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THE
TRUTH

About Truth

PLUS ROMANS 3 / A MAN OF THE BOOK / THE PLACE OF FAILURE / RESURRECTION LIFE /
LOOK ONLY AT THE LORD / SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS / YOU CAN KEEP THEM / **MORE!**

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FROM THE EDITOR

Our magazine is unique in many ways. It is free to all U.S. mailing addresses. All its articles present or defend the Free Grace view, or some application of it. At 48 pages, it is not a small or large magazine. Very few of the writers are professional authors. Most are pastors, pastors' wives, or church leaders. The articles are practical and down to earth, yet they have solid content as well.

We drop about 1,000 people a year from our mailing list. Over 90% of these are due to bad addresses. People move and sometimes forget to send in a forwarding address. Therefore, to maintain our subscription list at its current size of a little over 10,000 subscribers, we must add 1,000 people a year.

For the last five years or so we've done just that. Therefore, we've stayed with a consistent mailing list of slightly over 10,000.

You can help us grow by getting the word out to your family and friends. We'd like to start adding 3,000 to 5,000 people per year, for a net increase of 2,000 to 4,000 subscribers per year. The reason is simple: we want to get the word out. We want more people to believe and promote the Free Grace message.

Radio helps get the word out, too. In 2020, we hope to get on hundreds of radio stations across the United States with a daily 2-minute show. We will still continue our daily 15-minute program. Shawn and I have already prepared about ten sample 2-minute shows, which we've sent to networks to get their approval.

A 2-minute radio program is a way to introduce untold thousands of people across the U.S. to Free Grace Theology, our website, our magazine, our free e-books, our books, and our national and regional conferences.

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Bob Wilkin, **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

In every issue you will find articles that promote the gift of everlasting life by faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works. You'll find articles on how to evangelize, how to disciple, how to explain tough texts, and how to answer tough questions that people ask.

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We think you will find one or more articles in every issue that encourage, educate, and motivate you. Thanks for being part of our Free Grace family. 



123RF

Nine Reliable Evidences of Justification by Faith apart from Works (Romans 3:28)

BY BOB WILKIN

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

While working on a book on one hundred verses which prove that salvation is by faith alone, apart from works, I came across an interesting explanation of what Paul meant in Rom 3:28 when he concluded “that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

That seems straightforward to me. Justification before God is by faith alone, apart from works. Paul makes that same point all through Rom 3:21-31 (and again in chap. 4).

The letters QED stand for the Latin *Quod Erat Demonstrandum*, which means “that which was to be demonstrated” or “it has been proven.” QED is often put at the end of a mathematical proof to indicate that the matter is now settled. It has been proven.

Verse 28 is Paul’s QED.

Paul is clear that our deeds have no part in our justification. However, I came across a popular commentary on Romans which argues that

while faith alone is the condition of justification, we need *true faith* in order to be justified. The commentator, John MacArthur, then went on for four pages to give nine different “reliable evidences of saving faith.” He said that the evidences of saving faith include:

1. “love for God,”
2. “repentance from sin and hatred of it,”
3. “genuine humility,”
4. “devotion to God’s glory,”
5. “prayer,”
6. “selfless love,”
7. “separation from the world,”
8. “spiritual growth,” and
9. “obedient living.”

(MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, pp. 323-26).

Many commentators and theologians today affirm justification by faith alone, apart from works, yet they backload the message by saying that the only way you know that you truly believe is by examining your works. While that approach is well intentioned, it is inconsistent with apostolic doctrine.

There is only one reliable evidence that you have exercised saving faith. That evidence is that you currently believe in Jesus for everlasting life/justification. Of course, we know what we believe. The idea that we need some external evidences to tell us what we believe is bizarre.

How do you know you believe that God exists? Do you look at your works to tell you that you are a theist? No. You look at His works (Ps 19:1).

How do you know that you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins? Do you look to your works to tell you that? Of course not. You look to God's Word.

How do you know that Jesus is coming again? Your works won't tell you that. God's Word does.

In the same way, how do you know you believe that justification is by faith alone? Because you believe that is true. Because you believe what God said through the Lord and His apostles.

Good works cannot prove one has been justified by faith. Interestingly, MacArthur gives several warnings in his discussion of these nine reliable evidences of saving faith. For example, regarding his third evidence, repentance from sin and hatred of it, he warns, "True repentance is more than simply sorrow for sin. Judas became bitterly sorry for His sin of betraying Jesus..." (p. 224). He added, "No Christian becomes

completely sinless until he goes to meet the Lord."

Concerning his fifth evidence, prayer, MacArthur warns, "Every genuine Christian will freely admit that he does not pray as often or as earnestly and persistently as he should" (p. 225).

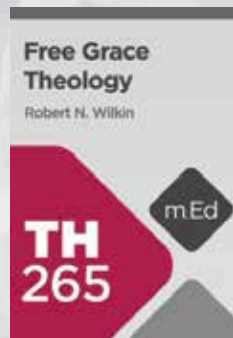
All nine of his points are subjective. If a person is looking at his works to see if he is justified, then he will not be sure he is. Why? Because he is looking in the wrong place. If you believe the promise of everlasting life/justification to the believer, then you know you are justified and born again. The very act of looking to your works to see if you are born again and justified shows that you are not currently believing the promise. ■■



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.

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Becoming a Man of the Book

By Shawn Lazar

Are you an elder? Do you hope to become one? Are you trying to raise them up in your church? If so, Donald Norbie has some practical advice.

In his booklet, *Shepherd the Flock*, Norbie summarizes the qualifications and functions of the elder. One qualification is being “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2). Teach what?

The Bible. The truths of God’s Word.

Hence, Norbie says the elder “is to be a man of the Book” (p. 22).

No one is born that way. You have to become a man of the Book. But where can you start? Norbie says it takes discipline:

This means he will discipline himself to spend hours studying God’s Word. He will build a helpful library with aids to help him in this life-long study of the Bible. A good exhaustive concordance, Bible dictionary and an [sic] one volume commentary will start him on the path of building a library. He must be “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict” (Titus 1:9). Like the priest of old he is to be a custodian of the Word of God (Mal 2:7). He must spend hours studying so he can feed God’s people (*Shepherd the Flock*, p. 23).

Are you studying to become a man of the Word?


It takes time. And anything that takes time takes discipline.

I find the best way to maintain that discipline is to teach a class, going verse-by-verse through a Bible book. Whether it’s a Sunday school class, a Wednesday night Bible Study, a Sunday



evening sermon series, or even a lesson around the dinner table, you will learn the most through preparation.

If you feel called to be an elder, you need to discern whether you can teach. Why not start by teaching a Free Grace Bible study in your home?

One of the biggest needs around the world is for more Free Grace churches. But whereas starting a church may be too daunting, starting a Bible study is easier and can fill a need for grace teaching in your area. Plus, you can list it on our Free Grace Church and Bible Study tracker for others to find. 



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



You Can Keep Them (Daniel 5:17)

By Ken Yates



123RF



We all know the stories about Daniel. He was a faithful servant of the Lord during a trying time in Israel's history. He had been taken captive when he was a teenager and lived the rest of his life in Babylon.

When we get to chap. 5, Daniel is a man in his 80s. The Babylonian Empire was on the verge of being defeated by the Medes and the Persians, but the Babylonians themselves thought they were safe in their city with its massive walls.

Amidst this setting, the king of Babylon had a feast in which he dishonored the God of Israel by using in a lavish party the vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem years before. As the party was going on, a hand appeared out of nowhere and wrote four words on a wall. None of the king's experts could interpret what the words meant. Someone reminded him that Daniel had interpreted dreams for his grandfather many years earlier. The king called for Daniel.

Understandably, the king was afraid. He earnestly wanted to know what the words meant. As a result, the king told Daniel that he would reward him very richly if he interpreted them.

What were these rewards? Daniel would be clothed in purple. This indicates that he would be given some kind of royal privilege. He would also be given a gold chain for his neck. There is disagreement about what this means. It was probably some indication of power, but it definitely was financially valuable. Finally, the king told Daniel he would become the third ruler in the kingdom.


This last reward was especially noteworthy. The king in Daniel 5 is named Belshazzar. His father was a man by the name of Nabonidus, who is not named in the chapter. They were co-rulers. Evidently, Belshazzar is offering Daniel to be the head of the empire, along with himself and his father. Power and money were at Daniel's fingertips.

Daniel tells the king that he will interpret the words for him and does so. The words basically meant that the Medes and the Persians were going to defeat the Babylonians. We are told at the end of the chapter that Belshazzar himself was killed that very night (v. 30).

Even though Daniel knew what the words meant, I love what he said to the king about the rewards the king offered him. He basically said, "Thanks, but no thanks. You can keep them."

One could argue that Daniel did this because he knew being a ruler in Babylon would mean nothing very soon. But it certainly couldn't hurt! Even if the Persians were going to destroy the country, his position of power would have at the very least helped him survive or escape. In addition, the golden chain, whatever it signified, would have been very valuable.

In the final analysis, Daniel's attitude is a great picture of the value of earthly rewards. He recognized that they are temporary. This is what spiritual maturity does for a person. Whatever power, whatever riches the world offers us have no eternal value. Daniel was a man who had been faithful to the Lord for years. He did not use the wisdom God gave him to gain the world's praise. He found himself in a situation where God was defamed. He did not want what those who were doing so offered him.

Daniel wanted the Lord's praise. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are offered eternal rewards. The world competes for our affections and offers rewards of its own. May we have the wisdom to respond like Daniel did: "you can keep them." 



