

The background of the entire page is a detailed painting of the Tower of Babel. The tower is a massive, multi-tiered structure made of stone and brick, with numerous windows, arches, and balconies. It spirals upwards, becoming more complex and crowded as it rises. At the base of the tower, there is a bustling scene of people working with large stone blocks, some using tools like hammers and chisels. In the foreground, a group of men in medieval-style clothing are gathered around a large stone block, with one man kneeling in prayer or contemplation. The landscape around the tower is hilly and green, with small villages and houses visible in the distance. The sky is a pale blue with some light clouds.

GRACE IN FOCUS

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NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2012

THE TOWER OF BABEL AND THE SCATTERING OF MEN

BY BOB WILKIN

DID JESUS DIE TO PAY THE PENALTY FOR THE SINS OF BELIEVERS ONLY?

BY DON REIHER

DID ZANE CHANGE HIS VIEW?

BY STEVE ELKINS

AND MORE

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BY S. C. LAZAR


The last two months of the year remind us of the birth of our Lord and Savior (though scholars think it most likely occurred in March or April). The birth of Jesus changed history. So did His death and resurrection. So will His soon return. History really is *His* story.

I hope you'll enjoy this issue. You'll find the third and final installment of Dr. Willard Aldrich's article, *Is Salvation Probationary?* There's an article by Shawn Lazar on a parable by Dostoyevsky. Shawn's analysis is outstanding. Steve Elkins, a contemporary of mine at DTS, writes with passion about the evangelistic zeal and message of our mutual friend, Zane Hodges. Don Reiher takes on the issue of limited atonement. And I present a brief exposition of Genesis 11 about the tower of Babel and the scattering of men.

Do you know of family and friends who would enjoy *Grace in Focus Magazine*? If so, we'll be happy to send it to them. Just provide us with their addresses (ges@faithalone.org). All subscriptions to U.S. addresses are free. (We charge a nominal fee for foreign subscriptions to cover postage only.)

Mark Gray, who runs our help desk and fills all orders, is getting better by the day. In May he was hit by a truck while riding his bike. First he had surgery to install a plate in his right ankle. Second he had surgery on his left shoulder. He is still in a sling and he faces months of therapy. But he is on the mend. Thank you for your prayers.

If you are able to make a year-end gift, it would be much appreciated. Many thanks to those of you who have already given to support our ministry this year. Your partnership allows us to get the word out in many exciting ways.



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Editor: Robert N. Wilkin, Ph.D.

Art Director: Shawn Lazar

Graphic Design: Holly Melton

Circulation Manager: Mark "Sling-Wing" Gray



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Phone: 940.270.8827

Email: ges@faithalone.org

Web: www.faithalone.org

INTRODUCTION

God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and to multiply *and to fill the earth* (Gen 1:28). After the flood, God repeated that same command to Noah and his sons (Gen 9:1).

Man was to fill the earth. We do not know how well man had spread over the earth prior to the flood. Presumably man was widely scattered.

However, after the flood many of the descendants of Noah and his sons fail to spread over the earth as they were told. Instead, they stay grouped together in one place. In addition, they hatch a plot to build a very high tower and to make a great name for themselves.

In this passage we see the hand of God. Many think that God does not intervene in human history. He just created us and then lets us do whatever we want.

Of course the flood itself disproves that.

But soon after the flood, in the Tower of Babel incident, we see more evidence that God has a plan for mankind, and He will indeed intervene when necessary to get men to do what He wants.

The Tower of Babel is really only a minor part of this story. The heart of the story is the dispersion of the nations that occurred at Babel. It shows that God opposes the proud and that God is able and willing to bring them down to accomplish His own purposes.

NOAH'S DESCENDANTS REFUSE TO FILL THE EARTH (GENESIS 11:1-4)

Evidently Gen 11:1-9 explains Genesis 10. That is, Gen 11:1-9 occurred before Genesis 10. Genesis often presents material thematically, out of normal chronological order.

These verses explain to the new nation of Israel (1440 BC) where all the world's nations and languages came from.

The whole earth spoke only one language. That makes sense. God created

Adam and Eve with language. They didn't have to learn to speak. They were created as highly educated, articulate people.

Whatever language God gave Adam and Eve was passed from generation to generation. No new language would develop. Everyone could understand everyone.

Evidently that was God's original plan for man. But as a result of this new rebellion, this refusal to scatter and fill the earth, God is going to change the language situation in a big way.

