everyone enjoyed it.

On Sunday I spoke on "The Golden Chain Revisited (Rom 8:28-30)" and "Do You Know the [Spiritual] Time (Rom 13:8-14)?" Both messages were well received. Our thanks to Doyle and Lou for a nice lunch on the way to the airport.

The Grace New Testament Commentary

In November Shawn spent many days loading in well over 1,000 changes to the commentary. Bethany and Mark found that many changes, and that doesn't count the many changes readers had sent in. Shawn had loaded in those changes during the first half of this year. I helped some in November by going over some of the hundreds of changes (500+?) Al Valdes made to his commentaries on Luke and Acts.



You may wonder how a two-volume 1,334 page book could be converted into a one-volume 700 page book without cutting anything out. I did too. But Shawn did a great job. He reduced the font size, but not drastically. It is still very readable. He increased the page size and changed the font too. He also changed the book to paperback, which will mean we can keep the cost about what it was before. (Printing costs have gone up a lot

in ten years.) We think you will really like the new and improved commentary.

It is now available to order through Amazon. We will likely have it in stock before the end of this month. Once it is ready, we will announce it on our Facebook page, in our blog, and at the GES bookstore.

Grace on the Go

On December 29th, Shawn will be preaching at Shreveport Bible Church.

On January 7th, Shawn will be holding our first "Free Grace Evening," in Siloam Springs, AR.

There will be a GES Regional in Austin/Georgetown, TX, Feb 21-22, 2020. The theme

is "The Return of Christ in 1 Thessalonians." We plan to cover the entire book in a dozen sessions. Register online now!

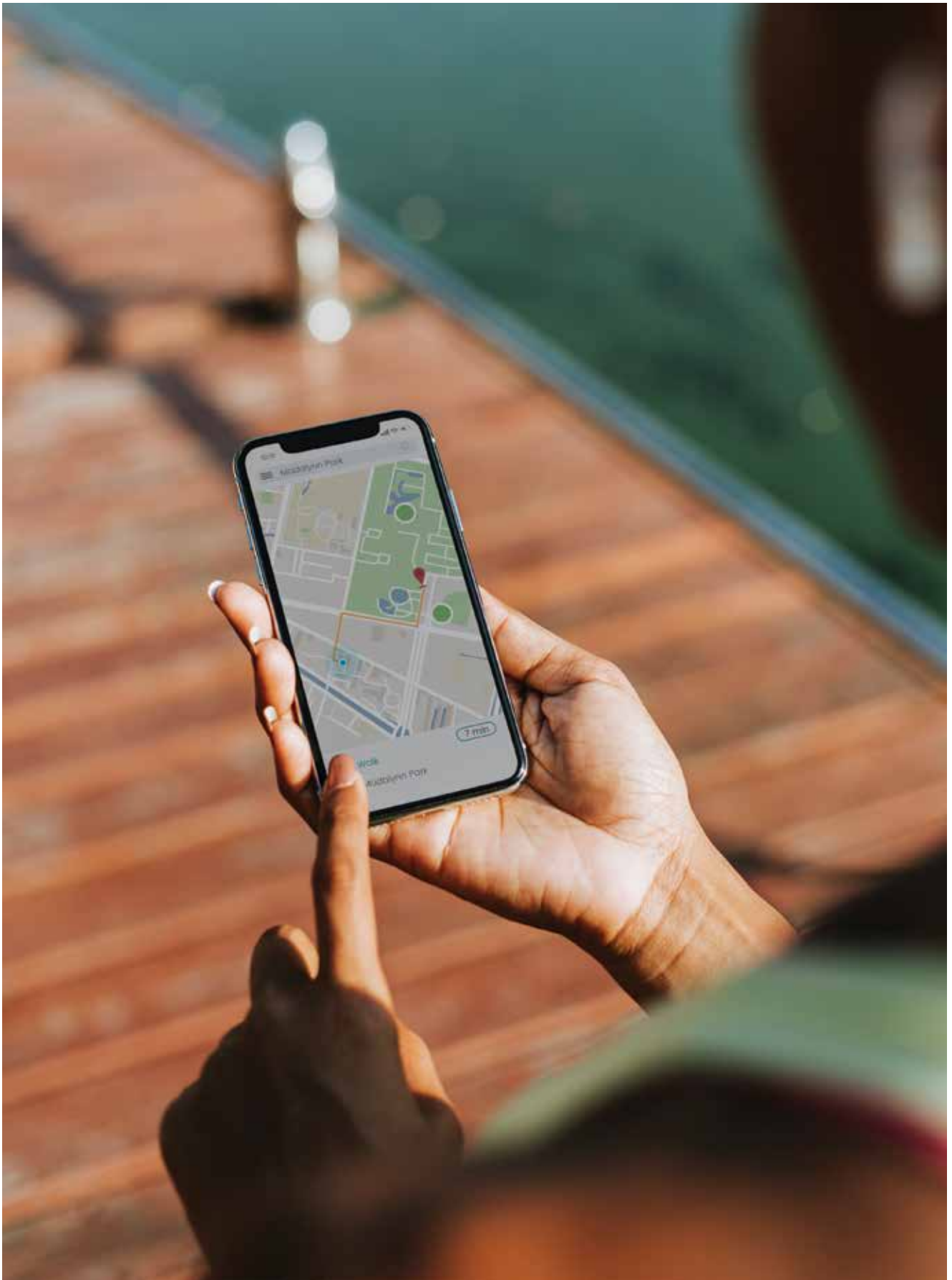
We are planning another Free Grace Evening in early March, near Laramie, WY.

And we'll be holding a bilingual Costa Rica conference the week of March 23rd.

Be sure to keep up with GES speakers on our events page!



February Regional in Austin!



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Spiritual GPS

By Marcia Hornok

Finding the will of God can be a conundrum. One wise saint said, “I didn’t know it was lost.” Indeed, it isn’t. Many Scriptures tell us God’s will. For example, *that none of these little ones should perish; that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; our sanctification; that we should abstain from sexual immorality; that we rejoice, pray, and give thanks; that by doing good we silence the ignorance of sinful men; and our suffering.* God’s will mostly involves our sanctification, not our vocation, vacation, or which vehicle to buy.

Wait a minute. That’s not what you mean? You want to know God’s *personal* will. What college to attend, whom to marry, how many children to have, where to park, which shoes to wear...I get it. You need Spiritual GPS: Guidance of Providential Sovereignty.