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

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Handling Conflict with a Sister in Christ

By Amy Paige

If you haven't found yourself in this uncomfortable spot, you will at some point. I've noticed two ways believers deal with confrontation.

An immature believer would respond in the flesh. Lashing out in words of anger face-to-face, but most likely by gossiping or posting on Facebook, i.e., hiding behind the keyboard.

A more mature believer might still attempt to handle a confrontation and think she is doing the right thing by avoiding the person altogether—by ignoring the person or by switching churches.

There's got to be a better way!

GOD'S WORD IS CLEAR

...if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother (Matt 18:15).

First of all, picture the resolution. If your desire/goal is to be back in fellowship, regain trust, or healing, you need to stop before you respond hastily and do more harm. What does God's character show us?

But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth (Ps 86:15).

Ask God for wisdom and a heart of humility. Ask Him to show you any wrong on your part that you need to confess to Him, and ask



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for forgiveness. (Your wrong may be that you've complained or shared it with someone else.) Be sure to say the words "I was wrong." Humility normally breaks down walls and opens the doorway to resolution. There's no room for pride here.

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you (2 Cor 13:11).

Go to your sister in private. Go in humility. Pray for guidance. Confess and/or apologize first for anything you need to.

Share and listen. Pray for resolution together and be willing to let God work. The "work" on your part may be uncomfortable—this whole situation will be out of your comfort zone, but you will survive.

In the end, you can't control the other person. It is in God's hands from there.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7-9).

Humility + love + obedience = mending, healing, and sweet fellowship.

Gratefully, we have a Heavenly Father who always forgives, and He is our perfect example. In fact, it's because of His forgiveness that we have the promise of everlasting life! Let's forgive like He does or seek forgiveness when we are at fault. ■

Amy Paige is a graphic designer with 289Design.



Romans 3

A Concise Commentary From *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Revised Edition)

By Zane Hodges

THE DECISIVE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE AGAINST HUMANITY (3:1-20)

3:1-2. There is much advantage from every point of view (**in every way**) for Jews. But Paul is not interested in pursuing all the advantages that are alluded to by the words *much in every way*. The primary (first) advantage, and the one he intends to dwell on, *is the fact that they were entrusted with the declarations of God*.

Thus, the surpassing importance of Biblical revelation is highlighted by Paul. The chosen race was uniquely privileged to have entrusted to them what God had been pleased to reveal. Paul will now go on to make the point that this entrustment was valuable, quite irrespective of Jewish response to these *declarations of God*.

3:3-4. Paul asks, **For what if some did not believe?** From the NT vantage point, the problem of Jewish unbelief in the Lord Jesus Christ was finally a problem of unbelief in their own Scriptures.

After observing that the Jews who did not believe in Him actually “search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life,” Jesus Christ added, “these are they which testify of

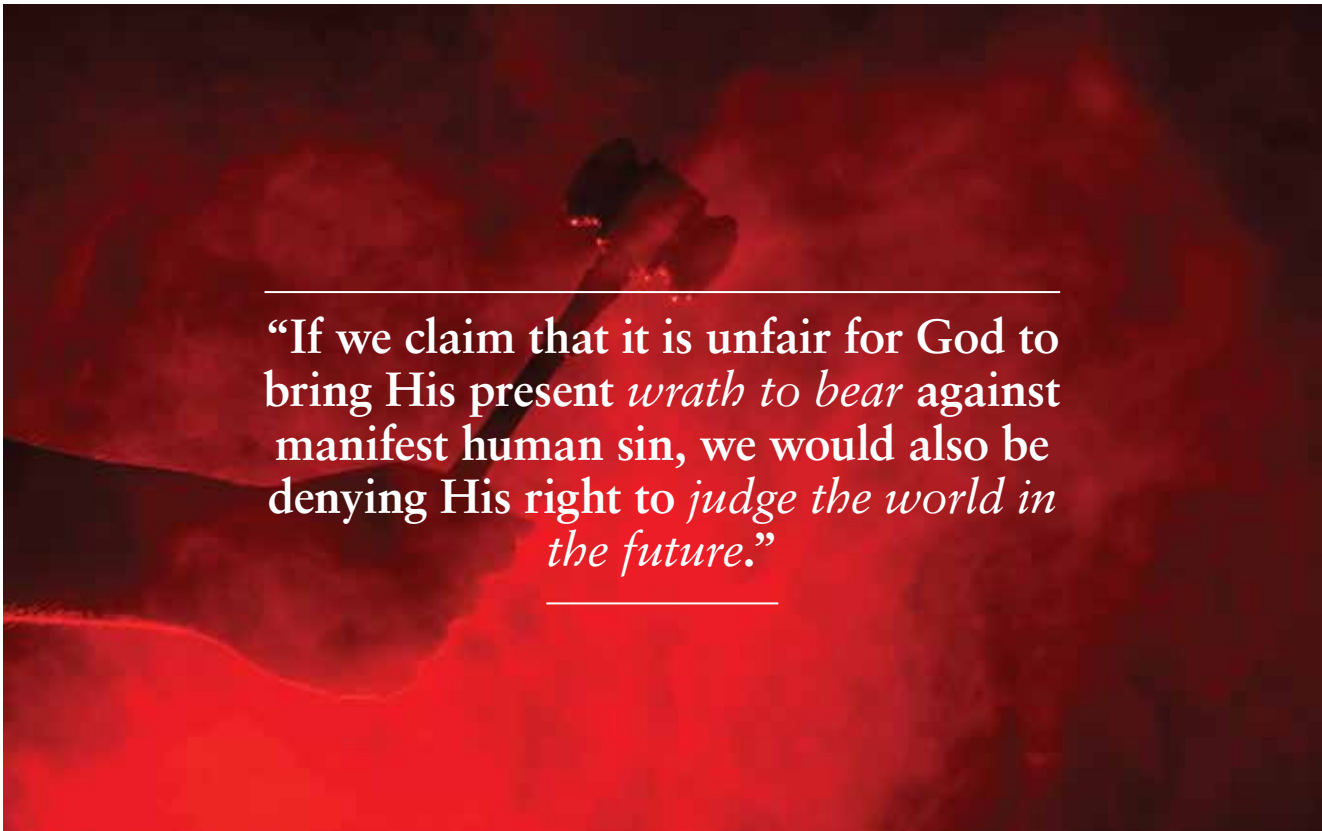
Me” (John 5:39). Subsequently He stated, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46).

Does such unbelief **call God’s faithfulness into question**? In view of Israel’s unbelief—is God through with that nation? Will He abandon His many promises to them as a national entity? Or as Paul here frames the question, **Their unbelief can’t annul the faithfulness of God, can it?**

It is inconceivable, Paul affirms, that human unbelief could *annul the faithfulness of God*. Indeed, even if **every man [is] a liar**, still **God will be true**; that is, He will keep His Word and be faithful to His commitments. That truth, in brief, is Paul’s conviction about Israel. God will be true to them.

Jewish unbelief had led them away from God’s purpose and blessing. But, by being true to His commitments, God would *be justified [vindicated] in [His] words* since He would fulfill them. Thereby also He would *conquer when [He was] condemned*.

Thus despite the present situation, God’s ultimate triumph and vindication were assured. God would be faithful to His people, and eschatologically He would be magnified in them.



“If we claim that it is unfair for God to bring His present *wrath to bear* against manifest human sin, we would also be denying His right to *judge the world in the future*.”

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3:5-6. If God’s truthfulness and fidelity (that is, His righteousness [= His right behavior]) stand out as a result of man’s own unrighteousness, is God really justified if He **brings wrath to bear**? If He is glorified by man’s failure, why does He punish that failure?

The Greek word translated *demonstrates* might also be rendered *recommends*. Man’s failure is so acute that it is like a glowing recommendation for God’s contrasting righteousness.

We surely would *not* say, would we, that *God who brings wrath to bear* is **unrighteous**? Such an idea is a purely human one (**I am talking in a human manner**) and it is also unthinkable (**Far from it!**).

Paul trumps this idea with yet another question: **Otherwise how will God judge the world?** The idea seems to be that if we claim that it is unfair for God to bring His present *wrath to bear* against manifest human sin, we would also be denying His right to *judge the world in the future*. If the fact that *our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God* undercuts

contemporary wrath, it also undercuts *future* judgment.

3:7-8. The argument Paul is refuting is that if God’s truth is magnified by my untruth (i.e., my lie in denying *His* revealed truth), then why would *my lie* constitute me as a **sinner** in the judgment? Paul is still thinking here of the unbelief referred to in v 2, so that when the Jew expressed a belief contrary to his own Scriptures, that false belief would be a lie. The basic thought seems to be that God’s truth is *enhanced* by my untruth to **His glory**, and Paul is not concerned with the details of how that occurs.

If one took the approach Paul is referring to, he would be denying God’s right to judge a person as a sinner if the sinful actions had somehow redounded to God’s glory. But this premise could lead to yet a further (ludicrous) distortion, in which one might say, “**Let us do wicked things so that good things may happen.**” Paul himself had been charged by some as teaching this very thing. This claim he regards as slanderous.

This whole line of thought is obviously wrong on its face, and Paul simply states that those who

make such claims deserve **the judgment passed on** them. In Paul's view, such people are already under sentence of judgment because of the manifest untruth of such claims. God's right to "judge the world" (v 6) cannot be denied. To Paul, the whole argument is not only flawed, but perverse.

