

GRACE FOCUS

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THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CORONAVIRUS

Two Responses

PLUS ROMANS 4 / PERSEVERANCE VS ETERNAL SECURITY / A WIFE'S CAREER / FREE WILL /
KEEP IT SIMPLE / GOD IS LOGICAL / JAMES AND THE RESURRECTION / MORE!

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Send them to ges@faithalone.org. Theological questions? Send them to questions@faithalone.org or write to *Grace in Focus*, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202.

FROM THE EDITOR

The coronavirus has brought much of the world to a sudden, jarring halt.

Thousands of people have gotten sick from the virus, and while most have recovered, thousands have died, and we grieve with those friends and families.

Millions of people have been forcibly put out of work and are now experiencing financial insecurity. We pray for you.

Businesses and families and churches and individuals are suffering in ways we won't fully understand until much later.

Many *Grace in Focus* readers are suffering, too.

GES has been affected by the virus, but thank God, we're doing well.

The staff are healthy and have been working from home. And while that has been an adjustment, we've continued with our work with only a little disruption.

Thankfully, the blogs, radio, and magazine have gone out uninterrupted.

We even started a new Spanish blog! (Tell your friends!)

However, one bad consequence of the coronavirus is that we've had to cancel or postpone conferences and speaking.

For example, our March Costa Rica conference was cancelled, and we're looking at alternative dates.

Notably, our National Conference, which was supposed to be in May, has been postponed to October 26-29, 2020, and will be held at Coppel Bible Fellowship in Coppel, TX. Make sure to cancel your hotel reservations and change your flights.

Ken Yates had to cancel a teaching trip to Korea, but he was able to teach the class online.

Bob and I have been taking this opportunity to focus on writing. Bob is nearly finished the first draft of his *100 Faith Alone Verses* book. We hope to have it edited and printed this summer.

We don't know what the future holds—but we know the One Who does. Our confidence rests



Grace in the Pandemic

Shawn Lazar **EDITOR**

in Him, not in ourselves. To that end, Bob wrote a new ebook on *The Christian and the Coronavirus: Two Responses*, which is published in this issue.

Please pray for GES, that we can continue to serve and glorify the Lord during this time.

Please pray for Free Grace churches, many of whom are reaching new people with online services.

And pray that—God willing—the coronavirus danger will pass quickly, so we can all get back to living, working, and worshipping together. **GF**





“Can the Leopard Change Its Spots?”

Eternal Security and the Limits of Free Will

BY BOB WILKIN

A friend sent me this second-hand question: “*If God desires for us to always have free will, why would He not allow us to give back the free gift of eternal life if we so choose?*”

That is a common objection. I’ve also been told that while no one can pluck us out of Jesus’ hand (John 10:28) or God the Father’s hand (John 10:29), we can wiggle out on our own if we want to. In this way of thinking, we are stronger than God is. His grip can stop everyone but Satan from snatching us away. By getting us to freely decide to get out of God’s grip, Satan has caused us to lose everlasting life.

But wait!

No one can pluck us from His hand. That includes Satan.

And that even includes us. (Before He said no one could pluck the believer from His hand, He said, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” Never perish is a guarantee. Compare John 3:16, 18.)

YOU CAN’T CHOOSE TO CHANGE REALITY

God does not give us *unlimited* free will. We have *limited free will*.

Let’s say, for example, that you were born in 1978. But you wish you had been born in 1940. You can’t choose to change your birthday. It is what it is.

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If you were born into an Anglo family, but you really want to be a Cherokee, you are out of luck. You can't change your ethnicity.

If you were born with *Alopecia universalis*, you don't have any hair. That is just the way it is.

If you were born a human, that is what you are. You can't change your species, no matter how much you like the thought of being a bird.

Jeremiah 13:23 says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?" The answer to each question is no.

There are many things about each of us which are unalterable. One of those things about us that is unalterable is being born again. While it is possible for a person who lacks everlasting life to gain that life, it is impossible once one gains everlasting life to lose it.

GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE

While we may not realize it, even God has many things about Him that are unchangeable.

God is eternal (Deut 33:27; 1 Tim 1:17). He can't stop being eternal. That is who He is.

God is true (John 3:33; Rom 3:4; 1 John 5:20). That means He can't choose to lie: "God cannot lie" (Titus 1:2).

God is just (Ps 7:11). He can't choose to be unjust.

God cannot violate His own nature. He is restricted by who He is. Of course, it is a good thing that God cannot choose to do evil. And it will be a good thing when in eternity future we cannot choose to do evil, either.

JESUS IS EVERLASTING LIFE

One thing many forget is that everlasting life is the life of Jesus Christ. Here is an important distinction: Jesus *is* everlasting life (John 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 1:2; 5:20). But believers *have* everlasting life. No believer will ever become everlasting life. We have it. But He is it.

Just as the Lord Jesus cannot cease being everlasting life, so too those who *have* everlasting

life cannot cease having it. We can no more give everlasting life back than He can cease being everlasting life.

How do we know that? Jesus Himself told us that often.

John 4:14-15. "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.' The woman said to Him, 'Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.'" The Lord promises that once a person drinks His living water, that is, once someone believes in Him (see John 6:35), he has everlasting

life and will never lose it. The woman misunderstood and thought he was talking about some special physical water. But she rightly understands that once she partakes of this living water, she will never have to come to the well to get more water. She knows she'd never need to drink again.

John 5:24. Jesus used all three verb tenses here to

underline the eternality of everlasting life. *Present tense:* The one who believes in Jesus "has everlasting life." *Future tense:* The believer "will not come into judgment [regarding everlasting life]." *Past tense:* The one who believes in Him "has passed from death into life." Done deal. No return trip.

John 6:35. Speaking of the bread of life, Jesus said, "He who comes to me [for the bread of life] shall never hunger." The words *shall never hunger* are emphatic in Greek. It will never happen. Speaking of the water of life, Jesus continued, "He who believes in Me shall never thirst." Again, that is emphatic. Once one believes in Jesus, he has life that can never be lost.

John 11:26. The Lord told Martha that as "the life," He guaranteed that "whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." Again, that is emphatic. He wasn't talking about never dying *physically* there. In fact, in the previous verse He promised to raise the believers who die. He

"Just as the Lord Jesus cannot cease being everlasting life, so too those who *have* everlasting life cannot cease having it."


promised eternal security to anyone who is a living human being who believes in Him. I think the reason He added the part about “whoever lives” is because in order to have everlasting life, one must come to faith in Christ while he is still alive. There are no post mortem new births. But once a person is born again, he “will never die.”

If anyone who believed in Jesus and was born again later lost everlasting life, then Jesus lied. But Jesus can’t lie. He fulfills every promise He makes. The believer will never hunger, will never thirst, will never perish (John 3:16, 18), will never die. He has everlasting life and he will never be judged regarding his eternal destiny, and he has once and for all passed from death into life.

Since we continue to sin until we die (Rom 6:23; 1 John 1:8, 10), it is possible that a born-again person might get mad at God and in a moment of spiritual insanity want to give

everlasting life back. Frankly, I’ve never met such a person. But I suppose it might happen. If it did happen, the person would not get his crazy wish.