I’ve been in your shoes. Which Bible College should I attend? Should I date that student named Ken from Utah? Should we leave a church of 600 with godly elders and staff to move to Utah (while I was eight months pregnant) and pastor a church of 40 with no elders? I can honestly say that despite ongoing, agonizing prayers for God to show His will, in none of these instances did He give a definitive answer. So we stepped into the Jordan to see if it would part.

I chose Washington Bible College because my pastor’s daughter attended there. I dated Ken because he asked first. We moved to Utah because his dad insisted we had to take over the church he had started. Ken decided to give it five years, and for five years he regretted that decision. One day he started devouring Friesen and Maxson’s book, *Decision Making and the Will*

of God, and became joyfully convinced we had not missed God’s “perfect will.”

DECISION MAKING

For believers, God’s will is not a target we must hit, and if we miss it, we will be God’s second-string players. Rather, as God’s image-bearers, we have intelligence, creativity, and imagination, critical thinking and analytical skills, and the ability to make decisions. God gives us freedom to choose whatever we want as long as it is not unbiblical, illegal, harmful, or fattening. (I added that last one.) But still we plead with God to guide us. So here is your GPS for making decisions.

G = Grid. Make a grid of your options. Gather information objectively, listing pros and cons, and welcome advice from people you trust.

P = Pray. Not to get an answer from God, but because God’s Word tells us to pray about everything (Phil 4:6). Prayer doesn’t convince God to move the way we want; it gives God our humble submission to accept whatever He wants. We pray because we trust in the Lord wholeheartedly and desire for Him to smooth out our paths (Ps 27:11; Prov 3:5-6). In prayer we also commit our works and plans to the Lord (Prov 16:3).

Praying often clarifies our thoughts and generates new insights, which some Christians attribute to the Holy Spirit, but I don’t know. That also happens to Mormons when they pray, and to atheists when they meditate, so you decide the source.

S = Select. Then make your decision for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). His Word gives us principles and guidelines for abundant living, and we may confidently ask for wisdom during trials (Jas 1:2-5). God’s people will also lend their wisdom, but ultimately we are free to select the option we want.

GOD’S ANSWER

A godly widow named Audrey had a difficult life-changing decision to make. She prayed earnestly for God’s direction and asked others to pray about what she should do. By faith, expecting God to answer, she pleaded with Him for two

weeks, but nothing happened. No circumstances or open doors pointed the way. No feelings of peace or unrest. Finally it came to her what God was saying: “I really don’t care what you do.” Profound. Could “God’s will” be whatever she preferred to do?

Both her options were wise and would not harm her spiritually. Both had ministry opportunities. She could pursue loving God and people through either of her decisions, and so she chose the one she wanted most. And believe it or not, that is Biblical. We “find God’s will” when we use what He has already given us—His Word, our analytical minds, counsel from friends, and our own free will.

A Biblical example of GPS in practice can be found in 1 Corinthians 16. Travel in Paul’s day involved a major commitment of time and resources. How did he determine what to do?

1. *Do what you wish if God allows* (16:5-7). Paul’s grid of pros included: “I will come...” “It may be...” and Cons: “I do not wish...” “I hope to...” with the overarching determinant: “If the Lord permits.”

2. *Consider ministry potential, disregarding the obstacles* (16:8-9). On the plus side was a “great and effective” open door. The negative of “many adversaries” was not even a consideration. Ministry has opposition, which does not indicate a closed door. Nor do coincidences mean open doors. You can usually find a boat going to Tarshish!

3. *Respect the decisions others make for themselves* (16:12). Notice that Apollos was “strongly urged” to go to Corinth by The Great Apostle Paul (as some preachers like to call him, as if that gives God’s Word more credibility!). But Apollos had freedom to make his own choice, and it seems that he based his *selection* on his willingness and on convenience.

4. *Let all your decisions be backed by doctrine and based on loving God and people* (16:13-14). The option we *select* must not compromise God’s truth or our walk with the Lord. Verse 22 again states the paramount necessity of loving the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. *Stay accountable to your God-appointed authorities* (16:10-11, 15-18). This included


Timothy, the household of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. The Corinthians were to submit to them and to “acknowledge such men.”

GOD HONORS OUR CHOICES

Although Paul had the benefit of direct revelations from God, he counted on opportunities and desires to make his decisions. So should we all. “If the Lord permits,” we can do God’s work where and when and how we want to, because God honors our choices—even silly ones like Leah and her mandrakes or Jacob and his striped rods. However, Jas 4:13-17 contains a warning against making boastful plans without regard to God’s sovereign control. Zane C. Hodges wrote:

What [we] ought to say, if [we] are truly humble, is that [our] lives (“we shall live”) and [our] activities (“do this or that”) are subject to God’s will. The words “if the Lord wills” would [be] most suitable on [our] lips, not as a mere formula, but as a genuine expression of [our] dependence on God (Hodges, *James*, p. 101).

In conclusion, the Guidance of Providential Sovereignty is somewhat of a misnomer. God in His providence is sovereign, but we are not His remote-controlled cars. He allows us to guide ourselves, and He does the *recalculating*.

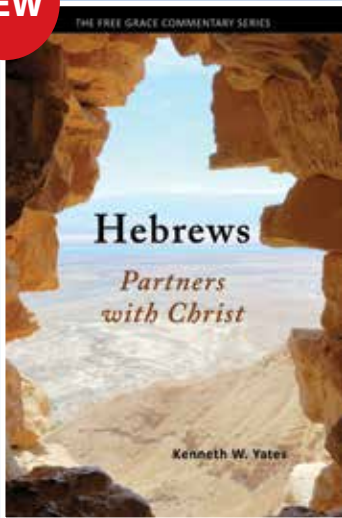
We don’t need to wait for our fleece to dry. To determine God’s so-called “individual will,” we can simply make a *grid*, stay dependent on God through *prayer*, and *select* what we deem best. 



Marcia Hornok writes from Salt Lake City, where her husband Ken pastored Midvalley Bible Church for 39 years.