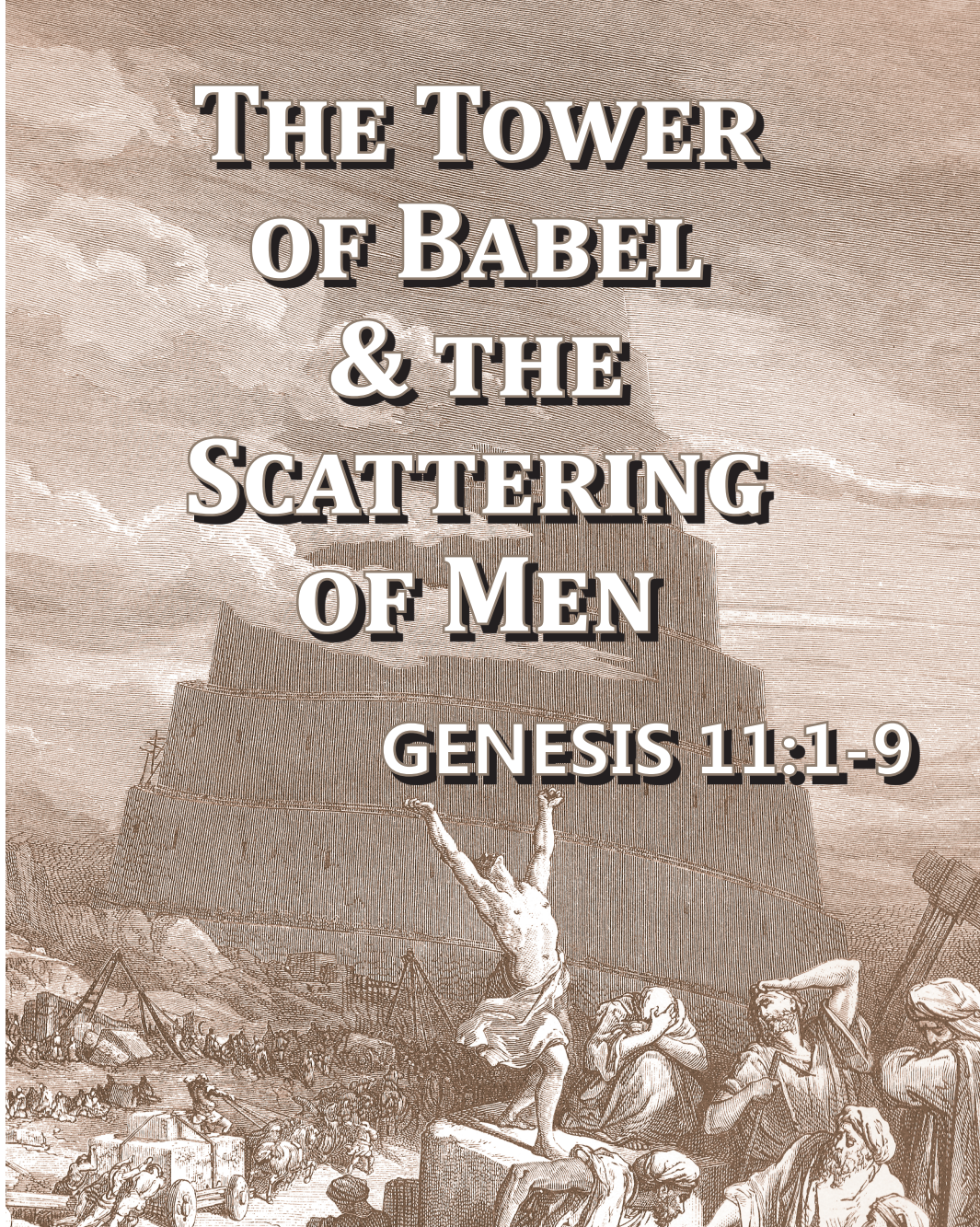
The land of Shinar (see Gen 10:10 which mentions that Babel is in the land of Shinar), later in the OT, is another name for Babylon, and of course Babylon is related to the name *Babel* in the Tower of Babel.

Shinar is thus the place that became Mesopotamia or Babylon. This is to the east and slightly north of modern Israel. Today Shinar is called Iraq. Thus the place we've had troops for the past decade is where this passage occurs.

Verse 3 seems quite harmless. What is wrong with men making bricks and mortar?

THE TOWER OF BABEL & THE SCATTERING OF MEN

GENESIS 11:1-9



by Bob Wilkin

continued on p. 4

4 THE SCATTERING OF MEN

The problem is not the action itself, but, as is often the case, the motive behind the action.

Verse 4 explains why they are making bricks and mortar. They want to build a city, which is fine in itself, and “a tower whose top is in the heavens.” They want to “make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

But that is exactly what God wanted men to do. While certainly some families could stay put so that a given region had a reasonable population, banding together for the explicit purpose of keeping others from moving out, and of building a mega-population, was a clear violation of God’s call.

And what was this “tower”? Most scholars believe it was a giant ziggurat. Indeed, one has been found in this region.

A ziggurat was a massive monument used for worship. Imagine a huge pyramid, but instead of it being pointed on top, it has a flat surface on top where sacrifices can be offered. The top was a temple.

By “the heavens” they probably mean the upper atmosphere. They intend to build something so massive that it would be *an artificial mountain*. My guess is the building was similar in height to the highest buildings on earth today.

Currently the world’s tallest building is in Dubai and it stands 162 stories high, with a total height of 2,717 feet, or just over one half mile high.

Those in Shinar thought this way:

Greatest strength: unity.

Greatest fear: scattering.

Greatest desire: making a name for themselves.

Alan Ross, in his class on Genesis at DTS, suggested: “The sin of the Shinarites appears to be immense pride... Pride in the OT is much more than an arrogant attitude. It is open rebellion against God, an independence of God. Humility is often equated with trust and obedience. Their refusal to scatter and fill the earth was direct rebellion against God and the height of arrogance.”

We will see shortly that what they fear the most is what actually happens, and they indeed make a name for themselves, but it is not the name they would have wished.

THE LORD ASSESSES THE SITUATION & CONFUSES THEIR LANGUAGE (GENESIS 11:5-7)

Verse 5 is a figure of speech since God is omniscient. God already knew what they were up to, and why they were doing it.

This may imply that the Lord Jesus actually came to Shinar in His pre-incarnate body to inspect what was going on.

There is irony here. Alan Ross points out: “No matter how high they climbed, it seems, the LORD still had to descend to view their human enterprise.” This clearly shows how lofty

THE PROBLEM IS NOT THE ACTION ITSELF, BUT, AS IS OFTEN THE CASE, THE MOTIVE BEHIND THE ACTION

God is and how our greatest aspirations fall far short of the glory of God.

Exactly what the end of verse 6 means is unclear: “Now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.” Probably this means something to the effect that if God does not intervene, if He lets them stay clumped in Shinar and build this tower and live together, then they will be able accomplish many things they wish to do, including making a great name for themselves, but which God does not want them doing.

God “decides” to intervene now rather than later. He knows this is the best way to deal with this rebellion.

Precisely what verse 7 means escaped my attention until I was

preparing this article. What God did was not simply give the people of Shinar many new languages. Let’s say there were 100,000 people and he gave them 25 different languages. But that is only *half* of what He did.