Once a person has everlasting life, that is what he has. To lose that life would mean that Jesus lied in John 3:16; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:35; 11:26. Jesus cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

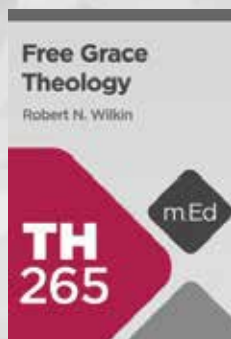
Having everlasting life makes you a different type of human forever. Free will cannot undo that. 



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.

Mobile Ed: TH 265 Free Grace Theology

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



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KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid)



LIGHTSTOCK

When I was in the military, there was a phrase that we used time and time again. If we were explaining a concept to another person, especially if that person was new to the military, we would say we needed to “keep it simple, stupid.” We called it the KISS principle. The point was that sometimes we describe things in a way that is too complicated.

The same thing can be said about theological concepts. One of those concepts is repentance. In the Free Grace movement, we make it clear that if we define repentance as being sorry for your sins, this is not a requirement for receiving eternal life. The Gospel of John, the only book in the NT whose purpose is to tell unbelievers how to receive eternal life, never mentions repentance.

When we discuss the issue, we usually go down many different paths. We talk about the root meanings of the word *repentance*. We look at how it is used in different contexts. We talk about how it is used in reference to the Jews and how it is used when addressing believers. We study how it was used in secular writings and in other times. We want to know how the noun and verb were used in the OT.

But I want to keep it simple. If repentance means to be sorry for one’s sins, is that necessary to receive eternal life? Does this involve tears? If so, how sorry do I have to feel about my sins before I can be saved? How many tears do I have to shed? Through the years many people have told me that they do not think they were saved because when they thought they were saved, they did not feel sorry enough for their sins. But now, they are really sorry about them.

Is that how it works? Of course not. Recently I read a short article in a magazine published by Dallas Theological Seminary. It was an article the founder of the seminary, Lewis Sperry Chafer, wrote many years ago. The title of the article is “Belief.” The point is that all a person needs to do to receive eternal life is believe in what God has promised about giving us eternal life through

His Son Jesus Christ. Any other addition, including feeling sorry for your sins, is an addition to the gospel.

Chafer briefly addresses the idea that one must feel sorry for his sins and cry over them. But Chafer does not get into great theological discussions of context or Greek. He keeps it simple by asking two simple questions: “Shall I have to soften God with my tears? Must I persuade Him with my pleading?”

I found this simple point so refreshing. Does the unbeliever have to butter up God by crying about his sins before he can be saved from hell? Does the unbeliever have to beg to God that he is truly remorseful over his past life before he can receive eternal life?

Is that the picture of God we find in the NT? Is God reluctant to give eternal life to people, and so we have to show Him that we really understand how undeserving we are of His grace by wailing and gnashing our teeth before God over our pitiful

estate?

That is what we are saying when we tell people that repentance is a requirement for eternal life and that repentance means to feel sorry for your sins. I long for the day when I will never have to hear that kind of gospel proclaimed again. Lewis Sperry Chafer died over 65 years ago. He dealt with the same things we have to deal with today. Evangelists and preachers of his day told people they had to weep and feel sorry for their sins. He said that was not the case. The only requirement is to believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life. In other words, Chafer exhorted us to “keep it simple, stupid.”

“Does the unbeliever have to butter up God by crying about his sins before he can be saved from hell?”



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.

Five Differences Between Perseverance of the Saints and Eternal Security

By Shawn Lazar

Q What's the difference between eternal security (or once saved, always saved, OSAS), and perseverance of the saints (POTS)? Aren't they the same thing?

A Well, they are often taken to be the same doctrine, but they shouldn't be. I admit that some people use the terms interchangeably. But I think we should be more precise and distinguish between them. For example, here are five differences that I see between POTS and OSAS.

First, the doctrine of POTS is part of Calvinism, while OSAS is not (at least, not necessarily). Many OSAS advocates reject Calvinism, such as Baptist Traditionalists and those who hold to Free Grace theology.

Second, POTS and OSAS have different foundations. POTS is founded on the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election, where God predestines some individuals to eternal salvation, and the elect are guaranteed to persevere because God chose them to be saved. By contrast, OSAS is not based on any doctrine of election, but on Jesus' promise of everlasting life. Jesus promised what whoever believes in Him has everlasting life, shall not perish, shall not hunger, shall not thirst, shall not be cast out, shall not come into judgment, etc. (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 37). In short, believers are eternally secure. (See my book *Chosen to Serve* for a defense of the idea that election is to service, not to eternal life.)

Third, POTS and OSAS have different views of the condition of salvation. This comes out clearly when POTS advocates say that people who fall away into error or unbelief never truly believed to begin with. In effect, POTS advocates typically teach that you are born again or justified by a continuous faith that must be the "gift" faith that God only gives to the elect. Essentially, salvation does not only depend on what you believe, but how you believe it. By contrast, OSAS says there is only one kind of faith (persuasion that something is true) and that what matters is what you believe, not how you believe. Salvation requires a single act of faith in Jesus for eternal life.

Fourth, POTS and OSAS take different perspectives on sanctification. According to POTS, sanctification is *unconditional*. Since the elect are predestined to salvation, and God causes them to be sanctified, they will never fall into major sin or unbelief in this life but will persevere in faith and good works until death. By contrast, OSAS sees sanctification as *conditional*. You have to choose to be a doer of the word to be sanctified, and there is no guarantee that you will progress from a carnal state to a spiritual one. But believers are eternally secure whether they experience practical sanctification or not.

Fifth, POTS and OSAS have different effects on assurance. Under POTS, you cannot be sure of your salvation because you cannot be sure if you are one of the elect with special gift faith who will persevere in faith and good works until death. By contrast, for OSAS, assurance is not only possible, it is the essence of saving faith. Jesus promised believers everlasting life. Hence, you cannot believe *that* promise without believing the life He gives is everlasting. ■



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society.

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Romans 4

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

By Zane Hodges

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ATTESTED IN THE OT [4:1-25]

4:1. Now that Paul has made clear that righteousness comes “through faith in Jesus Christ” (cf. 3:21ff), he returns to the idea of OT authentication.

The words **what...Abraham our father has obtained** state the issue broadly. What advantage or effect did the *physical* side of Abraham's relationship to God have? The phrase **with reference to the flesh** alludes to circumcision, which the typical Jew would take as the necessary mark of God's acceptance of Abraham.

4:2. From Paul's perspective, **if Abraham was justified by works, then he has something to boast about**. But as Paul has just insisted, justification *before God* is by faith alone and *excludes* boasting (3:27-28). It follows therefore that if it *can* be said that Abraham *was* in some sense justified by works, it *cannot* be said that this experience grants him boasting *toward God*.

Before God none can boast. But *before men*, Abraham was justified (or vindicated) and that gave him a ground for boasting (cf. James 2:21-23, which also deals with Abraham's

justification/vindication before men). Paul does not wish to deny this to the great patriarch whom all his physical kinsmen revered. But **with regard to God**, this great man was on the same level as all other men, as Paul will now go on to show.