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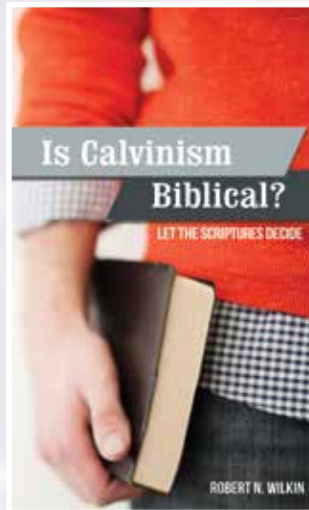
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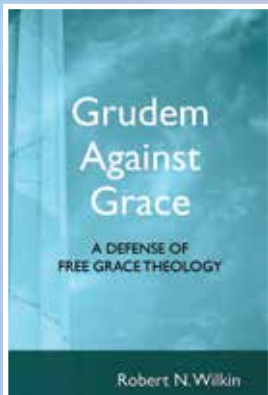
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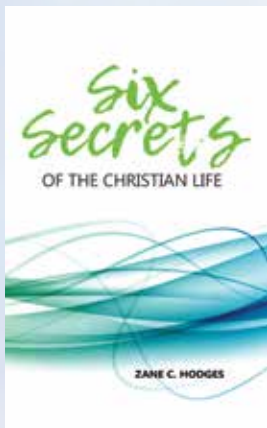
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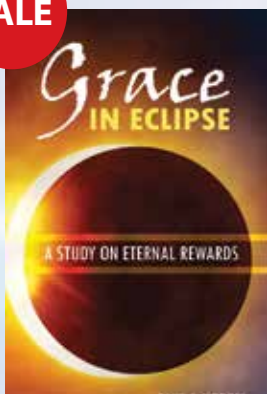
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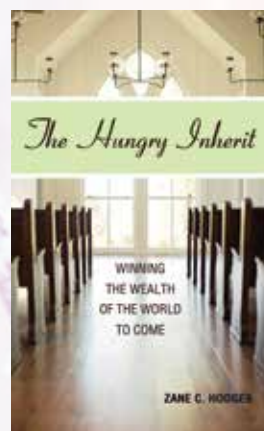


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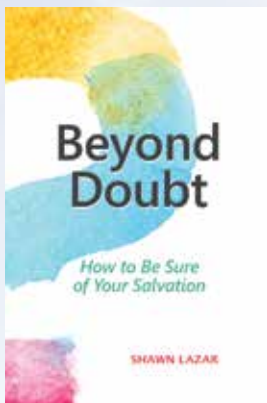


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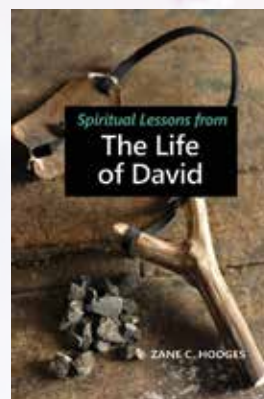


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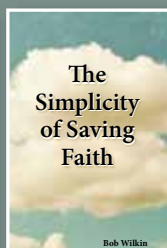
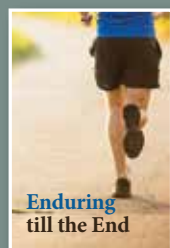


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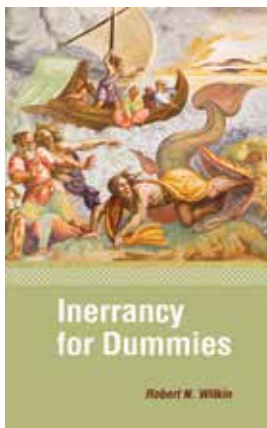
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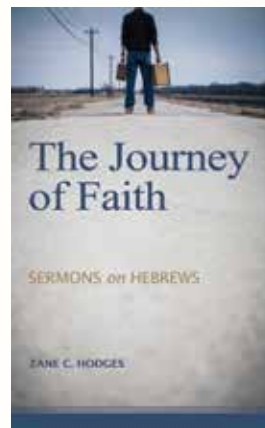


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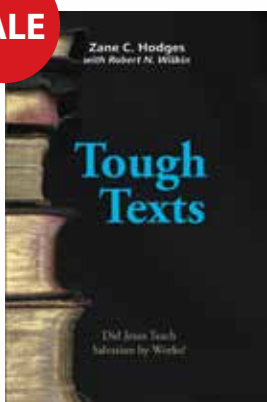


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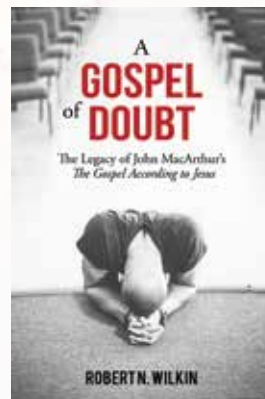


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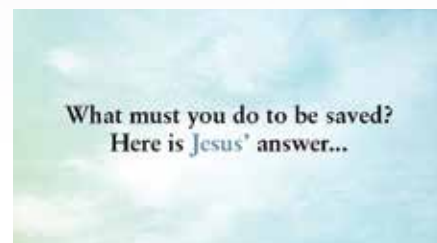


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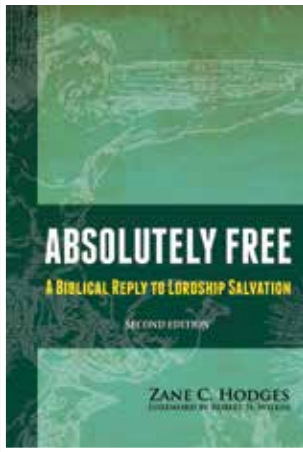
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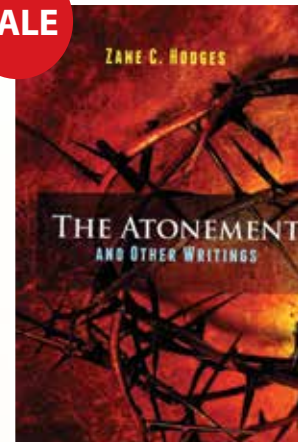
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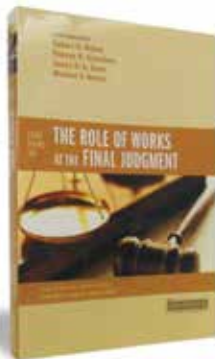