3:9. Paul has affirmed that there are advantages to being a circumcised Jew, chief among which is the possession of the written revelation of God, including the law. That advantage is not annulled by the fact that the Jews fail to believe their own Scriptures, since their unbelief only enhances the perfect truthfulness of God. Yet this enhancement of "His glory" in no way nullifies God's right to be man's Judge. But could the Jew argue that this "advantage" (having the revealed Scriptures, or Torah) constitutes a defense against divine condemnation at the final judgment (cf. v 13)?

Paul answers, **Not at all!** By no means are Paul's words designed to temper what he has already said, for we have previously **charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.**

As a matter of fact, the Scriptures that the Jews are so privileged to have are the very instrument by which they and the Gentiles are emphatically condemned. Paul will now, *for the first time*, offer Scriptural evidence for this by quoting a withering Biblical indictment of mankind.

3:10-18. To drive home the truth of universal human guilt before God, Paul now adduces the ultimate proof—the Word of God. No single Scripture is referenced here, but rather Paul draws up a catena of Scriptural statements (Pss 5:9; 10:7; 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 140:3; Eccl 7:20; Isa 59:7-8; Prov 1:16). Thus we hear the agreed voice of the OT about the sinfulness of the world.

Paul does not quote verbatim from the OT. His aim was not exact quotation, but an accurate representation of the Biblical testimony he cites. Paul probably quoted from memory.

The collection of OT citations in vv 10-18 constitutes a portrait of man as he really is. The catena has two major subdivisions—namely, vv 10-12 and vv 13-17. In the former verses, the stress is largely on what man *does not do* (sins of omission), thus exposing man's *deficiencies*. In the latter verses, the statements are mainly descriptions of sinful words and deeds that he *does do* (sins of commission), exposing man's *depravities*.

Man is deficient in terms of basic character, that is, he is *unrighteous* ("***There is none righteous***"). This deficiency is explicitly universal since there is "***not even one***" who could be described as *righteous*. [Paul is here paraphrasing Eccl 7:20 in language like that found in Psalms 14 and 53.] As a natural consequence, men are deficient in spiritual perception ("***There is none who understands***"), and, as a further result, man is deficient in spiritual devo-

tion ("***There is none who seeks God***"). Whatever man's religious inclinations may be, these do not manifest themselves in a diligent pursuit of a genuine knowledge of his Creator. Paul would no doubt have acknowledged that people may seek God in sporadic or superficial ways.

In place of a search for God, human beings "**have all turned aside**" to empty, futile pursuits, with the result that "**Together they have become useless.**" Man's self-directed efforts apart from God are profitless when summed up and weighed in the divine scales.

Not only is mankind collectively *useless*, but there is not a single individual who does "***good... not even so much as one.***" Thus, the main point of v 12 for Paul would be that, whether considered together or individually, mankind is hopelessly unprofitable and produces nothing truly worthwhile. In other words, everything is tainted by sin.

But man is also guilty of sins of *commission* (vv 13-17). To be noted here is the stress on various

"Whatever man's religious inclinations may be, these do not manifest themselves in a diligent pursuit of a genuine knowledge of his Creator."

parts of man's body—his throat (v 13a), tongue (13b), lips (13c), mouth (v 14) and feet (v 15). By inference, we gather that the members of man's body are the vehicles through which his sinfulness comes to reality, and this subtly prepares the ground for Paul's later discussion about the sinful orientation of our own physical bodies (cf. esp. 7:21-25; 8:10).

To begin with, *"Their throat is an opened tomb."* The implication is that men's corrupt words, which come out of their *throats*, are like the stench of an open sepulcher, the unmistakable evidence of death within. Moreover, the words that are formed by *"their tongues"* express *"deceit"* all too readily, while *"under their lips"* lies conceal venom (*"the poison of asps"*), painful and poisonous to those who hear them.

Finally, *"their mouth is full of a curse and bitterness"* (i.e., *"full of a bitter curse"*). Thus, from *throat* to *tongue* to *lips* to opened *mouth*, the words of men exhibit their deep sinfulness. Man's corrupt *words* are accompanied by equally corrupt *actions* (vv 15-17).

Paul's catena now focuses on those actions. The *spiritual* "death" disclosed by *"a throat [that] is an opened tomb"* leads in action to the physical death of others, since *"their feet are swift to shed blood."* And on that pathway (*"in their paths"*), men leave not only the blood of their victims but also *"ruin and misery"* for others (one thinks readily of the effects of warfare). Moreover, these effects are continuous inasmuch as *"the path of peace they have not known."* Men may pursue peace, but the path to that experience eludes their grasp. Their sinfulness invites unremitting conflict at every level of experience.

The bottom line is this: *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."* When all is said and done, mankind refuses to determine its course with reference to the wishes of its Creator.

In a sense, therefore, v 18 is both a summary of vv 10b-17 and an explanation for those verses. Man's words and actions both display, and are rooted in, a tragic loss of the holy fear that is indispensable to the blessing of every human creature. Here we almost return full circle to the "slide" into depravity that was initiated by the solemn fact that "when they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful" (1:21). From that deadly root has grown the poisonous plant of humanity's desperate wickedness.

What then is the conclusion? Paul now states it in 3:19-20.

3:19-20. The Scriptures address those who are

under the law (i.e., the Jews), but in the process of addressing them, *the law* condemns *them* along with *all* humanity.

The net result of this Scriptural testimony is that **every mouth**, whether Jewish or Gentile, is **shut** and left without any capacity to counter this condemnation. By that same testimony, as well, **all the world** has become **accountable to God**. God's just punishment of man's sinfulness is already in operation through His present wrath

and will culminate when man is condemned at the final judgment.

Since the law's condemnation is universal, it follows that **by the works of the law no flesh will be justified before Him**. Not for a moment does this truth clash in any way with Paul's earlier assertion that "it is the doers of the law who will be justified" (2:13) because it remains true that this principle applies to any who can be so described. But in that passage Paul was discussing the *principle* by which God will judge mankind. What Paul states now is the *reality*. All men are sinners and so they can never find justification *by the works of the law*.

What the law really does, in fact, is to expose humanity's wickedness, **because through the law comes the knowledge of sin**. The conviction of sin is precisely the effect God designed for the

"The conviction of sin is precisely the effect God designed for the law, because if man's hopelessness under the law is truly understood, then he is prepared for God's provision."

law, because if man's hopelessness under the law is truly understood, then he is prepared for God's provision.

In the light of the whole discussion of 1:18–3:20, therefore, it may be said that God's wrath that is presently visible in the world is an unmistakable indicator of humanity's unrighteous state. Eternal judgment is the natural outcome to which that "unrighteousness" is leading mankind. But the outcome of this judgment is a foregone conclusion, since in the judgment only the doers of the law will be justified, not its mere hearers. Since there are no such persons, mankind's situation looks hopeless indeed. It is even implicit that man must somehow find a way to *escape the final judgment*, impossible as that seems.

Paul now turns to God's solution.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AVAILABLE BY FAITH (3:21-22A)

3:21-22a. Despite human unrighteousness, God has another kind of righteousness that is available to mankind, one testified to by the law and the prophets.

In the major section starting at 1:18, Paul began by declaring the wrath of God that is revealed from heaven. Now, however, something else is declared to be revealed—*righteousness*. Furthermore, this revelation is not to be discerned from human experience, as was the case with wrath (cf. 1:19-32). Instead it is a matter that God has communicated in His inspired word, namely *the law and the prophets*.

As a result, God's righteousness about which Paul is now speaking is a matter of faith. Hence, after mentioning this *righteousness*, Paul goes on immediately to define it more precisely: **that is, God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.**

Thus justification by faith is not at all a human idea, but a divine idea.

But not only is this righteousness one that comes *through faith in Jesus Christ*, it is also one

whose potential scope is universal so that it is **for all**.

But although *God's righteousness* is intended *for all* (without distinction), it is actually bestowed **upon all who believe**.

CHRIST IS THE MERCY SEAT FOR ALL MEN (3:22B-26)

3:22b-23. There is **no difference** between Jew and Gentile inasmuch as **all have sinned**. It should be noted that Paul in no way qualifies this reality by any phrase like "a great deal" or "too much." From Paul's point of view, the mere fact of sin is enough to condemn all mankind.

It follows inevitably from this simple fact that all *also fall short* [present tense] of the glory of God. The sense of the phrase *the glory of God* must not be separated from Paul's thought in the immediate context. To sin is to flagrantly miss the lofty moral standard of that glorious righteousness. But by implication, if one is granted *God's* righteousness,

one is raised thereby to a level consistent with His glory. Man's plight is hopeless unless or until he can receive a righteousness compatible with *the glory of God*.

3:24. Since "all have sinned," men can only be **justified freely by His grace**. God's righteousness comes *freely*, and it comes only *by His grace*. Paul therefore begins his discussion of the doctrine of justification by sharply defining its means in contrast to the ineffectual nature of "the works of the law," by means of which there can be *no* justification (v 20).

This is possible **through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**. Here then for the first time in Romans, Paul refers directly to the death of our Lord. Paul employs the term *redemption*, a word especially connected in Greco-Roman society with the ransoming of prisoners of war or the freeing of slaves. The implication here is that *Christ Jesus* has bought us out of some form of

**"Man's plight is
hopeless unless or
until he can receive
a righteousness
compatible with *the
glory of God*."**



LIGHTSTOCK

servitude. Paul will make this concept clearer as he proceeds.

It should also be noted that *the redemption* Paul speaks of is *in Christ Jesus*. As Paul will now go on to show, this *redemption* is not simply procured *by Christ Jesus*, but is actually found *in Him*.