4:3. The initial call of Abraham in Gen 12:1-3 contained a salvific promise in the words, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Compare Gal 3:8 (“that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,” so that in fact God had “preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand”). God told Abraham that Messianic salvation would come through his family line. Apparently Abraham had not believed this specific guarantee, even though he had acted on God's call (cf. Gen 15:2, “...the heir of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?”).

This time, however, when God reaffirms His promise in terms of a guarantee of physical seed, “**Abraham believed God**” (cf. Gen 15:6). In the light of Gal 3:6-9, we can discern the fact that *Messianic salvation* was part and parcel of what Abraham believed on this occasion. But that is not Paul's point here in Romans 4. Rather Paul is concerned with validating *justification by faith* in terms of Abraham's experience as revealed in



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Scripture. Thus, as his quoted text declares, when *Abraham believed* on the occasion in question, it was then that “*it* [Abraham’s belief in Messianic salvation] *was imputed to him as righteousness*” (cf. 4:9, “*faith was imputed to Abraham as righteousness*”).

Frequently we are told that “Christ’s personal righteousness in fulfilling the law” is imputed to the believer. But that idea is not found in Paul. God does not credit us with an obedience to “the works of the law” which we have in fact signally failed to perform. “God’s righteousness” is “apart from the law” (3:21). This righteousness in no sense represents a non-existent “fulfillment” of the law’s works. To say so is to degrade it.

God accepts “faith in Jesus” as a fully adequate substitute for any and all works of whatever kind they may be. For Paul, when “*Abraham believed God*,” the transaction called *justification before God* occurred in the absence of works of any kind. For this event, only *faith* mattered.

Thus the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 3:24-26) has completely removed the demands of God’s law from consideration, as

well as removing all other forms of working as well.

It follows that there can be no “trial” where there are no charges. Those who have a “*faith-righteousness*” will not experience final judgment (cf. John 5:24, “does not come into judgment”).

4:4-5. From Abraham’s personal experience of justification by faith, one must conclude that the bestowal of righteousness was an act of divine grace. If works had been involved, then this *righteousness* would have been a form of compensation [*ho misthos*: pay, wages] and not **on the basis of grace** at all. Rather it would have been **on the basis of what is owed**. The reference to *grace* here picks up the idea already expressed in 3:23 where Paul speaks of being “justified freely by His grace.” Clearly it was *on the basis of grace* that Abraham was justified, since it was **his faith**, not his works, which was **imputed** to him as **righteousness**.

The Greek phrase *ou logizetai* (from *logizomai*) is typically rendered *are not counted* (NKJV, ESV), *is not reckoned* (KJV, RSV), or *is not credited* (NASB, NET, NIV, LEB). *Logizomai* is

Paul's standard word in Romans for "imputing" righteousness (as in 4:3, 5, etc.). Its use here of both an earned payment (*compensation*), in v 4, and an unearned *righteousness*, in v 5, is comprehensible in the light of this word's commercial sense. We might see the connection in English better by translating this way: "*compensation is not put to his account on the basis of grace*" (v 4), and, "*his faith is put to his account as righteousness*" (v 5).

One might paraphrase Paul's concept as follows: "In God's books, a works-righteousness belongs in the 'earned pay' column, while a faith-righteousness belongs in the 'unearned gift' column."

Thus, **the person who works** gets whatever he earns. This is the principle that governs the works-relationship to God. On the other hand, **the person who does not work** and instead believes, obtains a graciously bestowed righteousness that is attributed to *his faith*. There is no such thing in Pauline theology as a man who is justified because *as he works* he believes. Instead, this righteousness comes to one *who does not work*. All work is excluded from this faith-righteousness and is thus completely irrelevant to it.

4:6. This verse is best understood as beginning a new sentence (so KJV, NIV, NACE, and JB). The point Paul is making is that David's words testify to the same truth stated by Gen 15:6 in reference to Abraham. The Biblical testimony is twofold here in accord with the OT law of witness (see Deut 17:6; 19:15; John 8:17).

David, we are told, describes **the blessedness of the [justified] man**. The term *blessedness* is chosen here in light of the following quotation from Psalm 32, which commences with the word *blessed*, and which highlights the state of well-being enjoyed by the justified person.

4:7-8. Psalm 32:1-2 speaks of two blessings. In v 7, Paul says that the first is the blessing of forgiveness by which sins are put out of sight (**are**

covered). This is not the same as the "blessedness" of v 8. In fact, v 7 is the only reference to forgiveness in Romans. Its occurrence here is because it is preparatory to v 8.

As wonderful as forgiveness is, it is less than the blessing of justification. As the Psalm indicates, forgiveness signals that *sins are covered*, and they no longer interfere in the forgiven person's relationship to God. But though *covered*, the sins are there. They were properly imputed to the person who did them as *wicked deeds*, but then they are put out of sight. This is not what justification means, however.

"God accepts 'faith in Jesus' as a fully adequate substitute for any and all works of whatever kind they may be."

Justification is the *second* blessedness described in the Psalm and is quoted in v 8. The justified person is "*the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin.*" In terms of justification, God charges the justified man with nothing at all (see 8:33). That man's faith, as Paul has already shown, is

"imputed as righteousness." Since this is a righteousness totally "apart from works" (v 6), no works of any kind—good or evil—can be factored into it. It stands totally complete based on faith alone. From this perspective, the presence or absence of forgiveness is irrelevant.

4:9. Paul now wraps together his double testimony from Scripture about justification.

This blessedness (alluding to David's words) is what has already been mentioned regarding Abraham. The question now is no longer whether such righteousness can be bestowed since that is proved by Paul's two proof texts. The question rather is whether such a blessing can *come* only **upon the circumcised** or whether it can come **also upon the uncircumcised**.

From Paul's perspective the answer is already obvious from what he has been talking about. **For what we are saying**, states Paul, **is that faith was imputed to Abraham as righteousness**. This carries with it the manifest implication that justification is for all who believe, whether *circumcised or uncircumcised*.

4:10. Paul now delivers the *coup de grâce* to any idea that one must be **circumcised** in order to receive justification. The father of the Jewish race was himself **uncircumcised** when his faith was credited to him as righteousness. Thus, circumcision can be no factor at all in the reception of “this blessedness.”

4:11-12. What then was the role of circumcision if it made no contribution to the righteousness that Abraham received by faith? Paul’s answer is that circumcision was a **sign**, that is, it was a **seal of the righteousness by faith which Abraham had received while he was uncircumcised**.

Paul is referring to Gen 17:1-14 where God entered into a covenantal relationship with Abraham. The distinguishing mark of this covenantal relationship was circumcision. The fact that God chose this point in time (*after* Gen 15:6) is important for Paul here. God’s willingness to execute a covenant with this justified man was a clear indication that God fully accepted him on the basis of his previous justification. If Abraham were still unrighteous in God’s sight, such a covenant would have been unthinkable. Thus the sign of the covenant was also a sign and *seal of the righteousness by faith* that Abraham now had.