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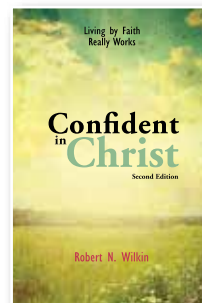
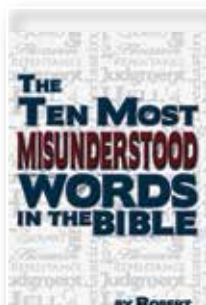
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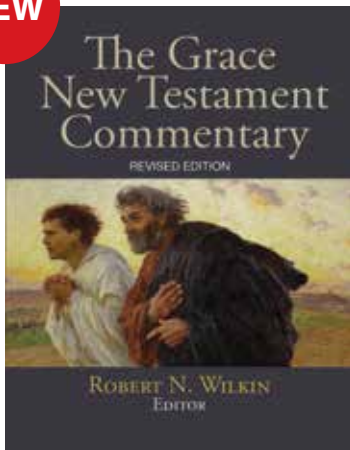
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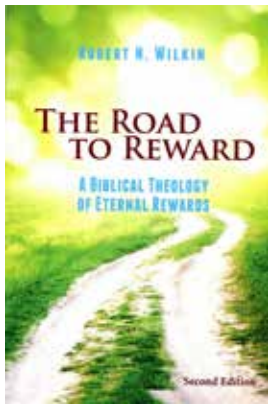
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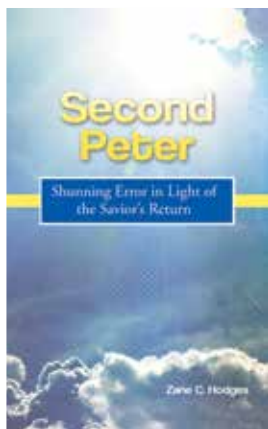
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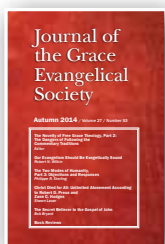
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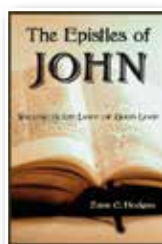
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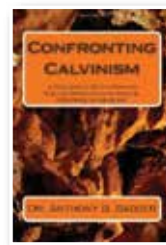


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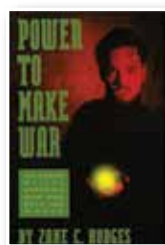


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The Mailbag

By You

My wife and I listen to the radio show after work while we eat dinner. This was, and still is, a blessing to me. Last month my wife had to be moved to an adult family home for dementia. Now I've been reading *Grace in Focus* magazine when I visit. Also a blessing. Thanks for all you do." ~Auburn, WA

"So glad to hear all those new people found your website. I think two minute radio spots will be perfect to interject the gospel—go for it!" ~Dekalb, MS

"Thank you so much for spreading the truth about the gospel of Jesus Christ! God bless you!" ~Spain

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"So thankful for your ministry and we are blessed to be a small part of it! Praying for your encouragement and for the Lord to continue to bless and use GES for His glory!" ~Tyler, TX

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"I am learning great things from your radio show. I am very appreciative of it. Keep up the good work you are doing. God bless." ~email

"I am currently incarcerated for a conspiracy to sell drugs. Last Sunday I went to church and the booklet *You Can Be Sure* caught my eye, along with *The Best News You'll Ever Hear*. I am new to the Christian family and am trying to learn all I can. I would be grateful for any reading material you can send me." ~Sheridon, OR




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Where Did We Get the Term “Free Grace”?

By Shawn Lazar

We believe in Free Grace Theology—which is distinct from Calvinism, Arminianism, Lutheranism, Thomism, and other -isms.

But where did the term “free grace” come from?

Historically, the expression “free grace” was used by both Calvinists and Arminians.

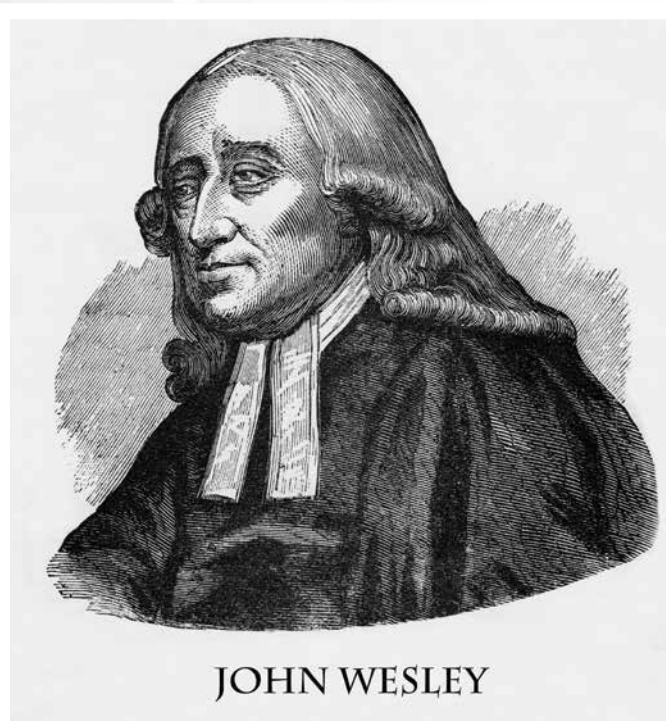
ARMINANS HAVE USED THE TERM

For example, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, preached a sermon called “Free Grace” (Sermon 128, preached in 1740). Wesley was preaching against the Calvinistic theory of predestination. His point was that God’s offer of salvation was not based on any merit in man, but was free to all:

How freely does God love the world! While we were yet sinners, “Christ died for the ungodly.” While we were “dead in our sin,” God “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.” And how freely with him does he “give us all things!” Verily, *free grace* is all in all!

The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all, and free for all.

First. It is free in all to whom it is given. It does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part. It does not in anywise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is.



JOHN WESLEY

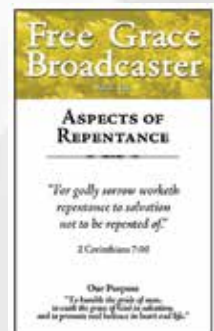
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It does not depend on his endeavors. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions; for all these flow from the *free grace* of God; they are the streams only, not the fountain. They are the fruits of *free grace*, and not the root. They are not the cause, but the effects of it. Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it. Thus is *his grace free in all*; that is, no way depending on any power or merit in man, but on God alone, who freely gave us his own Son, and “with him freely giveth us all things” (emphasis added).

CALVINISTS HAVE USED THE TERM

But Calvinists have used the term, too. Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon with that title (#233). I think that, for him, “free grace” was another way to say “unconditional election.” We’re not only unable to *merit* salvation—we’re also unable to respond in faith to the gospel without God’s free grace electing us.

Besides Spurgeon, I have copies of a periodical called *The Free Grace Broadcaster* which republishes sermons by Calvinists.