If that was all he did, they could still all communicate with their first language. Here is the other half of what God did: *He took away their first language*.

Of course, that had never happened before and it has never happened since.

Imagine what that must have been like. Let’s say you are like me and you only speak English. Now imagine one day you lose the ability to speak or understand English, but you now speak and understand Chinese. And the people down the street now speak Arabic, but not English or Mandarin. Your back yard neighbors now speak French, but not English or Mandarin or Arabic. Your neighbors on the next block over speak Swahili, but not any other language. People all over your town speak 20 or more different languages, but no one speaks or understands English any more.

What would happen? You would gather together with the people who speak your new language and all of you would form a new community. If you lived in the world after the flood where the whole earth was open to colonization, you would go with the people of your language and pick a land and populate it.

The people who spoke Old Chinese went to what is now called China. The people who spoke Egyptian went to Egypt. The people who spoke Greek went to Greece. And so on.

God got the people to do what He wanted by confusing their languages.

This is an example of the balance between God’s sovereignty and man’s free will. God allows *limited free will*. Both individually and collectively God is at work behind the scenes to see to it that we do not veer too far from His plan. He allows lots of freedom and lots of iniquity, but there are limits.

THE LORD SCATTERS THEM (GENESIS 11:8)

Verse 8 might be presenting the results of what God did in confusing the languages. Or it might be presenting a separate point.

Either way, God caused men to do what He wanted, to fill the earth, to scatter, and to cover the planet.

He also wanted them to stop building the mega city they were building. And stop they did.

A REMINDER THAT WE SHOULD FULFILL GOD'S COMMANDS (GENESIS 11:9)

The city is called *Babel* "because the LORD *confused* the language of all the earth" (Gen 11:9). Babel is from the Hebrew word that means *confusion*.

The name *Babel* reminds us that we should fulfill God's commands. A failure to do so will result in consequences, possibly quite painful. In this case mankind lost the ability to communicate with each other. Suddenly there was a language barrier that had never existed before.

Remember what the people in Shinar wanted the most: to make a name for themselves. Well, in a sense they did. But the name they made was not a glorious one like they had wished. Instead the name they made was Babel, confusion. How would you like to be called *confusion*.

They were united. Yet they were united in opposition to God.

They feared being scattered. Because they rebelled against God, their greatest fear was realized.

They desired to make a great name for themselves. They made one all right, but not the one they wanted.

If Adam had not sinned, then the Garden of Eden would still be here and there would have been no curse on the earth. No one would have died.

If the sons of God had not intermarried with the daughters of men, then there would have been no flood and no great drop in lifespan. People would still be living 800 to 900 years.

If the descendants of Noah had not decided to clump together in Shinar, if they had scattered over the earth, then there would be only one language on earth today, not hundreds.

Rebellion leads to judgment and curses from God. Obedience results

REBELLION LEADS TO JUDGMENT AND CURSES FROM GOD. OBEDIENCE RESULTS IN BLESSINGS FROM GOD

in blessings from God. Why not pick blessings?

LESSONS AND APPLICATIONS

1. Israel was called out of the nations to be God's chosen people, His theocracy. Alan Ross points out that if like those in Shinar "they lifted their head in pride and rebelled against God...then they too would be scattered across the face of the earth." Of course, that is exactly what happened.
2. The separation of peoples into nations is not a bad thing inherently. *If* they had done this willingly, they would have had one language and none of them would have had the name *Babel*.
3. God works behind the scenes to get us to do what He wants.
4. We do not have total free will. We have limited free will.
5. God opposes the proud. Those who exalt themselves above God will be put down.
6. God judges disobedience, even if we think He does not.

7. God sees all. We cannot hide from Him.
8. God's plans will ultimately be accomplished, with or without man's obedience.
9. We should look forward to the New Earth in which there will be true unity. Though there will be many nations, most likely we will all speak and understand one language. We will return to the way God intended. We will all worship not in an artificial mountain, the Tower of Babel, but on a real mountain, the New Jerusalem.
10. Until the Lord returns, true unity of the nations is highly unlikely. Allen Ross notes: "The United Nations has often been seen as a lengthening shadow of Babel."


CONCLUSION

Given a chance to start over after the flood, man quickly got way off track. They rejected God's command to fill the earth.

Of course, most people don't want to leave where they grew up and move to some new place, but that was God's command. Thus families should have been pushing out and starting new communities and new nations until eventually all of the inhabitable lands were colonized.

In a sense these people moving out would have been missionaries, taking the message of life to new locations. Unfortunately, this did not happen voluntarily.

The story of Babel is ultimately a story about the futility of rebelling against God. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. It is Jesus' name we should seek to exalt, not our own. If we seek to make a name for ourselves by rebelling against God, we will find that the name we obtain is more like *Ichabod* (Hebrew = Inglorious) than *Glory*.

It always pays to obey God; it never pays to disobey Him. 

Is Salvation Probationary?

Part III

[Editor's Note: Originally published in 1934 in the journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*, this article was written by then Th.M. student Willard Aldrich. He later went on to get his Th.D. and to be president of Multnomah Bible College (1943-1978). He died in 2009. Part I appeared in the May/June issue and Part II appeared in the Sept/Oct issue of this magazine.]

by Willard
Maxwell Aldrich

Thus far I have shown that eternal life with its many concomitant positions and possessions becomes the believer's as soon as he exercises saving faith. I have also shown that the character of eternal life and these positions and possessions does not warrant the idea that they may be gained and lost again. But now, as a final step in this article, I will demonstrate from Scripture that God has pledged Himself to maintain these unchangeable and eternal relationships.