The reason Abraham received this *righteousness by faith...while he was uncircumcised* is that thereby he became **the father of all those who believe while uncircumcised**. All believing Gentiles can look back to him as their spiritual progenitor.

Even more than that, as is indicated by the words **in order that righteousness might be imputed to them also**, the case of Abraham was actually designed to encourage Gentile belief and justification.

But in addition to becoming the spiritual father of uncircumcised believers, Abraham’s subsequent *circumcision* made him **the father of circumcision** both to his physical descendants

(those of the **circumcision**) and also to those who **follow** his believing footsteps. The words **follow in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham** are most naturally taken to refer to believing Jews who, like Abraham, receive *righteousness* by means of *faith*. They stand so to speak in the *footprints* of Abraham when, like him, they believe and are justified.

The point of v 12 is that Abraham is not simply *the father of circumcision* to all Jews. He is likewise *the father of circumcision* to his circumcised descendants (Jews) who *also* believe as he did. Thus, they would become Abraham’s children in this second, superior sense.

4:13. Paul’s argument from Scripture here takes a step back historically speaking, and he now refers to **the promise that Abraham would be heir of the world**. This can hardly refer to anything other than the original promise made to him at the time of his call and recorded in Gen 12:1-4 (see esp. “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” Gen 12:3).

Paul understood Gen 12:3 as a prophecy about the gospel and justification by faith (cf. Gal 3:8-9). The universality of this part of the promise to Abraham is obvious. In addition, since the world to come will be composed exclusively of those who receive the Abrahamic blessing of justification, Abraham thereby becomes the *heir of the world*. Just as he will “inherit” the physical land of Israel through his *physical* descendants, so also he will inherit the world to come through his *spiritual* descendants.

Obviously *the promise* Paul is referring to came over five hundred years before the giving of the law and thus **was not made to Abraham or to his seed through the law**. Instead, since *the promise* pertained to the blessing of justification, it can be said to have been made to him **through the righteousness of faith**. The eternal world to come will therefore be populated and possessed by Abraham’s *spiritual* descendants, both Jewish

“The father of the Jewish race was himself uncircumcised when his faith was credited to him as righteousness. Thus, circumcision can be no factor at all in the reception of ‘this blessedness.’”

and Gentile, all of whom will be recipients of the Abrahamic blessing of *the righteousness of faith*.

4:14-15. Paul affirms that it is not possible that **those who are of the law** could be heirs of this Abrahamic promise of blessing (i.e., justification). In that case, faith could not be the means by which the blessing is received but would be **made void** (or, ineffectual). Equally, **the promise** could not be realized and thus would be annulled. As Paul has already established, “by the works of the law no flesh will be justified” (3:20), thus **the law** would render *the promise* unattainable.

So far from making the Abrahamic blessing attainable, *the law* actually produces the opposite of blessing, namely, wrath (see 1:18ff) But **where there is no law there is no transgression**. Of course, Paul does not say that in the absence of law there is no *sin*. Sin is a violation of God’s righteous standards whether this is realized by the sinner or not. But the presence of law confronts the sinner with the fact that his behavior is a *transgression* of God’s known will and therefore subject to His retributive *wrath* (anger).

4:16-17a. Therefore, since the law would have made the promise unattainable to both Jews and Gentiles, God ordained that the promise would be bestowed **by faith**, so that it might be **by grace**. Faith, not works, became the means through which it was received.

The result is that the Abrahamic promise of blessing is **confirmed**, that is, *made sure and certain*, to believing Jews and Gentiles alike. Thus **the entire seed** of believers, both those who are **of the law** and also those who are simply **of the faith of Abraham**, are recipients of the promised blessing. From this standpoint, Abraham can be seen as **the father of us all**, that is, of all believers.

This kind of fatherhood fulfills the Scripture where it is written, “*I have made you a father of many nations*” (Gen 17:5-6). The *entire seed* is made up of many believers from many nations.

4:17b. The God in whom Abraham believed on the occasion of his justification is **the One who**

brings the dead to life and speaks about things that do not exist as though they did.

The words rendered *speaks about things that do not exist as though they did* are a reference back to the preceding statement, made by God, that “*I have made you* [not “*I will make you*”] a father of many nations” (v 17a). This declaration represents a *fait accompli*. Yet it was made long before the fulfillment that Paul has specified in terms of the many believing Gentiles who have now become Abraham’s spiritual children (cf. “father of us all,” v 16). But the non-existence of these children at the time God spoke was no impediment to Him. Since He would fulfill His

word, He could speak of Abraham’s future children, who *did not yet exist, as though they did*.

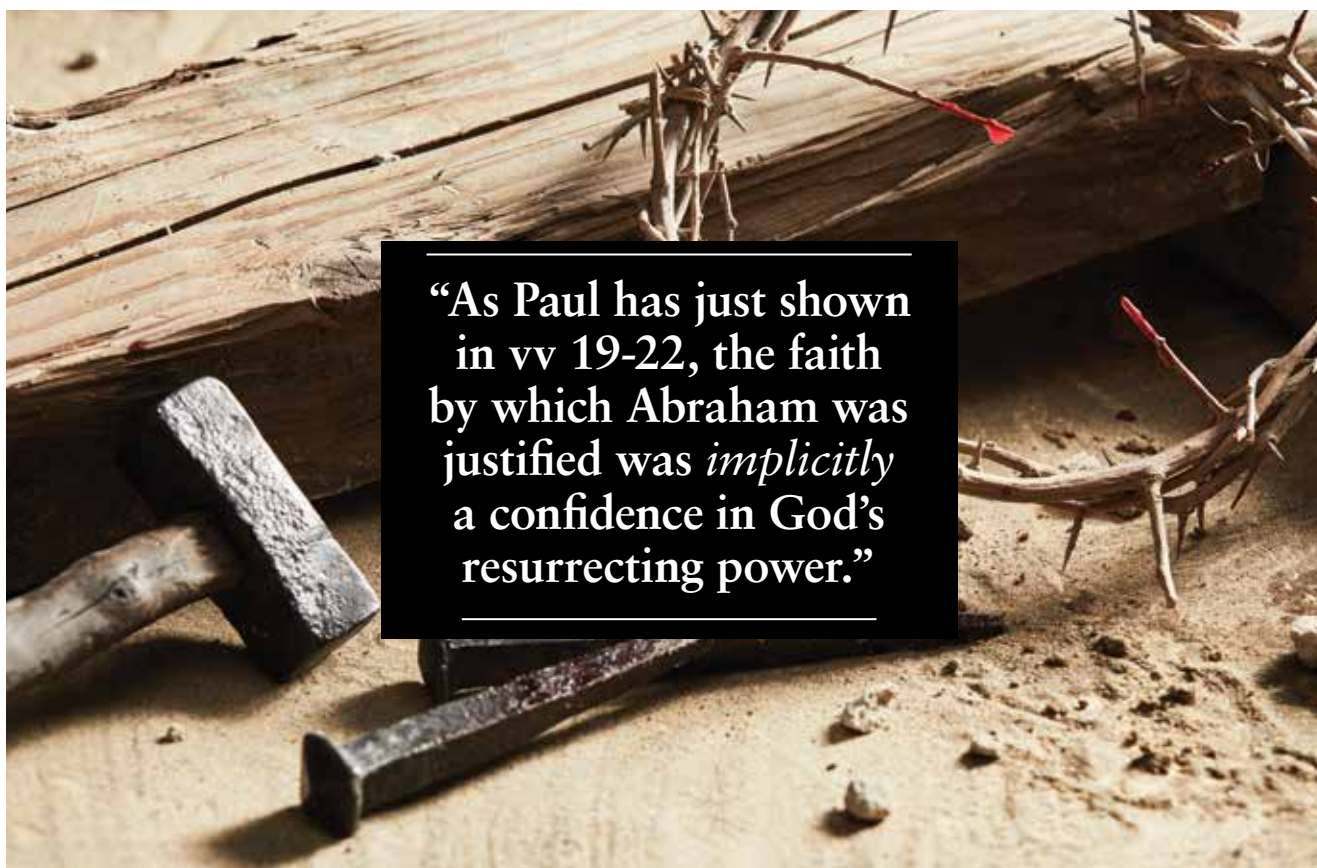
But of the two statements about God (that is, that He *brings the dead to life* and that He *speaks about things that do not exist as though they did*), it is the first one which will now be elaborated in the verses that follow.