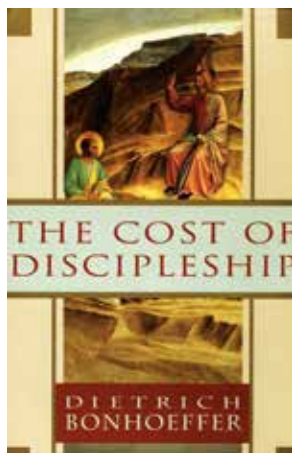


So, both Arminians and Calvinists have used the term *free grace*, and meant different things by it.

I don't think the expression *free grace* was adopted from either Wesleyans or Calvinists. Not directly. Instead, I think it was adopted in response to claims that the faith alone message amounted to *cheap grace*.

BONHOEFFER AND COSTLY GRACE

Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke about the danger of cheap grace in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. Only, Bonhoeffer wasn't talking about the Free Grace position. Instead, he wrote in the context of the rise of National Socialism in Germany where the State churches enthusiastically supported the Nazis. Bonhoeffer was complaining about Lutheran priests granting sacramental forgiveness to churchgoers who were active Nazis, or supporters of National Socialism. The people would sin, superficially confess their sins at church, be sacramentally "forgiven," and then go




on sinning without any church discipline or real effort to be a Christian disciple. For Bonhoeffer, that system was full of *cheap grace*: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church," he wrote. "We are fighting today for costly grace."

As Bonhoeffer's books were read by Evangelicals worried about a lack of discipleship and discipline in the modern American church, the language of *cheap grace* was applied to those of us who believe in *sola fide*, i.e., that the only condition to be born again is to believe in Jesus for eternal salvation (John 3:16), and that salvation and discipleship are separate issues.

Calling our position *cheap grace* misses the point. After all, saying that grace is *cheap* implies it still costs something. But we're not saying eternal life costs us just a little bit (i.e., that it's cheap)—we're saying that eternal life is *free*:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God... (Eph 2:8).

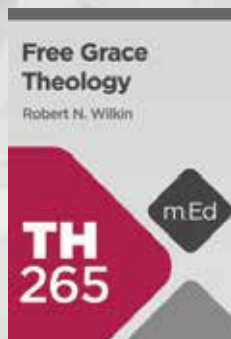


Hence, instead of preaching *cheap grace* or *costly grace*, we preach *free grace*. 

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society.

Mobile Ed: TH 265 Free Grace Theology

Have you ever wondered, "Can I lose my salvation?" or "Does God choose who is saved?" or "What does Jesus mean when he talks about rewards?"

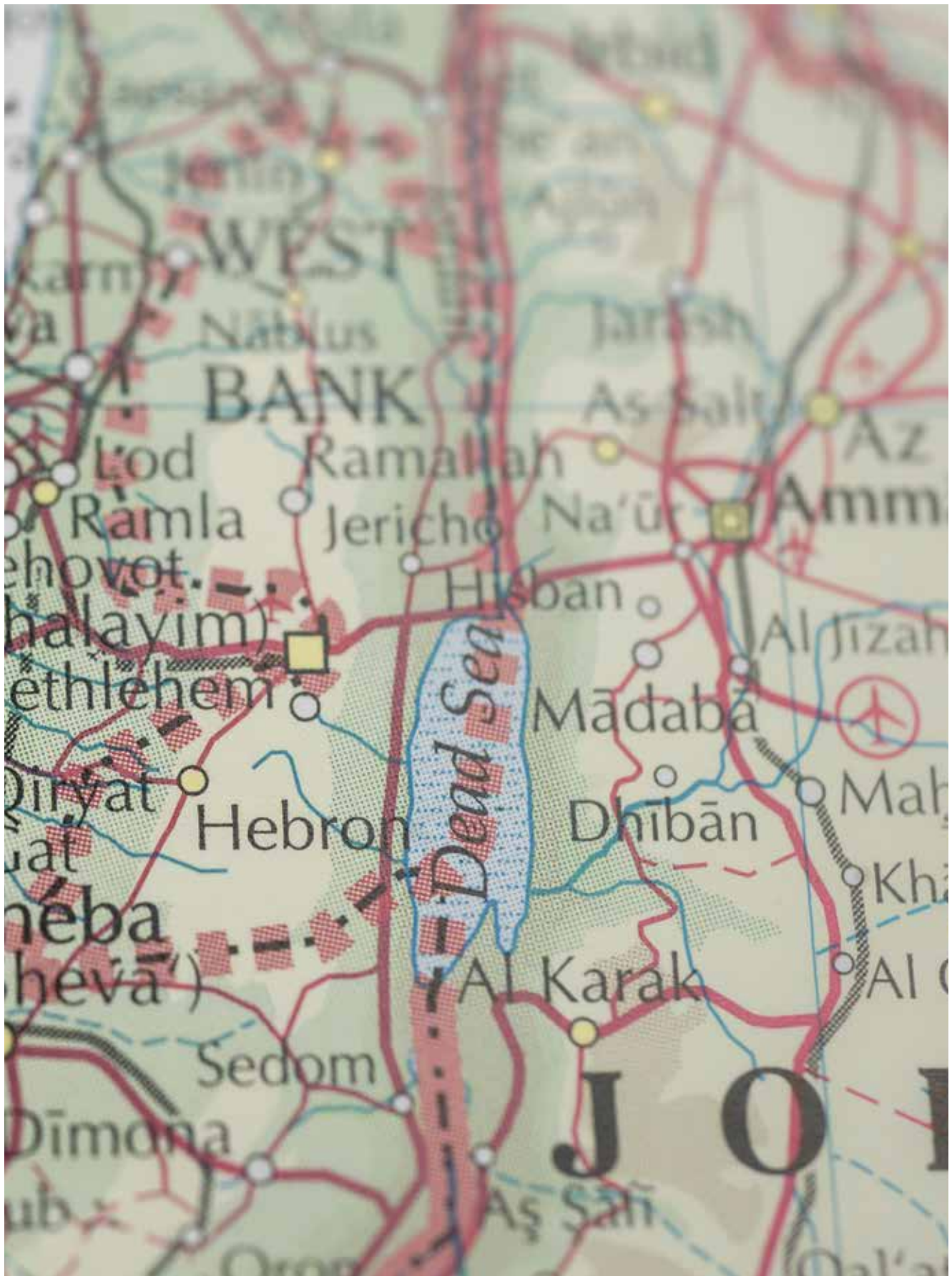


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LIGHTSTOCK

Top 5 Reasons to Visit Israel

By Summer Stevens

Israel is a fascinating country—past, present and future. We live in such an incredible time in history that makes international travel relatively simple and affordable. Here are my top 5 reasons to visit Israel.