3:25. It is, in fact, the very Person of Jesus Christ that **God has set forth as a Mercy Seat**. Other translations read “propitiation” (NKJV, NASB, HCSB) or “sacrifice of atonement” (NIV) rather than *Mercy Seat*. But the primary use of the word in the Greek OT (LXX) is the mercy seat.

Jesus Christ is a *Mercy Seat*...only through faith. His role is to be a “meeting place” between God and man *whenever* man exercises faith in God’s Son (cf. John 14:6).

The next words, **by means of His blood**, could be connected with the words *through faith*, so that we might read the two phrases together as *through faith in His blood* (so KJV, NIV, HCSB). But Paul nowhere else speaks of faith *in* His blood. Rather, our Lord has become a *Mercy*

Seat, where God and man can meet, precisely *by means of* the shedding of *His blood* for the world’s sins.

The sacrificial work of Christ on the cross is, first of all, a **proof of God’s righteousness in passing over, in the forbearance of God, the sins previously committed**. Paul here refers to *the sins* that men did *before Christ was crucified*. The public death of His Son was a vindication of God’s merciful dealings with sinners in all the preceding ages. Thus, it was a *proof of His righteousness* in so conducting Himself with mankind.

3:26. God, in the death of Christ, proved and vindicated **His righteousness at the present time**. If God’s “forbearance” in the past is shown to be righteous, *ipso facto*, He is shown to be righteous in what He presently does. The cross of Christ is a seamless garment that demonstrates God’s righteousness in dealing with the sins of all of human history, whether past or future at the time of the cross (John 1:29).

The result is that God can **be righteous and justify the person who has faith in Jesus**.

Paul believed that (1) God, apart from man's works, justifies the one who believes in Jesus; and (2) the cross is the basis for this justification and shows it to be a fully righteous act.

Here it is important to say that for Paul these are absolute realities totally independent of anything man does before or after faith.

The famous statement that "we are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone" is a Reformation idea, not a Pauline one. *This idea can be found nowhere in Paul.*

The synergism of faith and works in salvation is differently expressed in Protestant and Catholic theology, but its fundamental character is essentially the same: namely, no true justification without good works. Paul knows nothing of this.

Paul concludes the long Greek sentence that began in v 23, saying that the *righteousness of God* comes to *the person who has faith in Jesus* (cf. Phil 2:9-11; Acts 4:12).

FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS VINDICATES THE LAW (3:27-31)

3:27. So where is boasting? It is excluded. Boasting is excluded by the very principle of **faith**. The sort of law that excludes human pride is definitely not the principle of **works** which, in fact, invites *boasting* (see Eph 2:8-9). On the contrary, the only "rule" that excludes human pride is *the law of faith*, that is, the "rule" that men are justified only by "faith in Jesus" in contrast to justification by "the works of the law" (3:20).

An error often found in contemporary discussions is that "works of gratitude to God" are somehow "immune" to the temptation to boast. But this is contrary to both experience and Scripture (e.g., Luke 18:9-14). Man is perfectly capable of bragging that his works demonstrate that he is one of God's "elect." Justification by faith alone blocks this all too human failing.

3:28-29. The key point, Paul states, is that **we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.**

The words *apart from the works of the law* refer to any and all acts of obedience to the law's commands. It is not just the law as a system that Paul excludes from Christian soteriology, but also


the works of the law that are excluded (cf. 4:4). Paul will not allow human deeds any role at all in man's justification.

This principle is in fact a universal one. Since *the works of the law* are irrelevant when *a man is justified by faith*, such justification is available to all mankind, whether they possess the law or not. God is not **the God of the Jews only**, but **also of the Gentiles**. He is the God of all mankind.

3:30-31. Alluding to the familiar Jewish declaration (the Shema, Deut 6:4) about the oneness of God, Paul declares that **there is one God** for all humanity who **will justify** any human being by means of faith.

So do we annul the law by faith? The most obvious objection to Paul's doctrine from a Jewish viewpoint would be that God's standards are thus ignored and rendered invalid. Paul's reply (**Far from it!**) emphatically disclaims such a result.

On the contrary, Paul claims that **we establish the law**. Paul does not here, or elsewhere in Romans, elaborate this observation. If it is true, as he has affirmed, that "through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (3:20), then the law's revelatory role in regard to sin is fully respected by the corollary truth that "by the works of the law no flesh will be justified before Him" (3:20). Therefore, to uphold it in this way is to *establish the law*.

Only the abandonment of the law as a means for, or an aid to, justification properly validates the full integrity of God's righteous standards. 



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



A warm welcome in Northwest Arkansas!

NW Arkansas Mini Regional Siloam Springs, AR January 7

We had our first mini-regional or “Free Grace Evening” in NW Arkansas on January 7. Diane Boring and her daughter Nancy Jackson were enthusiastic about GES coming there and offered to host us in the Jacksons’ house. They did an excellent job of getting the word out, inviting friends, and making their home an open and accessible place to meet to hear the Word. That is essential to the success of these meetings.

Shawn spoke on the broad subjects of Faith, Hope, and Love; i.e., *faith* as the one condition to have eternal life; the *hope* of Christ’s soon return to reward His servants; and a practical spirituality of *love*.

Our thanks to Diane, Nancy, and the Jacksons for being a great example of Christian hospitality.

Winter GES Board Meeting Plano, TX January 10-11

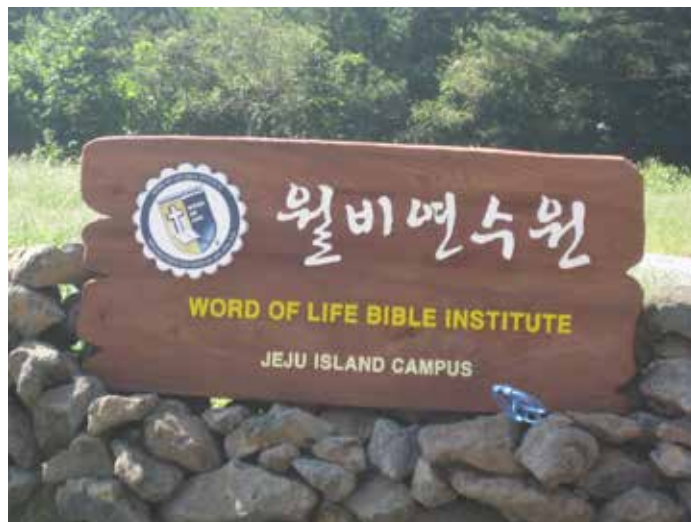
December giving was great, up 5% over the previous December. The first six months of our fiscal year, however, were slightly down over the same time period last year.

We had a great discussion of future ministry plans, various theological issues, and all aspects of our ministry (magazine, blogs, journal, books, podcasts/radio, conferences, etc.).

Brad Daskocil continues as Chairman and Bernie Hunsucker remains the secretary-treasurer. The other Board members are Tony Taffer, Ken Yates, and Bob Wilkin. Shawn Lazar is an ex-officio member. We are blessed with a strong and united board.



The Board. Shawn, Ken, Brad, Bob, Tony, and Bernie.



Pray for Ken and his students on Jeju Island, South Korea.

GES's 24th Annual Conference The Hope Center, Plano, TX May 18-21

The theme this year is the great doctrines of the Bible. We have many returning favorite speakers (Bob Bryant, Steve Thurman, Shawn Lazar, David Janssen, John Claey's, Ken Yates, Steve Elkins, Lucas Kitchen, and Bob Wilkin), as well as some first-time plenary speakers (Cliff Freeman, Nathanael Stevens, and Allen Rea).

In response to comments made by conferees, we've made three major changes for 2020.

First, all plenary messages will be 50 minutes, a ten-minute increase.

Second, we have a women's track in our workshops. Each of the seven parallel sessions will have one workshop taught by a woman and designed for women.

Third, we've moved the Tuesday evening banquet to a trendy location in downtown Plano, a short drive from the Hope Center.

Grace on the Go

We are entering a very active season in speaking, teaching, and holding conferences. Please keep each of these events in your prayers.

Feb 12-22. Ken Yates. 2 Pastor's conferences and one conference for wives of pastors (taught by Ken's daughter, Kathryn Wright), Nairobi, Kenya.

Feb 21-22. GES Regional Conference in Georgetown, TX (near Austin).

Mar 3. Mini-Regional with Shawn in Laramie, WY.

Mar 4. Mini-Regional with Shawn in Centennial, CO.

Mar 24-26. GES Pastors' conference in Costa Rica. Ken and Shawn will also be speaking at ILE Language school, ESEPA Bible College.

April 20-30. Ken is teaching the Books of Hebrews and Colossians at Word of Life Bible Institute, Jeju Island, South Korea.

June 29-July 9. Ken is teaching Romans at Ambassador Bible College in Zambia. Kathryn Wright is teaching the doctrine of salvation. And Bill Fiess will be donating and teaching Logos Bible software to students.

And there are conferences in the works for Chapel Hill, NC, San Diego, CA, and Miami, FL.

Notes and Letters

"Bob, this [Jan 17, 2020 blog on those who claim that assurance is found in our works] is great. Simple and direct QED. Amen. If that is 'easy believism,' then I believe it too. Former Catholics like myself can spot this Roman Catholic type teaching of John MacArthur. Luther found that out too after all his penances, climbing stairs on his knees, etc."

—AW, email

Financial Report

YTD Budget	\$ 269,349
YTD Income	\$ 285,395

*These numbers are approximate. We had a good December; however, historically second half giving lags, so we are likely to fall short of our budget by about \$20k by the end of the fiscal year.