4:18. Abraham, Paul states, was a man who **beyond hope believed in hope**. Abraham was well past the point at which he could, humanly speaking, have *hope* for a physical child. The reference is to Gen 15:6, as is clear from the phrase “*so will your seed be*,” taken from Gen 15:5.

In the Genesis context, Abraham had despaired of having a physical son (cf. 15:3-4). But God offers him an heir “who will come from [his] own body” (Gen 15:4) and innumerable descendants like the stars (Gen 15:5). Although there were great physical obstacles to this promise (see v 19), Abraham’s faith rose above those obstacles so that what was out of reach as a physical hope was achieved. He thereby became “*a father of many nations*.”

4:19-21. This impressive description of Abraham’s justifying faith is highly instructive. In order to believe the promise God made to him (Gen 15:4-5), it was necessary for Abraham to ignore **his own body**, which had lost all potential for *communicating life* by physical means. Thus,

“So far from making the Abrahamic blessing attainable, the law actually produces the opposite of blessing, namely, wrath.”



“As Paul has just shown in vv 19-22, the faith by which Abraham was justified was *implicitly* a confidence in God’s resurrecting power.”

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his body, in this sense, was dead since he was about one hundred years old. But there was also the problem of the corresponding deadness of Sarah’s womb, since she had always been unable to *conceive life*. This too Abraham had to look beyond (refuse to take notice of).

Thus Abraham demonstrated that he was not weak in faith. Implicitly he believed in God’s resurrection power since his faith was not hindered by “death” either in himself or in Sarah. In fact, he did not doubt the promise of God in unbelief. That is to say, his heart did not call God’s promise into question because of an inability to believe it (*in unbelief*). On the contrary, he became strong in faith.

In exercising this faith, Abraham was giving glory to God. This does not mean that he expressed praise on this occasion. Rather the sense is that by taking God at His word, he was, in so doing, giving God glory. In what way precisely he rendered this *glory to God* is now clarified by the words that follow, stating that he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was able also to do. In other words, Abraham

glorified God by his strong conviction that God could perform *what He had promised*, however difficult it might seem. He ascribed to God the power to fulfill His word.

4:22. Abraham’s belief in God’s promise to him resulted in his justification. The pronoun *it*, the subject of the verb “*was imputed*,” is a reference to faith (cf. 4:5, “his faith is counted for righteousness”).

As earlier noted, for Paul justification is by no means a matter of imputing some form of obedience to the law to believers. Justification by faith is exactly what its name says. The believer is justified by his faith because that faith—totally apart from works—is what is accounted “*to him for righteousness*.”

4:23-24. Genesis 15:6 concerns not only Abraham, but also those who would believe in the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. That is, the record about Abraham’s faith was intended to offer Scriptural support to the proclamation about Jesus.

Here again the subject word *it* most naturally refers to faith. Just as *faith was imputed to*

Abraham “as righteousness,” so *faith would be imputed* “as righteousness” *to those who would believe in the same God in whom Abraham believed.*

As Paul has just shown in vv 19-22, the faith by which Abraham was justified was *implicitly* a confidence in God’s resurrecting power. The God in whom he believed could overcome his own “dead” body as well as the “deadness of Sarah’s womb.” Paul of course preached the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:3-8) and he could say that “if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). So it is in every way probable that, since the cross, justifying faith has never occurred in any heart that thinks Jesus is still dead. Indeed His very offer of eternal life is inseparable from the promise of future resurrection (John 11:25-26).


However, on the other hand, all of the first disciples believed in Jesus for eternal life without realizing that He must die and rise again. This is quite plain from John 20:8-9 (see also John 2:22) and from the fact that the announcement of His resurrection by the women was received in unbelief by the disciples (Mark 16:9-13; Luke 24:11). But despite this lack of understanding on the part of the first disciples, when they believed Jesus’ word as the word of the One who sent Him (see John 5:24), they were in fact believing in *the One who would raise Jesus our Lord from the dead.* In short, faith in the God who set Jesus forth as a Mercy Seat (3:25) is faith in a God of resurrection, whether consciously realized or not.

4:25. The word translated **was delivered** refers to our Lord’s betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. He *was delivered for our offenses.* Our Lord died as a substitute for us so that those offenses might not remain as an impediment to God’s justifying grace to us. His death was necessitated by these offenses if He was to become a *Mercy Seat* (see discussion under 3:25) where man and God could meet in peace.

The words *raised for our justification* are the first direct reference to the resurrection of Jesus since 1:4. The risen life of Christ is a major concern of the material that follows in chaps. 5–8. Here, too, the language of Paul suggests strongly

that 4:25 is a “hinge” verse, concluding the unit begun at 3:21, but anticipating what will follow.

Just as our sins necessitated the death of Christ, so also *our justification* (*dikaiōsis*, “righteous living,” only here and in 5:18 in the NT) required His resurrection. This was not because there was anything incomplete or inadequate about the atoning death of our Lord. Instead, as a demonstration of God’s satisfaction with His Son’s atoning death, the resurrection provides a valid proof that God is righteous in deciding to “justify the person who has faith in Jesus” (3:26). A dead Savior would provide no such validation of God’s act when He grants justification to sinners who believe in Jesus.

Paul is now ready to move on to the implications that this truth has for Christian experience. 



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

International Teaching

By Ken Yates

One of the things that GES does is take the message of grace to other countries. In almost all cases, we find that pastors and seminary students in these countries have very limited exposure to Free Grace theology. Recently, my daughter and I were able to take part in this ministry in an African country.