1. Archeological finds. Israel is an ever-expanding treasure trove of history and discoveries. While some artifacts move around to different world museums, only in Israel at the Israel Museum can you see the almost-complete scroll of the Book of Isaiah from the Qumran Caves. Or, better yet, hike up to Cave One where the Dead Sea Scrolls were originally discovered in 1947. Next, bring your flashlight and walk through Hezekiah's Tunnel in the City of David, which is still under excavation, and continues to reveal ancient treasures. Or walk around the City of Jericho and find your own piece of ancient pottery to take home. Other more recent fascinating finds include a seal ring bearing the name Pontius Pilate, and another seal with the inscription, "Isaiah the Prophet."

2. Bring the Bible alive. Recently I had the opportunity to see a theatrical presentation of the life of Jesus, with incredible special effects, live animals onstage, and beautiful music. For me, the best part of the show was the vitality

and energy expressed among the disciples, in the different towns, and in Jesus' relationship with people. There was nothing serene or boring about the show—it was bursting with life. I think this is a much closer representation of Jesus than many of our Christian films portray. Similarly, in our minds, we often remove the liveliness of Biblical stories and forget that these were regular people living in real communities, with emotions exactly like ours. That's why picking up stones in the actual valley where David might have collected his before the battle with Goliath, or standing on an overlook of Mt Gerizim and Mt Ebal, where the Israelites called out the blessings and curses, is so powerful in bringing greater clarity and understanding to the Word of God. Israel offers access to unearthed historical sites and artifacts, as well as reproductions of things like wine-presses, threshing floors, and farming methods used in Bible times.

3. Walk where Jesus walked. For many people, simply occupying the same physical space where God himself walked is life-changing. Visit the city of Bethlehem (and buy a hand-carved nativity set), tour the Pool of Siloam, discovered in 2004, or walk up to the Temple Mount where Jesus walked many times. Stroll along the shores



LIGHTSTOCK


of the Sea of Galilee at sunrise, or take a boat ride through the beautiful waters at sunset. Excavations in Capernaum have revealed a synagogue, perhaps the very place Jesus taught and healed, and a home believed to belong to the Apostle Peter.

4. Natural beauty & intrigue. Aside from Biblical significance, Israel is a unique and beautiful country. It boasts earth's lowest elevation on land with the Dead Sea at 1,410 feet below sea level. You will never forget the experience of floating in the supposed healing salty waters!

Or, join the thousands every year who make the trek up to the culturally significant Masada to watch the sunrise and reflect on the events that occurred there.

And of course, the capital city, Jerusalem, is a fascinating place with a lively open market, the emotionally moving Wailing Wall, and the Dome of the Rock. Despite everything we read on the news, nothing captures the sense of political and religious division between the Muslims and the Jews than a visit to the Holy City itself.

5. Future events. Israel is a key location in end times events. The Bible says there will be a new temple in Jerusalem, and it also prophesies that the Two Witnesses will preach, be killed and resurrected in Jerusalem. Revelation 16 talks about the final battle of Armageddon, which many believe is the present-day Valley of Megiddo.

Finally, the most significant future event in Israel is Jesus' physical 1,000-year reign from His Throne in Jerusalem. What an incredible opportunity we have to visit some of these eschatological sites now! 



Summer lives outside of Pittsburgh with her husband Nathanael and their five children. She has a Masters in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary and enjoys running (but mostly talking) with friends and reading good books to her kids.

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What's Wrong with the Testimonies?

By Kathryn Wright

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest blessings that the Lord has given me is that I was raised in a Free Grace home. My father, Ken Yates, and I spend a lot of time together. Many of our conversations center around theology. Not too long ago, my dad wrote a blog for GES about the issues concerning personal testimonies. This article is an extension of what my dad said in his blog and the discussions we have had.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

As a general rule, the average testimony given in our churches today is misleading and profoundly rooted in Reformed Theology. Here's a recent example.

Not too long ago, I was sitting at a table with three Evangelical missionaries. The conversation turned to salvation, and each man proceeded to give his personal testimony.

The first described how he went into a church and bowed his knees at the altar and cried out to God.

The second said he was saved as a child when he prayed for forgiveness and asked the Lord to enter his heart.

The third gentleman gave a detailed account of his life prior to salvation. He was a bad kid growing up. He bullied girls, stole candy, was a terrible student in school, and was disrespectful to his teachers. He went on to say that he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. After he was saved, he no longer bullied girls, or stole things, and his



teachers and classmates were all amazed by the transformation in his life.

I think most Christians can relate to the experiences I have had listening to the testimonies about how people became Christians. These are standard examples of how people give their testimonies. In fact, if you google “how to give a testimony,” a common formula you will find is as follows:

Step 1: Describe your sinful life prior to salvation.

Step 2: Describe the moment of salvation.

Step 3: Describe how you have stopped sinning now that you are saved.

This formula, or one similar to it, is often found in Christian literature, in practice, and when people train to do evangelism. Perhaps we have used it ourselves. I think we should reconsider this way of doing things.

PROBLEMS WITH STANDARD TESTIMONIES

There are a number of problems with the way testimonies are often given. First, it is fundamentally a Lordship formula. Lordship Salvation claims that in order for a person to be saved he must submit his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He must turn from his wicked ways and give his lives to Jesus. This is demonstrated in the “before” and “after” of personal testimonies. Sadly, this places salvation on the works of the individual and not on the promise of Jesus Christ to all who simply believe in Him for eternal life as a free gift.

Second, this formula emphasizes sin rather than belief. In fact, in all three examples above, not a single testimony mentioned belief or eternal life. The focus of these testimonies is often on the lifestyle of the person rather than what that person came to understand and believe about Christ.

Third, it is very confusing to an unbeliever. Oftentimes, people use their testimonies as a way to evangelize. When unbelievers hear testimonies like these, they walk away thinking one of two things. First, that they must clean up their lives in order to be saved, or that if they are saved, they will no longer struggle with sin. One places assurance on one's work; the other robs people of assurance the moment they struggle with sin. But assurance comes when we believe in what Jesus promises us, which is eternal life.