LIGHTSTOCK

Will My Children Keep the Faith?

By Marcia Hornok

A young friend on Facebook explored the question of why millennials are leaving the faith. Perhaps we should ask what makes young adults choose to keep the faith in which they were raised.

The question has many answers.

WHOM YOU MARRY

A major one, in my opinion, is their choice of a life partner. When a believer marries an unbeliever, the believer hardly ever pulls up the unbeliever. Invariably, the believer gets pulled down and loses interest in spiritual things. When things of earth become the priority, Christians serve their own interests, not God's.

When a Christian thus becomes unprofitable, even what he has will be taken away. In the context of the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20), where this concept is found, it means that when we respond to the seed (i.e., the Word of God) we keep getting more, but when we stop inputting and nurturing the seed, we begin to lose even what we used to have. We lose the spiritual ground and insights we had previously gained.

This "use it or lose it" principle is also in the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:29). No one loses salvation, but an unprofitable Christian loses rewards he could have received for serving and

walking with Christ. Which leads me to reason #2.

THE DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL REWARDS


Perhaps parents of prodigals also did not give their children a healthy view of the doctrine of rewards. At the Judgment Seat of Christ there will be Christians who weep and gnash their teeth and get put in the "darkness outside," probably during the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Matt 25:30). They never lose their salvation, but they lose the rewards they could have had for staying faithful and useful.

PILGRIMS

The older I get, the fewer answers I have, but when Deuteronomy 6 tells parents to keep God in the hearts and minds of their children during all daily activities, I think this double emphasis would be helpful.

First, give our children/grandchildren a "pilgrim mentality." We must guard their minds so they do not conform to this world, and we must guide their minds so the Word transforms and informs their thinking and behavior (Rom 12:1-2). With our prayerful intentionality, they will guard and guide their own minds as they become teens.

Second, teach our children that Jesus is not only our Savior, Lover, Master, but also our Evaluator. We look forward to honoring Him with service in eternity by humbly serving and walking with Him now.

We have taught our children how to go to heaven when they die, but we need to teach them how to live for heaven now. If they forego holiness in this life, they will forfeit honor in the next. 



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

Resurrection Life, Right Now!

By Phil Congdon

Spring is the season of resurrection—as the whole world seems to come alive from its winter hibernation and burst forth with new promise. Here in Texas, the profusion of blue-bonnets, Indian paintbrush, verbena, and a host of other wildflowers is a vivid reminder—resurrection time is here!

For Christians, the word “resurrection” means more than horticultural revival; it reminds us of the central event in all human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This single event turned the “one-way street” leading from birth-to-death on its head, offering hope for eternal life through faith in Jesus.

To a world stuck on that dead-end road of sin, we announce this victory and seek to persuade people to believe in their Savior. Of course, we know that receiving God’s free gift of eternal life isn’t just an “insurance plan” for after we die: it’s a provision of new life—victorious life, right here and now!

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ as Savior—if you have received that gift of eternal life, your new life has already begun. Jesus said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).

Paul wrote,

I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20).

In Col 3:3 we read.,

You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.


Through faith in Jesus, we already have passed out of death into life. Christ lives in us. Our new life has already begun!

You may reply, “Phil, it sure doesn’t feel like it!” Two reasons for that: first, you’re still stuck in this perishable body, and as it gets older, we realize how temporary it really is (see 1 Cor 15:50-58 and 2 Cor 4:16-18 to get a Biblical perspective on this).

Second, our adversary (the devil) doesn’t want us to claim our new life; he wants us to wallow in despair and defeat. He tells us what losers we are, hoping we’ll believe his lies and never realize that we truly are *children of God* (see John 1:12).

And one more reason: the whole world is trapped in an “atmosphere” of death. Satan is “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4); the whole world lies under his power (1 John 5:19). We see this “culture of death” today—when our leaders embrace death (e.g., abortion, infanticide, euthanasia) as a solution to life’s problems. Spiritually, we see it when leaders approve immoral actions and lifestyles of which Scripture says, “those who practice such things are worthy of death” (Rom 1:32). In this world of death, we carry new life—and the *message* that brings new life.

Therefore, as we approach Resurrection Sunday this April 12th and remember the eternity-changing event of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, we remind ourselves anew—we are living “resurrection life” *right now*.

Madison Avenue will try to sell you on everything from diets to makeovers with the promise of “a new you.” Don’t buy it. They’re only dressing up the old “dead man.” Instead, recognize who you are “in Christ,” and live out the victorious new *resurrection life* that is yours—*right now!* 

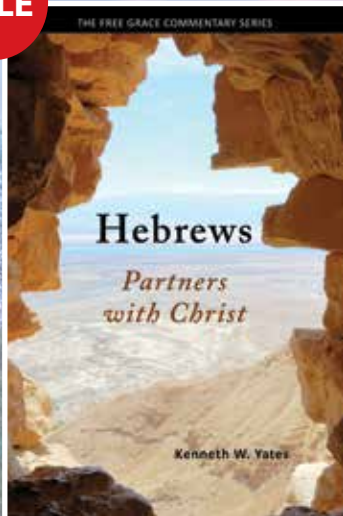


Phil Congdon is senior pastor of New Braunfels Bible Church in TX.

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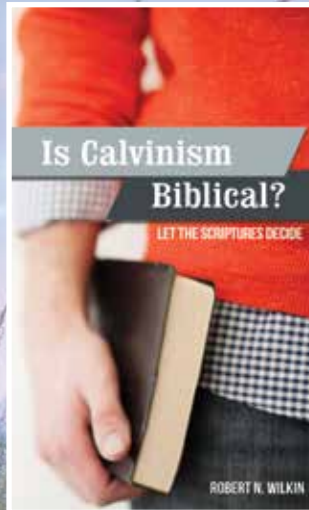


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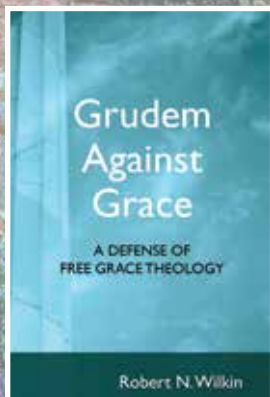


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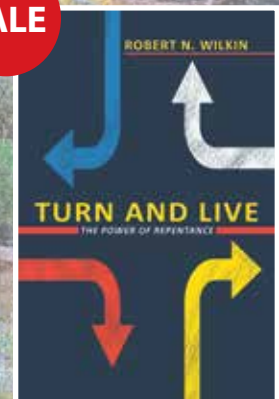
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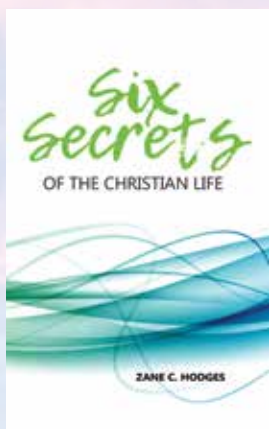
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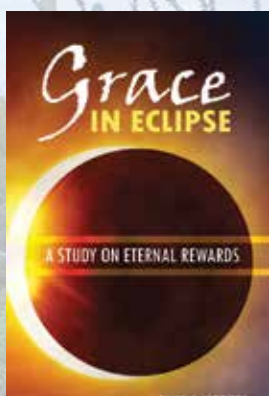


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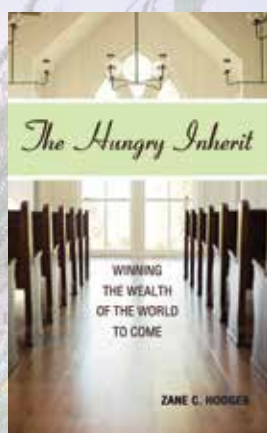


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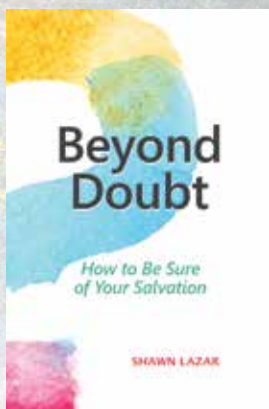


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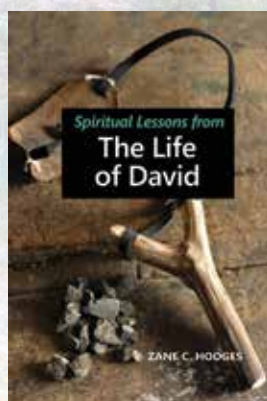


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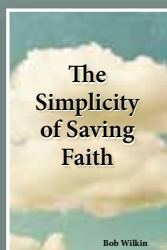
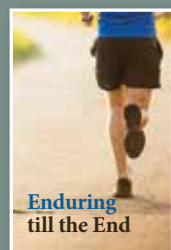


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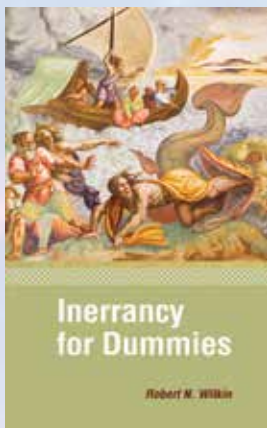
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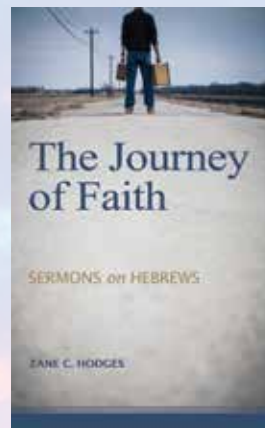