AN INVITATION

Catherine and Jimmy are a couple from Kenya who run a school for children up to the 8th grade. Part of the curriculum includes Bible teaching. Through GES, they asked if I could come and do a conference for pastors in Kenya. In addition, they wanted my daughter Kathryn to do the same for the wives of the pastors.

Not surprisingly, we were informed that these pastors and wives did not have an understanding of Free Grace theology. They all believed that eternal salvation could be lost. As a result, we were asked to emphasize what the Bible says about receiving eternal life.

Catherine and Jimmy had been heavily influenced by a friend from the United States. Many years ago, Catherine had been the roommate with this friend as they worked together in an orphanage. Catherine, at that time, also rejected Free Grace theology. However, after five months with this roommate and her going over and over John 3:16, Catherine believed in the gospel of eternal life and for the first time knew she would be in the kingdom, regardless of what would happen in the future.

Catherine, of course, shared this great news with her husband Jimmy. Free Grace theology plays the central role in what they do at the school. Naturally, they wanted us to share it with

the pastors and wives who would come to our conferences.

FOUR CONFERENCES

Kathryn and I were able to do four conferences in February. One was for the wives, and two were for the pastors. Kathryn was also able to do a conference for Sunday School teachers. All of these conferences focused on the free offer of eternal life through faith in Christ alone. In accordance with the teachings of the NT, those who believe have the assurance that they have eternal life. They can never lose it. One of the conferences for the pastors was longer than the other. After discussing the nature of eternal life, we did a study in the Book of Hebrews.

There were a total of approximately 120 “students” at these conferences. It is safe to say that none of them had ever heard of the things that were taught.

REACTIONS

At first, the pastors and wives had a hard time comprehending what grace was all about. Part of the problem was that they had never studied the Scriptures in context. It was hard for them to see that we cannot simply quote a verse divorced from that context. However, as the conferences continued, many of them were able to see the permanent nature of eternal life and the freeness of the offer.

Two very encouraging reactions stand out for me. In Kenya, there are “overseers.” These are what we in the States would call denominational leaders. These men have responsibilities involving a number of churches. One of these men, at the conclusion of the conference he attended, said, “We have been teaching the wrong things in our churches. We have only been teaching condemnation to our people. We need to teach them grace.”

Another overseer voiced the same sentiments. He said that he wanted Kathryn and me to return to do more conferences. He said, “Our pastors need to hear this teaching. When you come back, I am going to invite all of our pastors to attend.”

After Kathryn and I left, there was an “after action review” of the conferences. Catherine and



Jimmy informed us that all in attendance said they want more of this teaching. These pastors and wives said they wanted to do it “as soon as possible.”

LESSONS LEARNED

There were a lot of lessons learned on this trip to Kenya.

First, we in the Free Grace movement have much to be thankful for. We have been exposed to such outstanding teaching through the years. We should give thanks for such blessings. It was hard to see pastors who had never been told that eternal life was eternal and was a free gift.

Second, we can be used by God in circumstances that we think are insignificant. Catherine’s roommate at that orphanage who taught her Free Grace not only impacted Catherine’s life. She impacted Jimmy’s and the kids that Catherine and Jimmy teach. The school has around 120 students who are hearing the message of grace in a country where such a message is rarely heard.

Third, God is at work even when we don’t recognize it. The Free Grace movement is small, and it is easy to get discouraged. We see Lordship and Arminian theology seemingly running rampant, and we begin to feel like Elijah—I am the only one proclaiming the message of grace.

But the message of grace is being proclaimed in places we are not aware. Catherine and Jimmy have an outstanding library of Free Grace books that pastors in the area can check out and read. This is all going on in the middle of Kenya. Until



I went on this trip, I had no idea that such a ministry existed!

Fourth, as Free Grace people, we work together and can encourage one another. On this trip it was amazing to see how others had contributed to what was done. Catherine’s friend from the US had proclaimed the message of grace and was used by God to get things started. There were Free Grace churches in the United States that supported all that we did. This included paying for the transportation and food for the pastors and their wives to attend. Others paid for the Free Grace literature that we were able to pass out to those who attended.

CONCLUSION

The message of grace is the Biblical message. As such, God wants it to go out. How exciting to know that God can and does use us to proclaim to people around the world that Jesus gives eternal life to those who simply believe in Him for it. It is a life they can never lose.

Thanks for all those involved in getting that message out! **GLE**



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.

A Wife's Career



By Marcia Hornok

**“Men and women together
were to reflect God’s image,
to rule over all created
things, thus subduing the
earth, and to reproduce.”**

Women must fight for their rights and free themselves from “old school patriarchy.” This protest mentality of the women’s liberation movement indoctrinates women to a mindset of independence. They are expected to seek self-fulfillment in a career, competing with men for success in the business world.

Being conformed to this cultural viewpoint contradicts the Biblical narrative for wives, which involves gentleness and willing submission. God’s plan is for a wife to help her husband in ways well-suited to him (Gen 2:18). Eve was created to help Adam in his work of tending and keeping the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). Sadly, they failed and got fired (expelled).

However, God had already established their job description in Gen 1:26-28. Men and women together were to reflect God’s image, to rule over all created things, thus subduing the earth, and to reproduce. After the Fall, God said husbands were to rule over wives (Gen 3:16). Although “sin had corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband,” wives should take 1 Cor 11:9 personally—God created them for their husbands.¹

The NT explains how God’s plan works. The husband is to rule or lead while loving his wife as Christ loved the Church, and the wife is to submit or obey, as the Church does to Christ, while respecting her husband. See 1 Cor 11:3-12; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:17-19; 1 Tim 2:8-15; and 1 Pet 3:1-7. The marriage principles in those verses make no exception for an unbelieving

spouse or a wife who has better skills than her husband or in a culture that pushes total gender equality.

HELPING HUBBY HIS WAY

Genesis 2:18 appoints the career for every wife—suitable husband-helper. *A wife must help her husband the way he determines is best for them.* Many wives need to “go to work” to adopt that mentality. It goes against everyone’s me-first nature and is extremely counter-cultural. But God’s desired resume for wives is Titus 2:3-5.

The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things: that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

Who among us would want to cause God’s Word to be dishonored and maligned? Bob Wilkin said, “The unbelieving world looks carelessly at Christian families, and especially wives. Fidelity in family responsibilities is vitally important.”² From 1 Tim 5:14, younger widows are to “marry, bear children, manage the house, and give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.” We may think our peers will reproach us for not working outside the home, but the opposite is true.

TITUS 2 STANDARDS

Several older women have “sensible-ized” me (the Greek word for *admonish* in Titus 2:4). It relates to having a sound mind (good judgment), being self-controlled, and balanced. Even after 51 years, I am still learning these seven paramount qualities and teaching them to other wives.

1. *To love their husbands.* My mother-in-law, Frieda, said the secret to her 63-year-long marriage was, “Don’t try to change him! Accept him as he is—a sinner like yourself.” Criticism and contempt, expressed in words and tone of voice, will kill a relationship. To keep growing in *phileo* love (fondness or affection), I try to purposely concentrate on Ken’s good qualities (Phil 4:8) and study how to please him (1 Cor 7:34).