This would seem the only reasonable thing for Him to do when we look upon the life of the saint not as a probation but as anchored in the realm of the "much more love" of God as set forth by the Apostle Paul in Rom 5:9-11. When we further realize that it is "by grace that ye are saved and not of works" this appears as a necessary part of God's great and gracious undertaking for the believer. And such is the statement concerning God's purpose with respect to his children as set forth by the Apostle Paul in Rom 11:29, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

The first question to settle in relation to this text is the right to take it from its context and employ it in proof of God's purpose to sustain in the believer the things pertaining to

salvation. First of all, we notice that the statement under consideration is a general principle, not contingent upon the immediate context, but introduced into it as an explanation of God's method of dealing with men. This then liberates it from the immediate context, and gives us the right to consider it as a general proposition (*Barnes' Notes, Epistle to Romans*, 277). In the second place, this very context deals with salvation, and that is the connection in which we are to use it. Furthermore, the words themselves, "gifts" and "calling," are used of salvation truth. Finally, while this passage deals with the salvation of the Jews, the Christian comes under its spiritual blessings as spiritual seed of Abraham.

The principle set forth in the statement, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," finds support from other passages of Scripture. So it is with God's covenant with Abraham. It is unconditional. God said, "I will," and the fulfillment of the covenant depends entirely upon *Him*.

We have already seen that Christ has pledged Himself to the keeping of those to whom He has given eternal life (John 10:28-29). The fact that the Holy Spirit is the "seal" upon the believer unto the day of redemption (Eph 1:13) also points to God's unchangeable purpose

in bringing many sons into glory. Another interesting passage in support of this principle is 1 Pet 1:5, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." The keeping power of God seems at first here to be limited by the "through faith," that is, He is able to keep only so long as the believer retains his faith. But, I have showed before that if the continued exercise of faith were essential to salvation, that God would have to guarantee it, for He has promised that "If any man eat, he shall live forever." Thus we may conclude that man and his exercise of faith is not the prime mover in this passage, but that the governing principle is found in the statement of the keeping power of God. The postulate that man's faith in this passage is no more than the intermediate agency over which God exercises control is supported by the Greek preposition (*dia*) used with faith. "*Dia*" is very often used to express the action of an intermediate agent or the way or manner in which a thing is accomplished.

We have seen that we both have a right to use this text, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance," and also that the principle embodied in it is common to the Scriptures. Now let us examine the text itself a bit more clearly.

The “gifts” (*charisma*) are the favors or benefits which God bestows on men. The Greek word properly “denotes any benefit which is conferred on another as a mere matter of favor, and not of reward” (see: Rom 5:15, 16; 6:23). “Such are all the favors which God bestows on sinners, including pardon, peace, joy, sanctification and eternal life” (*Barnes’ Notes*, 277). The best way to determine what the Apostle Paul is referring to by “gifts” in this passage is to take a survey of its use throughout the book. The word is used in the singular in the following passages: 1:11, “some spiritual gift to the end that ye may be established”; 5:15, 16, 17, 18, “free gift unto justification, gift of righteousness,” etc.; 6:23, “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” In the plural the word is used both in the passages under consideration and in 12:6 where it has reference to the spiritual gifts for service. It is clear, then, from the Apostle’s use of the word that he means every gift of God from the beginning to the consummation of his salvation.

The word “calling” (*klésis*) means more than the mere extension of the invitation to come and partake of the divine favors. An examination of Paul’s usage of the word in other passages shows beyond a doubt that his most frequent usage of it carries the thought of the “effectual calling, whereby sinners savingly believe, and obey the Gospel.” [Ed. Effectual calling was a common view among Free Grace believers of the time, and remains so even today. And it seems here that Aldrich intends “obey” to mean *obey by believing*.] Thus it involves a life purpose or vocation. It is so used in 1 Cor 7:20, “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.”

Thus the text may be expanded to read, “The gifts (including both the gifts of salvation and other spiritual gifts) and the calling of God (which involves the direction of the believer’s life vocation) are without repentance,

i.e., not to be repented of.” If the attitude of God toward the gifts and calling is not to be repented of, it means that the gifts and calling themselves are to be forever *unchangeable* and irreversible.

Among the “*all things* given unto us pertaining unto life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3), are eternal life (Rom 6:23), authority to become sons of God (John 1:12) and salvation (Eph 2:8). These

The Holy Spirit is the seal upon the believer unto the day of redemption

are specifically mentioned as gifts, but all of the positions and possessions of the believer belong here.

In summary of the treatment of this text, it may be treated in syllogistic form. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance, hence unchangeable, irreversible. The possessions and positions attributed to the believer the moment he exercises saving faith are gifts, and form the calling of God. Therefore, these relationships and possessions are without repentance, unchangeable and irrevocable, and the believer entering into them is secure in the safekeeping power of God.