A BIBLICAL TESTIMONY ISN'T AS EXCITING

We all love to see “before and after” pictures of people when they lose weight. There is something impressive about a 300 pound man losing 100 pounds. Marketing gurus know this, which is why we see them so often in commercials. It makes people think that whatever weight loss program they are trying to sell you is a quick fix.

But we all know that weight loss doesn't work that way. Discipleship and maturity in our Christian walk do not work that way either. It takes time, self-control, discipline, and lots and lots of grace (1 Cor 9:25-27). Sadly, what we often see in testimonies is a mixing of discipleship and salvation. People sandwich months, if not years, of sanctification growth in their salvation accounts

and make it sound as though both occurred simultaneously.

We need to make these two experiences distinct. There is a time and place for testimonies in which we have seen the Lord transform us and helped us overcome sin in our lives. These types of testimonies are incredibly edifying for other believers, especially for those that may be struggling with similar situations. We can encourage other believers with our “weight loss” journey within the context of discipleship. This is not the same as discussing our salvation experience.

So, what does a clear *salvation testimony* sound like? The Apostle Paul is often seen as the gold standard answer to that question. His example is often portrayed in light of his works. Prior to salvation, Paul killed Christians; he was a Pharisee and blasphemed God. After he was saved on the road to Damascus, he became the greatest missionary of all time, wrote many books in the NT, and established churches throughout the Roman Empire.

Talk about a Jenny Craig commercial! You will even hear folks ask, “What was your Damascus road experience?” when they want to hear your own salvation account. It's an intimidating comparison and carries with it a lot of confusion. While Paul describes his life prior to salvation in terms of his disobedience towards God (1 Tim 1:13), he also describes himself as blameless in regards to the law (Phil 3:6). Someone might even describe Paul as a righteous Jew, and his lifestyle prior to being saved was characterized by obedience towards God. However, his lifestyle prior to and after salvation is not relevant. When Paul gives his testimony to Timothy, he writes: “However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern *to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life*” (1 Tim 1:16, emphasis added). The issue we see in Paul's testimony isn't his change in lifestyle. It is that he believed in Jesus for eternal life.

WE SHOULD BE LIKE PAUL

Therefore, if we want to follow Paul's example, we should talk about faith. A possible format for how a believer could give his testimony is to

describe what it was that he believed prior to salvation. This will be different for each of us. Maybe you were an atheist prior to salvation or a member of a cult that taught that salvation is by works. Whatever your belief system prior to salvation, describe it and why you came to the realization that it was wrong. Then describe the moment you understood that it was by faith in Jesus for eternal life. You could use the Scripture that brought you to that understanding.

CONCLUSION

Not too long ago, I attended a church where I was asked to give my testimony. I remember being uncomfortable about the experience, but at the time I wasn't sure why. It wasn't until I began to process how people traditionally give testimonies that I began to understand what was going on in my thinking.

My testimony wasn't exciting. There was no major lifestyle change when I became a believer. You might even say that my testimony was boring. I think some people even questioned its authenticity because I never described a "before and after" experience. I was saved when I was a child. I don't remember it. I couldn't tell you how old I was. In fact, I have no memory at all of the day I was saved. I just know that there came a time in which I knew I had eternal life because Jesus promised it to me. My prayer is that everyone can come to know and believe the same promise. When we give our testimony, the personal details may be different. But the message will always be the same. We became children of God and received eternal life when we believed in Christ for that wonderful gift. ■



Kathryn Wright is a graduate of Luther Rice Seminary and teaches overseas.

No Man Is an Island

By Bob Wilkin

In 1624, English poet John Donne wrote a poem whose first line reads, "No man is an island entire of itself..." He went on in the same short poem to write, "any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

Donne was born and raised a Catholic. However, as a young man he became an Anglican and later a chaplain and pastor. He wrote "No man is an island" during a time of poor health that plagued him until his death seven years later.

His poems and phrases lost the attention of popular culture until 1940, when Ernest Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Then in 1962 a movie was made entitled *No Man Is an Island*. It was about the lone American who evaded capture by the Japanese during their 3-year occupation of Guam. After that movie, the phrase became well known by all American school children.

Donne's point is we all impact each other. That is, of course, a truth found in Scripture in terms of the local church.

If local churches are functioning as they should, then we each build each other up. We are not judging the consciences of other believers. We are pursuing peace with one another. We are seeking to edify each other. We aim to be well pleasing to God and approved by our fellow Christians.

While we each will be judged by Christ separately at the Bema, we must realize that how we treated others, especially those in our church, will play a big part in our judgment at the Bema.

Romans 14 is one of the places in the NT from which the idea that no man is an island comes. The issue in chap. 14 concerns doubtful things,



also called opinions (Hodges, *Romans*, p. 401), disputable opinion (Longenecker, *Romans*, p. 986), and non-essential issues (Lopez, *Romans*, p. 263). Longenecker says that Paul is talking about “matters that are neither required of nor prohibited to believers in Jesus” (*Romans*, p. 1001).

So, Paul is not talking about issues like premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, wearing skimpy clothing at church, getting drunk, etc. All those things are clearly prohibited in the Bible. Those who violate Scripture are to be held accountable by the elders in the local churches. Instead, Paul is talking about things neither commanded nor forbidden.

The entire chapter uses one main example. It is the case of believers who think it is okay to eat anything, meat included, and believers who think you should eat only vegetables. The other examples which Paul uses are drinking wine versus not drinking wine, and believers who think that they should observe special Jewish feast days versus other believers who think that they should not. Paul uses those examples to say that believers need to get along and not look down on others (as the stronger brothers were likely to do) or judge each other for having different views or difference practices (as the weaker brothers were susceptible to do).

Romans 14:10-12 is one of only two places in the NT that uses the expression *the Judgment Seat of Christ* (cf. 2 Cor 5:9-10). The day is coming when believers will be judged by Him to determine our eternal rewards.

Hodges says, “Any serious consideration of [the fact that we all are subject to final accounting before Christ] should cause us to focus on our


own day of accounting, rather than the presumed failures of other Christians” (*Romans*, p. 412).

In most Greek manuscripts, there are three more verses here, Rom 14:24-26, at the end of the chapter. They are found in the English translations as the last three verses in the book (Rom 16:25-27). Of course, that is odd since Rom 16:24 sounds like the close of the letter, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Why a double ending?

These verses are a fitting conclusion to chap. 14.

Whenever a matter is neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture, we are to be at peace with other believers who have a different opinion. This is true of eating meat, drinking wine, observing Jewish feast days, men shaving their heads bald, men having beards, women wearing makeup, women (or men) wearing jewelry, wearing sandals to church, etc.