2. *To love their children.* Why do mothers need to learn *phileo* for their children? Because, cute as they are, children can be exhausting and exasperating. As a breast-feeding counselor, I tell new mothers that success in nursing their babies requires self-sacrifice, which is not automatic, but can be cultivated. My older friend, Jeannette, helped me learn to train (not merely tolerate) my six children by teaching them to be respectful, obedient, and submissive to authority.

3. *To be discreet.* This word, related to “admonish” in v 4, speaks of a sound mind and self-control. It implies common sense. By application, being balanced and not over-indulging in useless pursuits.

4. *To be chaste.* Purity involves how we dress in public (1 Tim 2:9-10) as well as our thoughts and actions. Guarding our hearts begins with guarding our minds against fantasizing about other men, reading or watching impure media, and flirting, even with online contacts. Don’t indulge in secret sins.

5. *To be homemakers.* This rare Greek word relates to working/keeping/guarding the home or family. A wife’s efforts and choices largely determine the atmosphere of the household. “The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her own hands” (Prov 14:1 NASB). The Proverbs 31 woman developed expertise (virtue) that ministered to her family and to people in need. Many women need a creative

outlet besides homemaking. They wisely accept their husband’s counsel regarding their endeavors.

Both my mother and mother-in-law were stay-at-home moms, even though they had business skills and training. My mother left her career so she could make breakfast, pack lunches, and be home when her eight children were. My mother-in-law helped her husband as the office manager (in their home) for the ministry organization he founded. If a husband wants his wife to “help” him by working outside the home, she still needs to prioritize him and their children. Being a wise home manager is a wife’s primary (though not necessarily exclusive) ministry in God’s eyes.

6. *To be good.* Being useful, agreeable, kind. Proverbs 31:11-12 says “every day.” For some examples of goodness, 1 Tim 5:10 presents a widow’s *curriculum vitae*: she should have brought up children, shown hospitality to strangers, washed the saints’ feet, assisted those in distress, and devoted herself to every *good* work.” Those endeavors may not earn a pay check, but they store up treasure in heaven.

7. *To be obedient to their own husbands.* Ephesians 5:24 says “in everything.” Isn’t that old fashioned in this day when progressive thinking supposedly trumps tradition? Doesn’t it cause abusive husbands who bully their wives? A better question is, do godly women live by God’s standards or not? The word “to be obedient” is *hypotassō*, a military term for being arranged by rank—placing oneself under authority. It implies protection, not suppression, and cooperation, not competition. Sarah is the older woman who modeled this. She obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and God handled the consequences for her. That attitude is precious in God’s eyes (1 Peter 3:4-6).

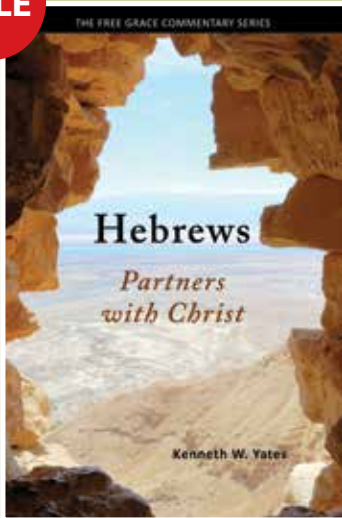
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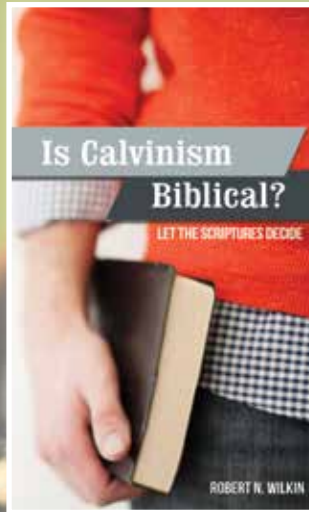


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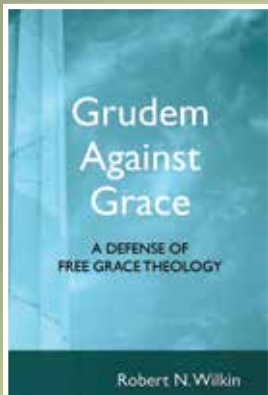


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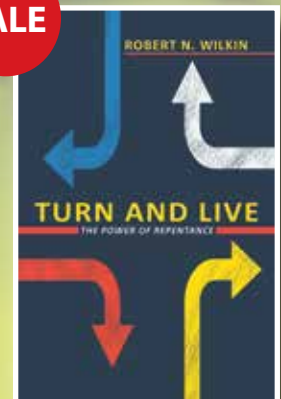
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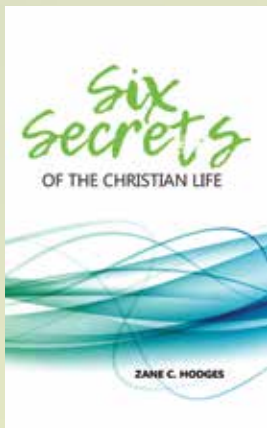
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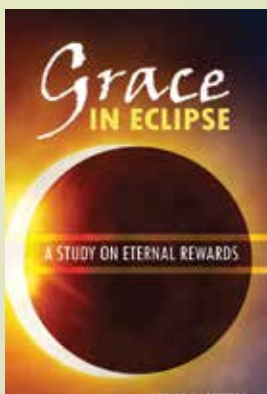


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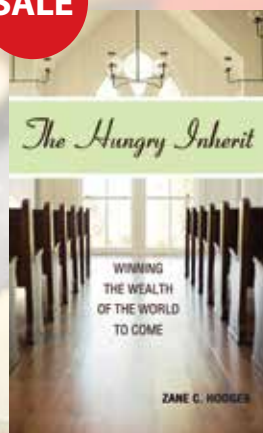


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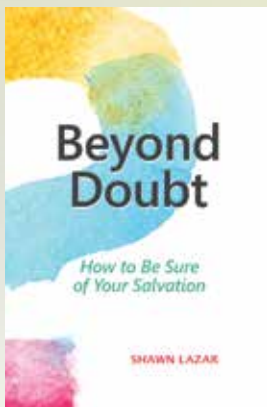


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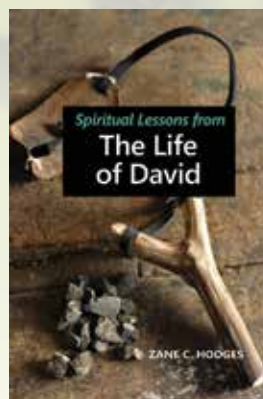


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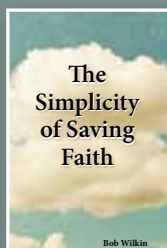
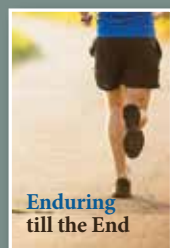