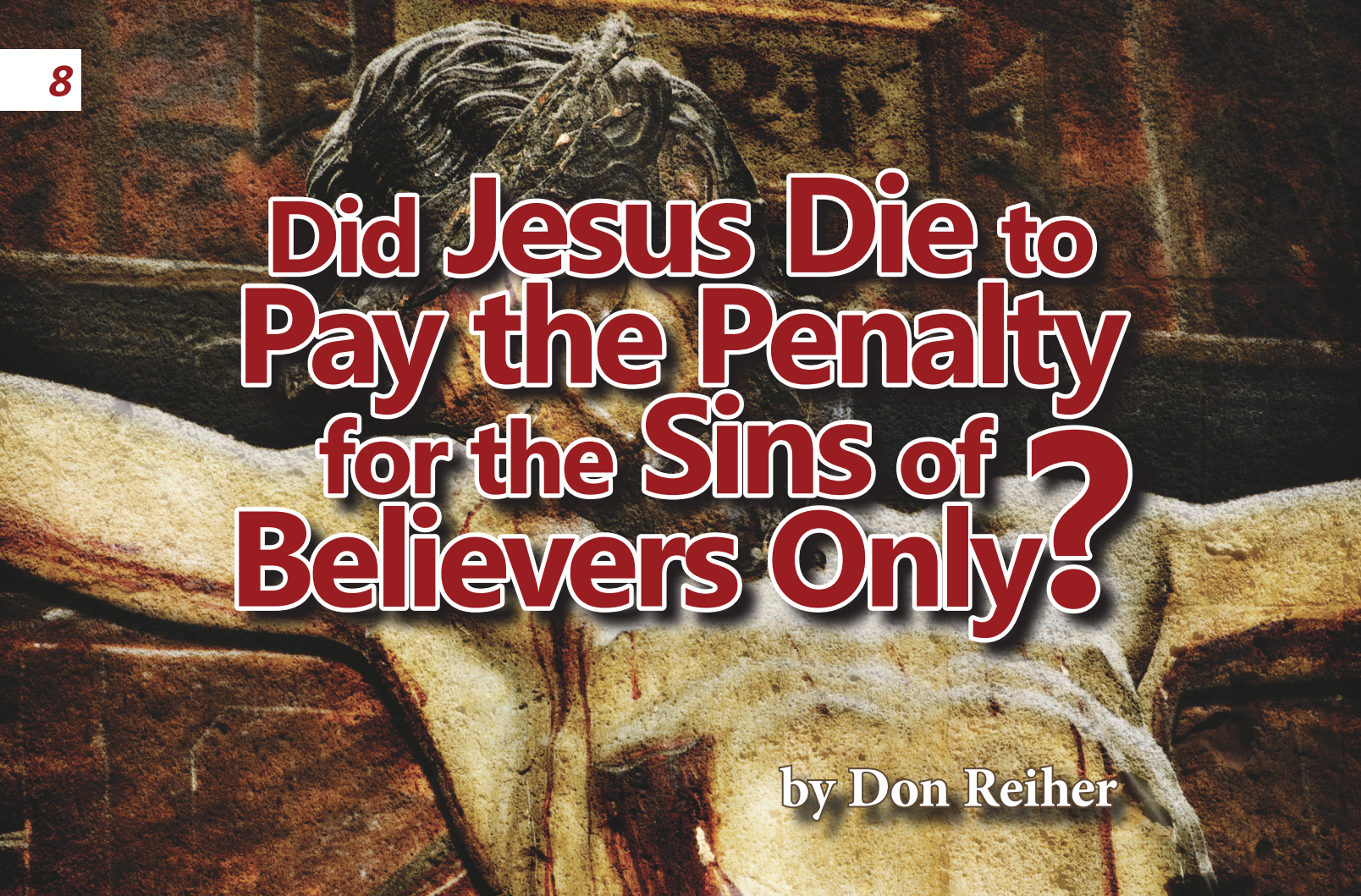
I have shown from the Scriptures that perfect positions and possessions are accorded to the believer in response to a look of faith, and therefore saving faith is an act instantaneous and complete in its effect; that

among the possessions into which he so enters is eternal life, which means that he “shall live forever,” and finally that God has pledged to keep these positions and possessions unchangeable and irrevocable. Concerning this last statement Barnes says, “**God does not bestow on men the gift of repentance and faith, of pardon and peace, for a temporary purpose; nor does he capriciously withdraw these favors, and leave the soul to ruin.**

When he renews a soul, it is with reference to his own glory; and to withdraw those favors, and leave such a soul once renewed to go down to hell, would be as much a violation of all the principles of his nature as it would be of all the promises of the Scripture. For God to forsake such a soul, and leave it to ruin, would imply that he did repent. It would suppose a change of purpose and of feeling. It would be characteristic of a capricious being, with no settled plan or principles of action. No confidence could be reposed in such a being, and his government would be unworthy of the affections and trust of the intelligent creation.”¹

But thanks be to God, for “God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall it not be made good?” (Num 23:19). With the Apostle Paul we may conclude that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! **III**

¹Ed.: Aldrich clearly quotes Barnes here for support regarding the doctrine of eternal security. Whether or not Aldrich believed regeneration precedes faith is not the purpose of the article. For a commonly held Free Grace view of the *ordo salutis*, see Dave Anderson, “Regeneration: A Crux Interpretum,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring, 2000), available online.



Did Jesus Die to Pay the Penalty for the Sins of Believers Only?

by Don Reiher

Do half-truths bug you? Several things that have really bugged me lately are lyrics and speakers saying something to the effect, "Isn't it wonderful that Jesus died on the cross to pay for *our* sins? We will not have to pay the penalty for our sins because of what Jesus did on the cross." This is true. However it is only half of the truth. Of course they may quote a verse like:

*But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.*

Isaiah 53:5

It sounds wonderful doesn't it? I can't remember how many times I heard this verse quoted at communion. Jesus died on the cross to pay for *our* sins? Is this true? Yes! Of course!

However, the word *our* sometimes gets too much emphasis. When spoken by a Calvinist who believes

JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS TO PAY IN FULL THE PENALTY FOR THE SINS OF EVERYONE

that Jesus did *not* die for the sins of unbelievers, it sure sounds like we are getting a rather sneaky lesson on

the third point of Calvinism, namely, Limited Atonement. But did Christ only die for *our* sins? Didn't He die to pay for the sins of *them* too (i.e. unbelievers)? If so, why don't we say during communion, "Isn't it wonderful that Jesus died on the cross to pay for *our* sins as well as the sins of the entire world?" Biblically speaking, that would be the whole truth. There are many Scriptures that teach that Jesus died on the cross to pay in full the penalty for the sins of *everyone*. For example:

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 John 2:2).