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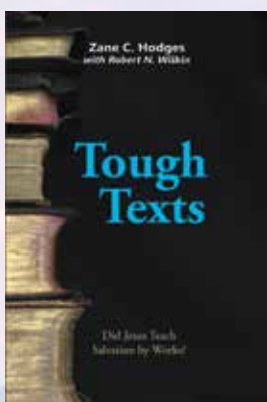


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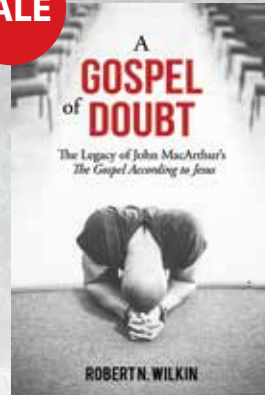
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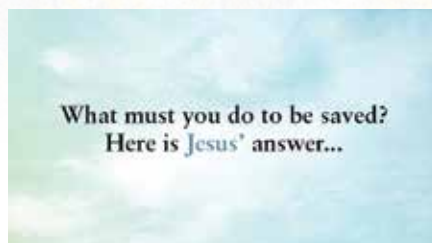


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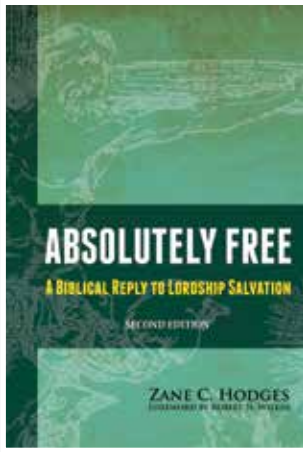
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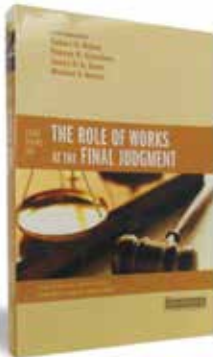
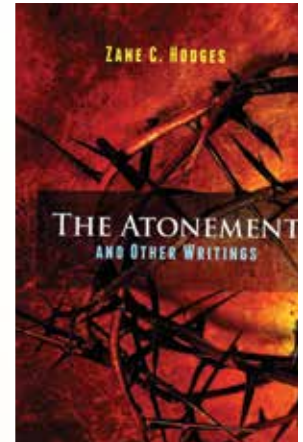
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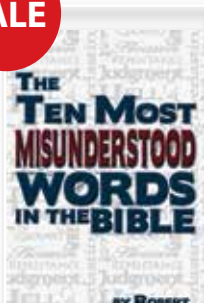
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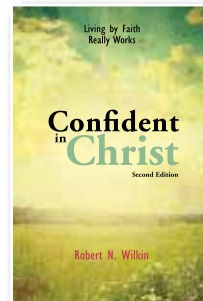
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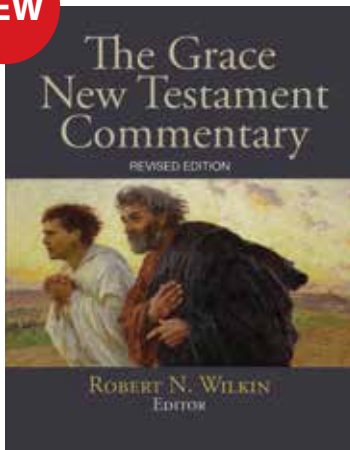
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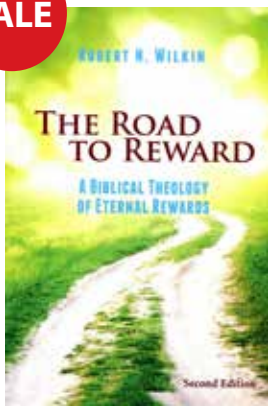
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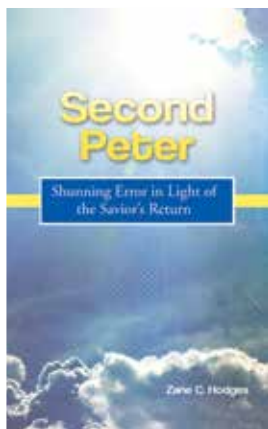
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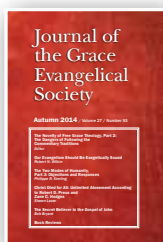
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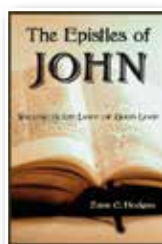
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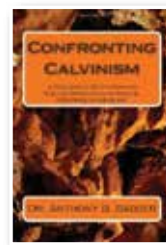


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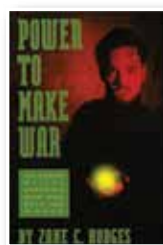


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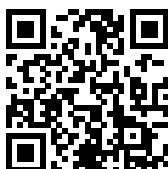
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The Mailbag

By You

Thank you for your faithfulness to the Bible. In this time, more and more are leaving the truth and believing a lie.”
~Allison, IA

“Your blog today motivated me to the responsibility I have to support the ministries that help me and other believers. Thanks for the reminder that we need to support our leaders who are in full time ministry. May my small monthly contribution further the cause of your great ministry.”
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“I’ve recently discovered your organization and have been deeply pondering eternal security. I find many of your arguments to be thought-provoking. If I’m being honest, having come from a family that teaches that salvation can be lost, though no real understanding as to how much sin would disqualify me from eternal life, I’d find eternal security to be incredibly heartening and hopeful. Before I feel I can embrace this idea completely, though, there are a couple of verses in particular that give me pause.” ~email 

Send your letters to ges@faithalone.org or to GES, PO 1308, Denton, TX 76202.

Look Only at the Lord

(Matthew 14:30)

By Shawn Lazar

I have a devotional by Watchman Nee called *The Lord Is My Portion*. In the reading for January 22nd, Nee meditates on Matt 14:30 which reads:

But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

Nee comments:

In walking upon the water Peter should not have looked at the strong wind. He has the word of the Lord; he therefore ought not look at the wind and the waves. In looking at these things he easily forgets the Lord's word. Without the word, one should never walk on water in the first place, even if everything is calm. Since walking upon the water does not depend on the wind and the wave, one should never look at these matters. One should look only at the Lord.


Isn't that true of assurance, too?

Basing your assurance of salvation on your works and behavior is like Peter looking at the wind and waves—it can only produce fear, not assurance. Your life is too tumultuous, rocky, and unpredictable to be the basis of assurance.

However, you do have Jesus' word:

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life" (John 3:36).

If you believe, everlasting life is your present possession.

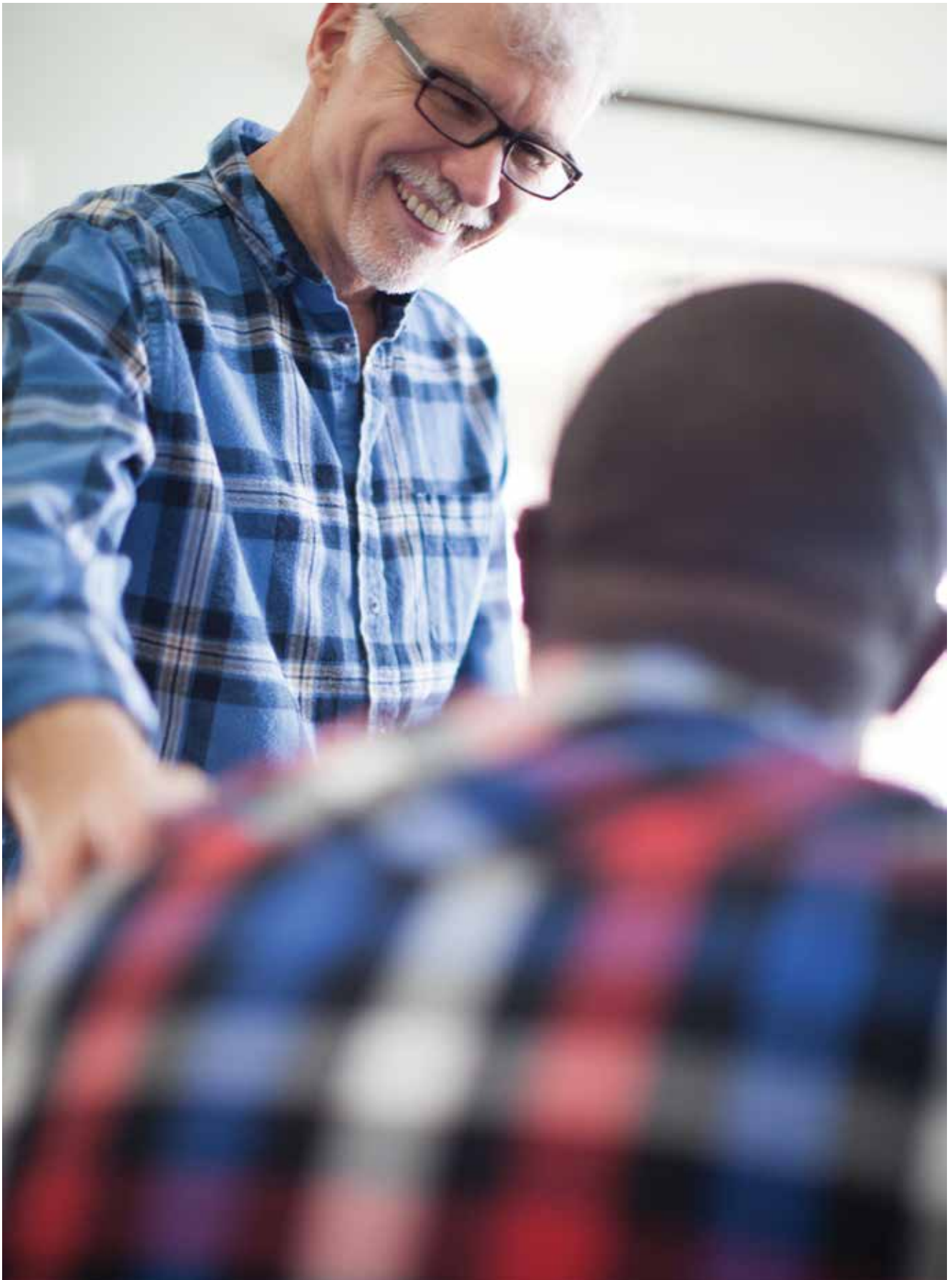
The winds and waves of your life might send a different message, but as Nee says, "one should never look at these matters. One should look only at the Lord." 