No one is an island. The Lord is with us in this life. And He wants us to love and encourage and edify the other members of His forever family.

We will give an account to Him one day for all our actions, including how we treated one another in our church. Let’s live considering His soon return and our judgment by Him at the Bema. 



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 43 years, Sharon. His latest book is *Turn and Live: The Power of Repentance*.

The Greatest of These

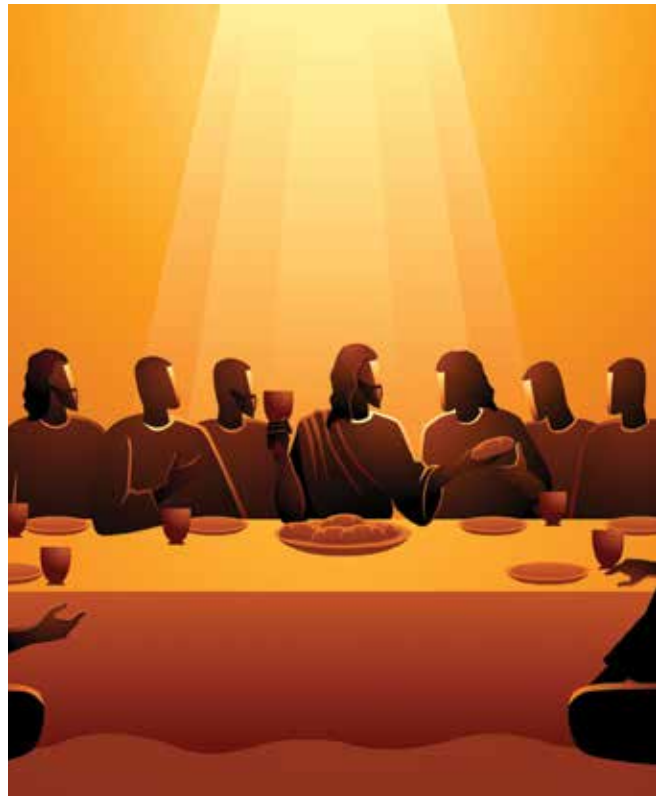
By Bill Fiess and Pam Esteven

In a recent study, I noted that some form of the Greek word family *agapaō* (verb, noun, participle, adjective) occurs in every single book of the NT. As many *Grace in Focus* readers know, *agapaō* and its various forms denote *love* in the highest sense of the word, both morally and socially. The word is used to express the unconditional love God has for people (John 3:16); it is also used by the NT writers to express the sacrificial love believers should have for one another (John 13:34) as well as the love believers should have for Jesus (see John 8:42) and for God (1 John 4:19).


Agapaō also expresses the love which the Father has for the Son (John 15:9), the love the Son has for the Father (John 14:31), the love the Son has for believers (John 13:34), and the love the Father has for believers (John 17:23).

You may have noticed that the Scripture references in the above paragraphs are all from John, either his Gospel or his first epistle. This comes as no surprise when we consider that two of John's books lead all other NT books in the number of uses of some form of *agapaō*: 1 John contains fifty-one occurrences, and John's Gospel contains forty-four.

John's use of *agapaō* in its various forms in his Gospel are concentrated in his account of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17) which contains a whopping 70% (31 out of 44) of the word's occurrences in his Gospel. The staggering majority of the uses of *agapaō* in the Upper Room Discourse is significant because this is



Jesus' final pre-cross teaching to His disciples. The lesson is about love.

As I study John's writings, I have observed that 1 John appears to be an expansion of the Upper Room Discourse, which addresses the issue of abiding in Christ. Both 1 John and the Upper Room Discourse in John's Gospel emphasize the importance of love in the life of a believer. We can therefore conclude that love is the outstanding characteristic of one who is abiding in Christ. Do the math: the greatest of these is *love*. 



Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia.
Pam Esteven is an editor and lives in
Baton Rouge.



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The Potential Impact of Christian Hospitality

By Shawn Lazar

What does a practical “Christian spirituality” look like? That’s what I’m trying to understand as I seek to follow the Lord more closely and to raise my kids to do the same.

The problem those of us in the Free Grace movement face is that so much of today’s teaching about “spirituality” assumes a salvation-by-works gospel, which inevitably distorts the whole venture. If you think eternal salvation depends on how well you climb the ladder to heaven, your approach to spirituality will be very different from someone who knows he is justified by faith apart from works.

So, given salvation by grace, what does Christian spirituality look like?

I think it is down-to-earth, and practical, and often focused on loving your neighbors (instead of, say, sitting in front of a candle and trying to clear your mind). And a part of loving your neighbor means *showing hospitality*. For example:

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling (1 Pet 4:8-9, emphasis added).

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another...given to hospitality (Rom 12:10, 13b, emphasis added).

Did you know that showing hospitality is implied in the Biblical command to love? How often do you do that?


In *The Hospitality Commands* (which I highly recommend), Alexander Strauch points to the very central role that hospitality played in the lives of the first Christians and the impact that hospitality can have on your local church:

I don’t think most Christians today understand how essential hospitality is to fanning the flames of love and strengthening the Christian family. Hospitality fleshes out love in a uniquely personal and sacrificial way. Through the ministry of hospitality, we share our most prized possessions. We share our family, home, finances, food, privacy, and time. Indeed, we share our very lives. So, hospitality is always costly. Through the ministry of hospitality, we provide friendship, acceptance, fellowship, refreshment, comfort, and love in one of the richest and deepest ways possible for humans to understand. Unless we open the doors of our homes to one another, the reality of the local church as a close-knit family of loving brothers and sisters is only a theory (p. 17).

Have you ever thought about your progress in the spiritual life in terms of having people over to eat?

Speaking for myself, I know there are many people in my little church that I’ve never had over at my house. Frankly, with three little kids leaving a trail of destruction wherever they go, having people over isn’t exactly my favorite thing to do. But maybe I have to change my thinking, put my embarrassment aside, and live up to those NT hospitality commands.

The command is not to show hospitality when it’s convenient and you can show off your nice house. The command is to show hospitality to your neighbor because they’ll benefit from your act of love.

Is there someone you can invite over to your house this week? A missionary? A loner? A newcomer? A visitor? Maybe someone in your church? That might be the act of concrete love that builds up your local expression of the Body of Christ. 



Shawn Lazar lives in Denton, TX, with his wife Abby and their three children.

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