In the words of Zane Hodges, there is nothing in 1 John 2:2 about Jesus Christ being the *potential* satisfaction for the sins of the world. As Zane said:

The apostle flatly states that Jesus *is* the propitiation for the

sins of the whole world. He *is* that. Not that He *can* be, or *potentially* is, but He simply *is*. Note too that this statement is exactly parallel to the truth that He is the propitiation for *our* sins. In whatever sense He is the propitiation for *our* sins, he is also the propitiation for the sins of the *whole world*. Very simply put, the propitiatory work of our Lord Jesus Christ is universally effective. That is true whether anyone believes it or not. On the cross, my friends, Jesus paid for every single sin that has ever been committed, by any person who has ever lived on the face of the earth. If you ask me, that is magnificent and overwhelming. (Video, "Propitiation: Does It Only Count If We Accept It?")

Another verse that comes to mind is:

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19).

Because of Christ's work on the cross, no sin will ever be imputed to an unbeliever. That means that unbelievers are not going to hell to pay the judicial penalty for their sins. Of course there is penalty for sin, but it is not a *judicial* penalty. That has already been paid. Nobody will go to hell for their sin. They will go to hell because they are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And

UNBELIEVERS ARE NOT GOING TO HELL TO PAY THE JUDICIAL PENALTY FOR THEIR SINS

the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:12-14).

There is no mention anywhere in this passage that unbelievers go to hell to pay for their sins. True, there is a penalty for sins we commit *now*. Believers as well as unbelievers pay for their sins both now and later, but this penalty has more to do with a law of sowing and reaping, as taught in Romans and Galatians, than it does with an eternal judicial penalty. In other words, both unbelievers and

believers face God's temporal wrath and judgment for sins. But this is much different than paying the eternal penalty for any of the sins. Only Jesus, the Lamb of God can pay the penalty for the sins of the world:

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

I can remember a lot of songs that say Jesus paid for *our* sin. Of course this is true. But it's not the whole truth. There is a large part of humanity being ignored. There is no mention of the fact

that Jesus paid for the sins of believers and unbelievers alike. Thank God that Jesus didn't forget *them*.



Did Zane Change His View?

by Steve Elkins



I used to have lunch with Zane Hodges about once a month. One time, right before his death, I was there a little early. He had just hung up from a call. Out of the blue he said, “They’re saying I changed my view on the gospel. I never changed my view. I’ll tell you what happened...”

I knew Zane hadn’t changed his view in the 30 plus years I’d known him. During my second year as a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, Craig Glickman, a fellow student, said we should take Zane Hodges for as many classes as we could. I began with Hebrews, then Acts, then the Epistles of James and John. I spent so much time in his office asking questions for my thesis, “*Current Issues Concerning Lordship Salvation*,” it was essentially a free class. As usual, he was the best question-answerer I’ve ever been around, not to mention the finest Christian gentleman.

Until he died, we had a monthly lunch and at least one yearly dinner when he’d come to our house to meet with forty-plus Young Life leaders and friends to enjoy “*An Evening with Hodges*.” What a blessing. There were also times I’d hoodwink him into answering questions for friends. I considered Zane my best friend and it was a deep honor to have been a pallbearer at his funeral.

Dozens and dozens of times I’d hear the same question asked of him: “So when you boil it down, what do I have to believe to be saved?” Or, “What’s the minimum—what’s the ‘bottom-line’ I have to believe to get eternal life?” Each time he gave the same answer—John 11:25-27. He would tell the story about Jesus and Martha, and then conclude, “You’ve got to believe that Jesus is the Guarantor of resurrection and eternal life.”

That was the same answer he gave in 1978 when I met him in the DTS library... the same answer he gave to those who’d argue with him in Hebrews class... the same answer in all his books... in all the meetings and Bible studies I attended with him... in his sermons at Victor Street... or messages at the Lord’s Table. His gospel came from John and it *always* had these elements, “*believe...Jesus...for eternal life*.”

Because of his understanding of Johannine theology, he understood that at the gospel’s core we are believing a *Person*, Jesus, *for eternal life*. That has some implications I’ll mention shortly, but that’s

always been the bottom line of believing the gospel for Zane, since he first heard it as a kid. It was always the answer to those repeatedly asking, “What do I have to believe?”

Because he kept hearing that question, he gave the “deserted island illustration.” Even with the harsh criticism he’s received for it, he never repented because *that’s always been his view of the gospel*.

And that’s why his next sentences when I picked him up that day were so interesting. He went on, “I’ll tell you what happened. Those who say I changed my view were my students. They came to me asking questions about lordship [lordship salvation]. I answered their questions. They were satisfied. *But they never got my core belief on the gospel.*”

They got answers dealing with problem passages. They got theologically sound, exegetically accurate, and intellectually satisfying answers about lordship salvation. But they *never got his baseline* for the gospel.

That baseline was always, since his childhood, the primacy of John’s Gospel for understanding the message of eternal life. His view has some very important implications—implications nicely brought out in the deserted island illustration.

I knew Zane’s gospel from classes, from his books, and from countless hours discussing it with him (and a day doesn’t go by I don’t thank the Lord for it). But interestingly, where his bedrock, baseline gospel came through *most* was one evening at the Lord’s Table at Victor Street.

It was a small crowd as usual, twenty or so folks. He made an off-the-cuff comment, which was only a reminder to his beloved, well-taught group at Victor Street: “There are three implications in all these evangelistic passages in the Gospel of John. First, I need to believe Jesus that *all I have to do is believe Him for eternal life*. It’s not ‘believe *and* something,’ but simply ‘*believe Him* for eternal life.’ Second, I need to believe that *what I get*

when I believe is *eternal*, it can’t end or be taken away. Until a person understands that what he gets is *eternal*, he hasn’t understood the gospel. Third, I need to believe that *when I believe* I have eternal life. I don’t have to wait to find out, bear fruit, persevere, or any of that. I *know* I have eternal life the *moment* I believe Jesus for it, or else I do not believe Him.” Those three implications arise from his bedrock understanding of John’s oft-repeated terms: “Whoever believes in Me has everlasting life.”