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society.







LIGHTSTOCK

Top 5 Questions to Initiate Spiritual Conversations

By Summer Stevens

I've taken several personality inventories lately that have all given me the same general result: I'm a "people-person." To me, people are fascinating. I count it a privilege to learn someone's story or be trusted with someone's heart, and it's rare I come across a person I don't find interesting. I'm almost always late to Sunday School because someone stops me to talk, and often I'm one of the last to leave the building after church. I used to think that all Christians liked people, but I've come to discover that not everyone easily connects to, empathizes with, or cares for people. But of course, we are all called to love others and share our faith, even if it doesn't come naturally. So, here are my top 5 questions to initiate spiritual conversations for those days when you need a little extra help.

1. For the believer going through a hard time.

Many Christians struggle to know what to say when someone experiences loss or trauma. Sadly, sometimes they'll say nothing at all out of fear of saying the wrong thing. This can make the hurting person feel further isolated and even uncared for. I have made a personal decision to always address the issue directly and with compassion. Make sure you have adequate time to hear the answer and have a meaningful conversation (a two-minute church greeting period is not enough

time!). Here are questions to show love and support to a believer, and open the door to further conversation—

"You have really been on my heart. How are you doing with the loss of your husband?"

"I know you are going through a hard time and I want you to know that I pray for you. What things can I pray specifically for this week?"

You can follow up with statements like—

"That sounds so painful. I can't imagine what you are going through. What kinds of things are you doing to cope? Who is walking alongside you during this?"

If the person does not have a strong support network, offer to be a prayer partner, to exchange encouraging Bible verses via text message, or help connect the person with a grief support group or others who have experienced a similar situation. You may offer to drive someone to a doctor's appointment, provide a meal or follow-up with a phone call after a tough conversation/appointment/funeral. The takeaway here is taking time to listen and offer help where it is most needed. When someone is suffering, the best way to show Jesus is to show up. Don't offer a Bible verse (only) or a book; offer yourself. This is the Body of Christ in action.



LIGHTSTOCK

2. For the believer in sin. It can feel intimidating to initiate a spiritual conversation with a believer in active rebellion against God. Many times the sinning Christian will isolate himself or herself from you out of guilt or a desire to avoid uncomfortable conversations. Your relationship with this person will, of course, dictate how or even if you approach a sensitive conversation. It's important to consider your goals for the conversation. Are you attempting to win back the believer to fellowship? To convince him to repent from his behavior? Or to simply be a friend and hear things from his perspective?

I would suggest that the first conversation with a sinning believer would be one of listening and understanding. You are probably not going to lecture him to repentance, and you may only have one chance to earn his trust (and his ear). So, after praying for the Holy Spirit's direction, lead the conversation to spiritual matters with a question like, "How's your heart these days?" Your goal is to keep the lines of communication open and to reaffirm your love and concern. It's the kindness of the Lord that leads to repentance (Rom 2:4), so be kind as your fellow believer opens up to you. You probably don't have to tell

him what's right; he already knows. When and if he comes back around, he will seek you out for friendship, counsel, and support.

3. For the friend you've known for years. Sometimes you may not know if someone is a believer or not. Perhaps she attended church in the past or as a child. Your relationship with her has not moved into spiritual matters, but you would like it; perhaps you can invite her to church or share the gospel.

Especially after many years of not broaching the topic of spirituality, you may feel uncomfortable, and many Christians don't even know where to start. If it feels like the elephant in the room, just state the obvious. "I feel a little awkward that we've been friends for so many years, and yet I haven't really shared the most significant thing in my life. Would it be okay if I told you how Jesus has changed my life?" And then share your testimony—how you came to believe in Jesus for eternal life and how your life is different as a result. Follow up with the question, "What has your spiritual journey looked like?"

If that method feels too direct, ease more naturally into the story of how you came to believe

CONT'D ON P. 40

GRACE FOCUS

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in Jesus, and end with, “I can’t believe I’ve never told you this story! We’ve been friends for so many years, and Jesus is the most important person in my life. I’m so sorry I didn’t share this with you earlier.”

4. For the seeker. A 2019 Barna Research study found that non-Christian millennials are more interested in spiritual conversations than older adults, and face-to-face conversations with a Christian are their favorite means of evangelism, (compared to tracts, street evangelism or even talking to someone at church). So don’t be afraid to bring up spiritual matters so long as it’s an actual conversation and not a monologue.

After you’re engaged in a meaningful conversation and dialogue is flowing, ask existential questions like, “Do you think God exists?” or “Do you ever wonder why we’re on this earth?” or “What do you think happens after we die?” These are the questions millennials themselves are asking; why not engage in the conversation? Remember, you are not asking questions to set yourself up for an easy lead-in to the “right answer.”


The goal should be a healthy dialogue that spans multiple conversations. Wouldn’t you want to be the person a seeker “seeks out” to think through spiritual matters?

As the term implies, you are dealing with seekers—people actively looking for answers, and they will probably be the most convinced when they arrive at conclusions on their own. Most definitely, when the time is right, share the gospel message, suggest a passage of Scripture to study, or offer to pray together, but respect the seeker’s own journey of spiritual discovery, and do so, as Peter says, with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:16).

5. For the hostile unbeliever. Growing up in Portland, Oregon, I experienced many people who were not just disinterested in Christianity, but were downright hostile. There was such a bias against Christians that, without realizing it, I grew up understanding that I had to prove my legitimacy as a considerate person before I would reveal my faith. If God has placed a

hostile unbeliever in your life, it’s important to take a different tactic when attempting to initiate spiritual conversations. If you’ve brought up your faith in subtle ways and been shot down or had the conversation ended abruptly, consider asking questions instead, without offering any solutions or suggestions. People like to talk about themselves, and so the key is asking thoughtful, conversation-inducing questions. Start with something like, “I know we don’t see things eye to eye when it comes to issues of faith. And I respect you as a person. But I’m really curious, if you’re willing to share, did anything ever happen to put a bad taste in your mouth about Christianity? Were there Christians in your life that treated you badly?” If your friend engages in the discussion, consider that a success! You’ve just had a spiritual conversation!

Listen really well, and don’t defend or respond at all. Just ask more questions and get the clearest picture you can of her spiritual background or baggage. Thank her for her honesty and tell her you understand. Hostility usually has a root, and a specific one. And sadly, it’s often a Christian who didn’t act like one.

As the Holy Spirit leads, revisit the conversation later, with something like this: “I’ve been thinking more about what you shared a few weeks ago about _____. It’s really been on my heart, and I’m so sorry someone treated you that way. Some Christians behave really terribly. But I just want you to know that what you experienced isn’t the heart of Jesus.” You probably won’t share the gospel at that moment. But perhaps you’ve opened the door to pursuing more spiritual conversations in the future, and helping to heal a wound that your friend has been carrying that has hardened her heart toward God. 



Summer Stevens 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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The Truth About Truth

By Dix Winston

A pastor, a college professor, and a boy scout were flying together on a small plane when the pilot had a heart attack and died. Since none of them could fly the plane and it was headed down, they began looking for parachutes. They only found two. This created a moral dilemma: which two would jump to safety, and which one would ride the plane down to a certain death?

The college professor announced that since he was the world's smartest man, he should take one of the parachutes. He then strapped one on his back and jumped out of the plane.

The pastor looked at the young scout, and told him he knew that when he died he would go to heaven. So the pastor insisted that the young man take the remaining chute and jump to safety.

The scout said that would not be necessary since the world's smartest man just jumped out

of the plane with his scout backpack!

All of us must jump out of the plane called *life* at some point. No one gets out of this life alive (apart from the Rapture). Therefore, a prudent individual will be certain of what her or she jumping out of this life with. Christianity claims to be a reliable "chute" in which to jump out of this life and land safely in the next. But is this merely wishful thinking, or is there a reason to believe it so?

Any experienced skydiver will "check the chute" before leaving the ground. I want to invite you to "check the chute" called Christianity with me.

STUMBLING OVER TRUTH

More than sixty years ago, Winston Churchill quipped, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."¹ That statement was made in a time when the concept of truth was not challenged. People then believed that some things were true, and therefore the opposite of that was false.

Almost twenty years ago, Professor Allen Bloom documented not only the dismissal of truth but also the death of truth on the college campus.

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says they believe, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students' reaction: they will be uncomprehending.