Zane never changed on that.

He changed on a few *peripheral* things, *but never on his bedrock belief*

Zane’s position has always been the same: The gospel is about believing Jesus for eternal life.

of the nature of the gospel offer. (Those are his words, not mine).

It’s been well-documented he adjusted his view on *repentance* (though not effecting his view on the gospel). Also, a number of years ago he adjusted from using the term *trust* when personally sharing the gospel. Previously he had seen *trust* as a functional synonym for *believe*. Upon realizing that people saw a volitional element implied in the term *trust*, as well as a possible lack of *certainty*, he decided from then on to stick with John’s word *believe*. (Zane felt the Biblical idea of *believe* has no volitional element, nor can it lack certainty.)

Someone might dig-up a quote here and there from Zane where he varied his terminology, but it should be understood as a *restating* of his core-belief, not a changing of it. Zane was

a master of saying the same thing in different ways. For instance, in 1981, commenting on Hebrews and those who “through the fear of death were subject all their lifetime to bondage,” he said, “The real secret in not fearing death is found in the death of Christ. Rather than helping one’s assurance, looking at one’s works will probably make us doubt our salvation. Therefore, we must cause our gaze to go outward to the finished work of Christ. The soul will only find rest in that which is perfect, complete, and secure.”

Someone could take that quote and say, “See, Zane changed his view. He *did* believe you have to believe in the cross.” But that would take him out of the context he’s *addressing*. Further, it says nothing about his central belief of the gospel. A proper understanding of Christ’s finished work does give assurance. But Zane has always held unswervingly that the apostles had assurance, *even when they hadn’t yet understood the cross*.

Zane’s position has always been the same: the gospel is about believing Jesus for eternal life, period. Rather than seeking to establish some kind of Hodges-revisionism (which Hodges adamantly denied), the question should simply be, *is John stating the gospel or not?* Zane always believed he was. Hence he arrived at his baseline approach and the deserted island illustration.

Because of his take on John, Zane believed obtaining eternal life is as simple as believing Jesus for it (not believing a variable list of doctrines). He also believed that the gospel can be found complete in any number of verses. Further, Hodges’ personal ministry always emphasized simplicity and clarity. He had a lifelong belief that anyone can understand the promise of eternal life very well.

But sadly, some of his students didn’t know this. They got his intellectually satisfying answers about lordship, but failed to get his baseline belief on the gospel that drove it all. 📖

...And Then the Onion Broke

by S. C. Lazar

Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* contains what is perhaps the most depressing illustration of salvation I have ever encountered. It is called the "Parable of the Onion" and it was brought to my attention by a Russian Orthodox seminarian as proof that Orthodoxy *did not* have a legalistic understanding of salvation. After reading it, I was grieved that anyone, let alone a clergyman, could think this was an accurate depiction of the gospel. While the parable is about eternal salvation and damnation, there is hardly a single Christian element in it. Indeed, notice that Christ Himself is entirely absent from the picture:

Once upon a time there was a woman, and she was wicked as wicked could be, and she died. And not one good deed was left behind her. The devils took her and threw her into the lake of fire. And her guardian angel stood thinking: what good deed of hers can I remember to tell God? Then he remembered and said to God: once she pulled up an onion and gave it to a beggar woman. And God

answered: now take that same onion, hold it out to her in the lake, let her take hold of it, and pull, and if you pull her out of the lake, she can go to paradise, but if the onion breaks, she can stay where she is. The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her: here, woman, he said, take hold of it and I'll pull. And he began pulling carefully, and had almost pulled her all the way out, when other sinners in the lake saw her being pulled out and all began holding on to her so as to be pulled out with her. But the woman was wicked as wicked could be, and she began to kick them with her feet: "It's me who's getting pulled out, not you; it's my onion, not yours." No sooner did she say it than the onion broke. And the

woman
fell back
into the lake
and is burning
there to this day.

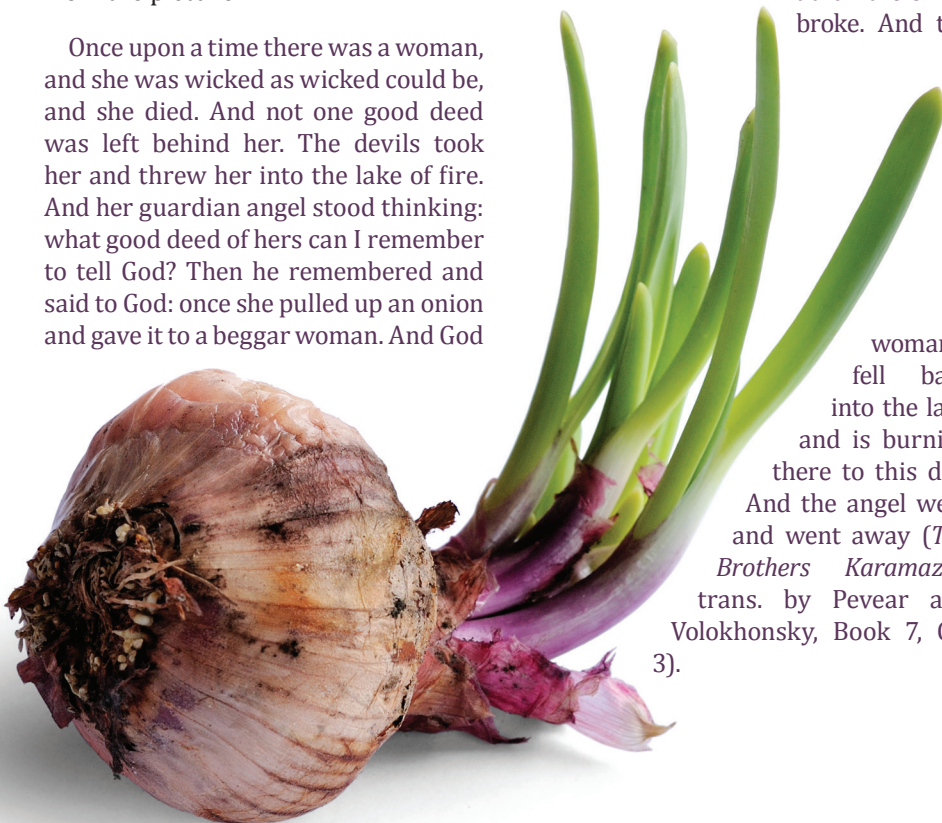
And the angel wept
and went away (*The Brothers Karamazov*,
trans. by Pevear and
Volokhonsky, Book 7, Ch.
3).

Whether this parable was meant to reflect Dostoyevsky's own beliefs about salvation, I cannot say. But it does represent what often passes for 'Christian' faith among people who are unfamiliar with the Bible and the gospel.

After a fashion, the purpose of the story is meant to teach about humility. It is meant to make us reflect upon our own lives, and cause us to ask whether we have any "onions" that could help pull us out of hell, should the time come. More poignantly, as Dostoyevsky later clarifies, the story is meant to help us recognize that we are all sinners like the wicked old woman. We too should be careful about how we live our lives, and eager to see that they are filled with good deeds.

Now, this attitude certainly has the *appearance* of humility. But from a Biblical perspective, this humility is false. How so? True humility always elevates Christ and His work, not man's work. It glories in the cross, not in our own feeble efforts. And this parable says nothing about the cross, nothing about Christ, nothing about faith in the gospel promises. It is entirely anthropocentric, entirely about man and his works. And so, rather than convince a person to look to Christ alone for their eternal salvation, the parable teaches that men need only try a little harder, put in a bit more self-conscious effort, and produce more works. After all, God is so "gracious" that one little onion can save you from hell.

continued on p. 15



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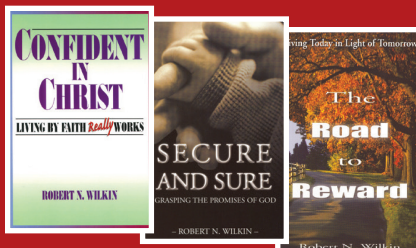
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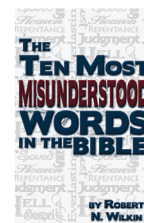
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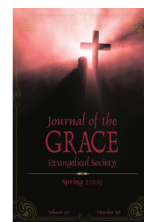
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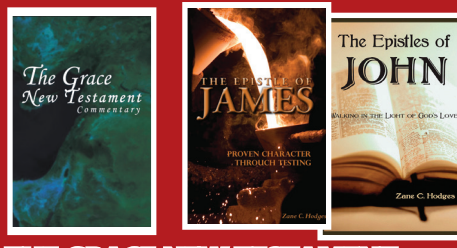
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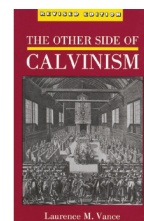
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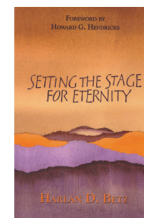
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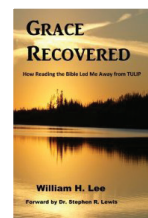
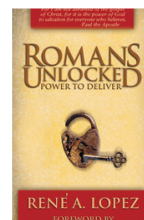
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The gospel message of everlasting life teaches the exact opposite of Dostoyevsky's parable. According to the gospel, there is only one way to receive everlasting life, and it is not by doing good, being good, or otherwise working our way to heaven. The reason why works cannot save us is because, as Jesus explained, no one is good but God alone (Mark 10:18; see also Rom 3:10). If no one is good, then no one should expect to be saved by their works.


But if works cannot save us, what can? How can we find redemption? Enter the gospel, which proclaims that we can receive everlasting life simply by believing in Christ for it. Jesus promises to give everlasting life to everyone who believes in His promise. It is that simple. Just believe. Again and again the NT repeats this: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16); "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe

the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

It is not the person who tries to do good who will be justified before God. On the contrary, if you are trying to justify yourself before God by doing 'good,' that means you are deceived about the true helplessness of your spiritual state, ignorant of God's holy character, and condescending towards Christ's atoning death. Imagine the pride it takes for someone to think they can supplement Christ's finished work with their own little "onions." The Bible says that it is not the one who tries to do good who will be justified, but the one who stops trying to do good, and instead only looks to Christ in faith: "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom 4:5). What a marvelous truth! What a wonderful Savior!

But that is not all. Not only do you receive everlasting life simply by believing in Jesus' promise, once you have everlasting life, you are secure

forever. The devil can't rob you of your eternal destiny. Nor can you forfeit it. Once you believe in Jesus, nothing on earth can separate you from God's preservation. Put simply, you will never perish. As Jesus said: "And I give them everlasting life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). These are incredible promises that Jesus makes to everyone who believes in Him, and yet one cannot find them in Dostoyevsky's parable. What would you rather trust to save you from eternal damnation: a pitiful 'onion,' or the Son of God? What Jesus once said to a woman, He now speaks to you: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). How will you answer? 



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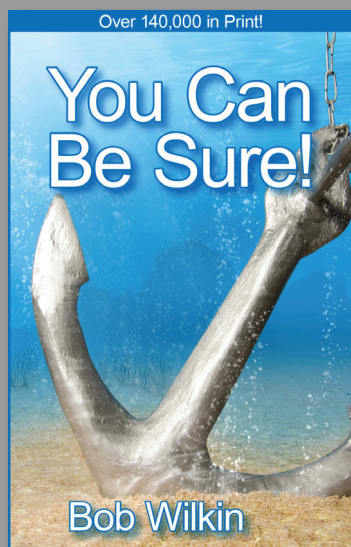
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