That anyone should regard the proposition as not self-evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into question $2+2=4$.²

This relative view of truth is no small matter. As Francis Beckwith observes,

When truth dies, all of its subspecies, such as ethics perish with it. If truth cannot be known then the concept of moral truth becomes incoherent. Ethics become relative, right and wrong a matter of individual opinion. This may seem a moral victory, but ultimately rings hollow.³

Truly our culture is experiencing a breakdown of the rational and moral immune system, rendering our society weak and susceptible to all manner of insane and immoral practices.⁴

As serious as this virus is for our culture's temporal future, it has even graver consequences for an individual's eternal destiny. For if there is no truth, then nothing meaningful can be said about the life to come or if there is even one. But if there is truth to be discovered, not created, then one has the potential of being certain about not only how to live life here, but where her or she might spend his or her eternal life.

TRUTH: A DEFINITION

There is much confusion surrounding the nature of truth. The following illustration from *Os Guinness* points out three differing approaches or views of truth. Three baseball umpires



debate their different philosophies of umpiring...

“There’s balls and there’s strikes.” Says the first, “and *I call them the way they are.*”

“No!” exclaims the second umpire. “That’s arrogant. There’s balls and strikes and *I call them the way I see them.*”

“That’s no better,” says the third. “Why beat around the bush? Why not be realistic about what we do? There’s balls and strikes and *they ain’t nothing til I call them.*”

As Guinness explains:

The first umpire represents the traditional view of truth—objective, independent of the mind of the knower, and there to be discovered. The second umpire speaks for moderate

relativism—truth “as each person sees it” according to his or her perspective and interpretation. And the third umpire bluntly expresses the radically relativist, or postmodern, “truth” is not there to be discovered; it is for each of us to create for ourselves.⁵

Only the first umpire represents a proper or accurate view of truth. He calls them the way they are. That is truth, because truth is what corresponds to its referent. Truth about reality is what corresponds to the way things really are. Truth is telling it like it is. There is a reality, and truth accurately expresses it. This has been called *the correspondence view of truth*.

As Norman Geisler explains, there are at least four reasons for adopting this view:

First, non-correspondence views are self-defeating. For example, the claim that “the non-correspondence view of truth” implies that this view corresponds to reality. If so, then the non-correspondence view cannot even express itself without using the correspondence view of truth.

Second, even lies are impossible without a correspondence view of truth. If one’s statements need not correspond to the facts in order to be true, then any factually incorrect statement could be true. If this is the case, then even lies become impossible, for if any statement is compatible with any given state of affairs, then

all statements can be true and none false.

Third, without correspondence there could be no such thing as truth or falsity. In order to know something is true as opposed to something that is false, there must be a real difference between things and the statements about the things. But this real difference between thought and things is precisely what is entailed in a correspondence view of truth.

Fourth, factual communication would break down without a correspondence view of truth. Factual communication depends on informative statements, but informative statements must be factually true (that is, they must correspond to the facts) in order to inform one correctly...⁶

So truth is that which corresponds to reality.

For instance, if I were to say there is a three-headed green monster under my bed, that statement would be true if there is a three-headed green monster under my bed. Or if I was to say I live in Colorado, that would only be true if indeed I had my full-time residence in Colorado. In a similar manner, if I were to say I was seven feet tall, that would not be true since I am less than six feet tall. So something is true if it corresponds to its referent.

Now that we have defined truth, we must examine three critical aspects or propositions concerning truth.

THREE PROPOSITIONS ABOUT TRUTH

1. **Truth is logical.** What I mean by this is truth conforms to the laws of logic. These “Laws” form the very basis of all rational thought. They are also referred to as “First Principles.”⁷ One of those principles is called the “law of non-contradiction.”

“Aren’t some things true for some people but not for others? Or true at some times but not others? No, for truth is, universal—that is it applies to all people at all times.”

The law of non-contradiction says, “A cannot be non-A.” I can illustrate this principle with the following statement: all pens write blue; this pen writes black. Now either one of those statements is true, or both of those statements are false, but both cannot be true in the same way and at the same time.

First principles or self-evident principles are undeniable. “For example, the principle of non-contradiction cannot be denied without using it in the very denial. The statement: ‘Opposites cannot be true’ assumes

that the opposite of that statement cannot be true.”⁸

However people still ignorantly violate these principles. For instance, I was talking to a friend and made the following statement: “Either Christianity is true, or Buddhism is true, but both cannot be true in the same way at the same time.” He responded, “You cannot be that logical when it comes to spiritual issues.” I pointed out to him that he had used logic to disavow logic.

A children’s story aptly illustrates this principle. It is a dialogue in Winnie the Pooh when he came upon Rabbit’s house.

So he bent down, put his head into the hole, and called out: “Is anybody home?”

There was a sudden scuffling noise from inside the hole, and then silence.

“What I said was, ‘Is anybody home?’” called out Pooh very loudly.

“No!” said a voice; and then added, “You needn’t shout so loud. I heard you the first time.”

“Bother!” said Pooh. “Isn’t there anybody here at all?”

“Nobody.”

Winnie-the-Pooh took his head out of the hole, and thought for a little, and he thought to himself, “*There must be somebody there, because somebody must have said ‘Nobody.’*”⁹

This proposition is important not only to fairy tales but also spiritual truths. For instance, either God exists, or He does not exist. He cannot both exist and not exist. Or either the Bible is true, or it is false. Or there is life after death, or there

is not life or existence after death.

But aren't some things true for some people but not for others? Or true at some times but not others? No, for truth is universal—that is, it applies to all people at all times.

2. Truth is universal. Today you often hear the following: “That may have been true for them, but it is not true for us.” Or, “That may be true for you, but it is not true for me.” Or, “different strokes for different folks.” People mistakenly think truth is determined by the individual or is limited by time.

I was speaking with a friend and made the following statement: “If something is true for me then it is true for you.” He disagreed, offering the following common situation as a rebuttal. He said that if you came over to his house this evening and asked his wife if she was cold, she would say she was. But if you were to ask him if he were cold, he would say no, in fact he was hot. So it is both hot and cold. Or is it?

I told him it was both cold and hot in his house, but truth was still universal. He must identify the referent in order to be accurate. It was universally true that his wife felt cold, and it was universally true that he felt hot. It all depended upon the referent.

While some might think truth is determined geographically, others think it is determined chronologically. In other words, what might have been true a hundred years ago is no longer

true today. For instance, centuries ago people believed the earth was flat when we know today that the earth is spherical. But the earth has always been spherical. It was universally true centuries ago that the earth was spherical. One's perception does not determine truth.

Today, people dismiss Biblical miracles, even though the Bible records them, because they think there must have been natural explanations for them. And people dismiss Biblical morality, even though the Bible reveals it, because today we are more enlightened and liberated.

3. Truth is Knowable. The final proposition about truth is that it is knowable. There are some today who would claim you couldn't know anything to be true. This is skepticism. And as Winifried Corduan has explained, skepticism is a position that cannot be rationally maintained.

Skepticism states that one cannot know anything. Does the person who makes that statement know it or not? If the skeptic thinks that skepticism is true, then it is false. The skeptic argues that we can know at least one thing, namely, that skepticism is true. If the skeptic does not claim that skepticism is true, he or she is not saying anything meaningful.¹⁰

There are some who would say you couldn't know if there is a God, or if the Bible is reliable, or if miracles are possible. But in making these statements they establish certain spiritual truths:

namely you cannot know if there is a God, or if the Bible is reliable, or if miracles are possible.

At some point the skeptics must admit that they know something, and if they know something, then truth is knowable.

So we can know the following: truth corresponds to reality. And truth is logical, universal, and knowable. ■



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The Place of Failure in the Christian Life

By Bob Wilkin





Over the years I've had lots of failures in life. I know we all have. But I'm more acutely aware of my own failures than I am of those of others.

Have you ever felt like giving up on your job, your ministry in your church, or on some major responsibility you bear?

I have. I believe we are all tempted to throw in the towel at times.

What keeps us going?

For me these are the things that keep me going:

"Can't never did anything" (my dad).

"You will do great things with your life" (my mom).

"Well done, good and faithful servant" (Luke 19:17, the words I long to hear the Lord say).

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim 2:12).

"It is finished!" (John 19:30, the Lord's second to last words on the cross).

Notice that some of what percolates in my head are the words of my parents. Yes, Scripture controls my worldview. However, my parents, though not perfect, did instill some good values in me, values consistent with Scripture. Whenever the gems our parents gave us match up with Scripture, that is a powerful combination.

Lots of people thought I'd never amount to anything in life. Of course, lots of people think that GES is not a good thing, and I'm wasting my time here.

My mentor, Zane Hodges, was criticized an awful lot. I take solace in the fact that the amount of criticism I've received is far less than that which Zane received. But still, criticism hurts, especially from people who've been close.


If people close to you—your parents, your boss, your employees, your spouse, your kids—have said that you are a failure in life, do not let that derail your service for Christ. We answer to the Lord Jesus at His Judgment Seat. While it would be great if those close to us encourage us, lack of support is no excuse. We are called to be faithful:

It is required in stewards that one be found faithful (1 Cor 4:2).

Maybe those who say that you were a bad boss or bad child or bad parent or bad employee are right. Maybe they are wrong and just being spiteful. But we can either wilt under actual or phantom failure, or we can keep on keeping on.

Paul went on to say,

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court [lit. "day"]. In fact, I do not even judge myself, yet I am not justified [vindicated] by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts (1 Cor 4:3-5a).

We all fail. And we are charged with more failures than we are actually guilty of. Don't let failure get you down. Seek His approval. Seek His "Well done, good servant." Be watchful for His soon return. 



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*.

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