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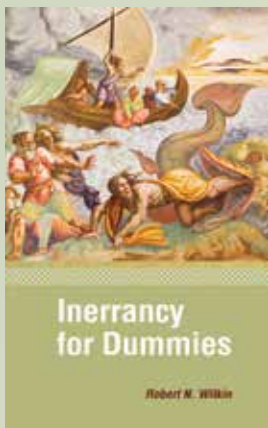
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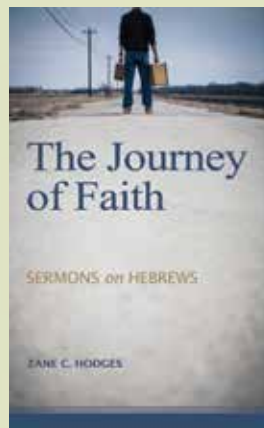


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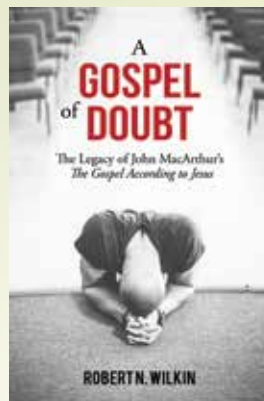


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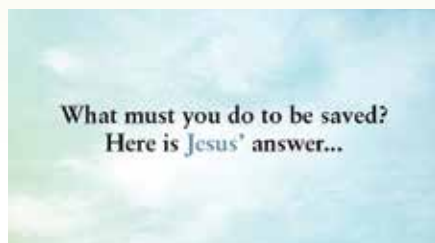
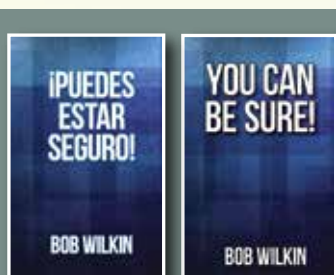


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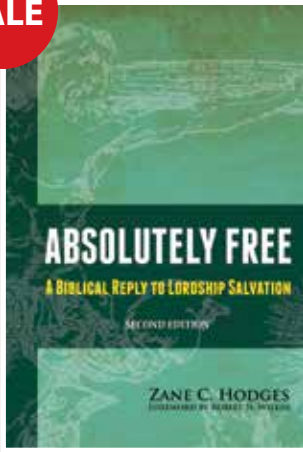
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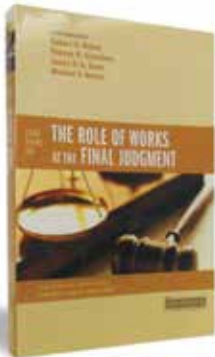
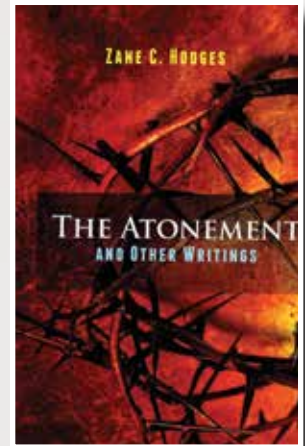
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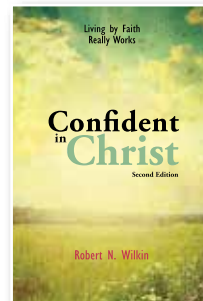
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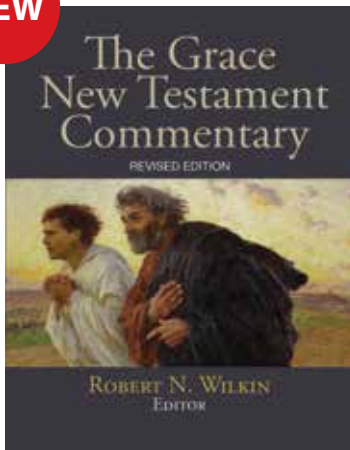
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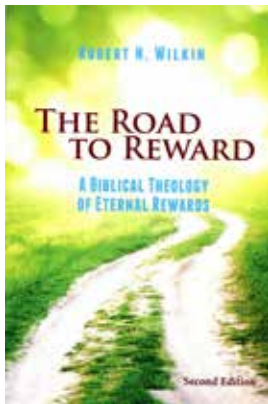
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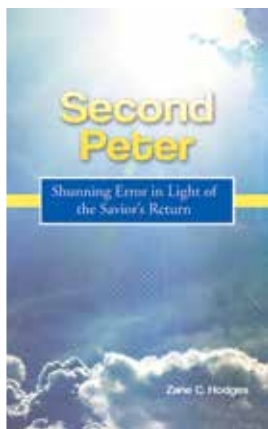
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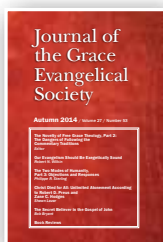
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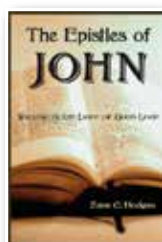
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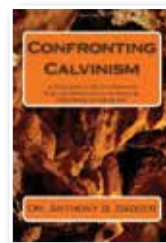


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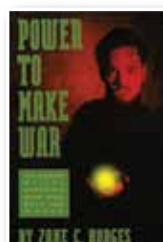


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Ken's being in charge and protecting me. Following his directions without challenging becomes easier with practice, and the perks are worth it.

CONCLUSION

A wife's God-appointed career has these seven responsibilities. Many wives with children at home take this job seriously while also pursuing a career in the working world. Most find they cannot do both well. Feminism tells a woman that working for a boss gives her freedom (liberation), but serving her husband and children makes her a slave. Wouldn't it be more fulfilling to work for the family you love than to serve a timeclock, let a boss control you, and come home with conflicted priorities? Perhaps employment can be postponed until the temporary child-raising years have ended.

Of course, husbands have God-appointed roles and requirements, too, and should not be

dictatorial, but this article addresses wives. We find joy in obeying God's Word. God will not evaluate us for our earning potential but for being good and faithful wives. Take pride in your career as your husband's willing helper, well suited to him. Ironically, your personal fulfillment will come from ministering to his needs. 



Marcia Hornok writes from Salt Lake City where her husband pastored Midvalley Bible Church for 39 years. Now retired, they enjoy their 12 grandchildren, 10 of whom live near them.

1. See Thomas L. Constable, planobiblechapel.org/soniclight, Bible study notes on Genesis 3:16.

2. Robert N. Wilkin, "The Epistle Of Paul the Apostle to TITUS," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, vol. 2 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1018.

The Mailbag

By You

I found your article "Becoming a Man of the Book" especially interesting. I don't seem to hear much about the believer's task of studying the Bible in a disciplined and even time-consuming manner that is structured and produces an intimate and authoritative grasp of our beliefs." ~Lowell, MI


"Bob Wilkin and Shawn Lazar, keep up the great work. God is using your ministry mightily." ~Media, PA

"As the song goes, 'Count your many blessings...' One of those blessings in my life is your ministry." ~Forest, VA

"Thank you for bringing a ray of sunshine and hope into our lives with each magazine—much needed in these times!" ~College Station, TX

"Keep up the good work of sharing and teaching others how to give the true gospel. We appreciate the t-shirts too. Should be a good way for us to witness." ~Lynchburg, VA

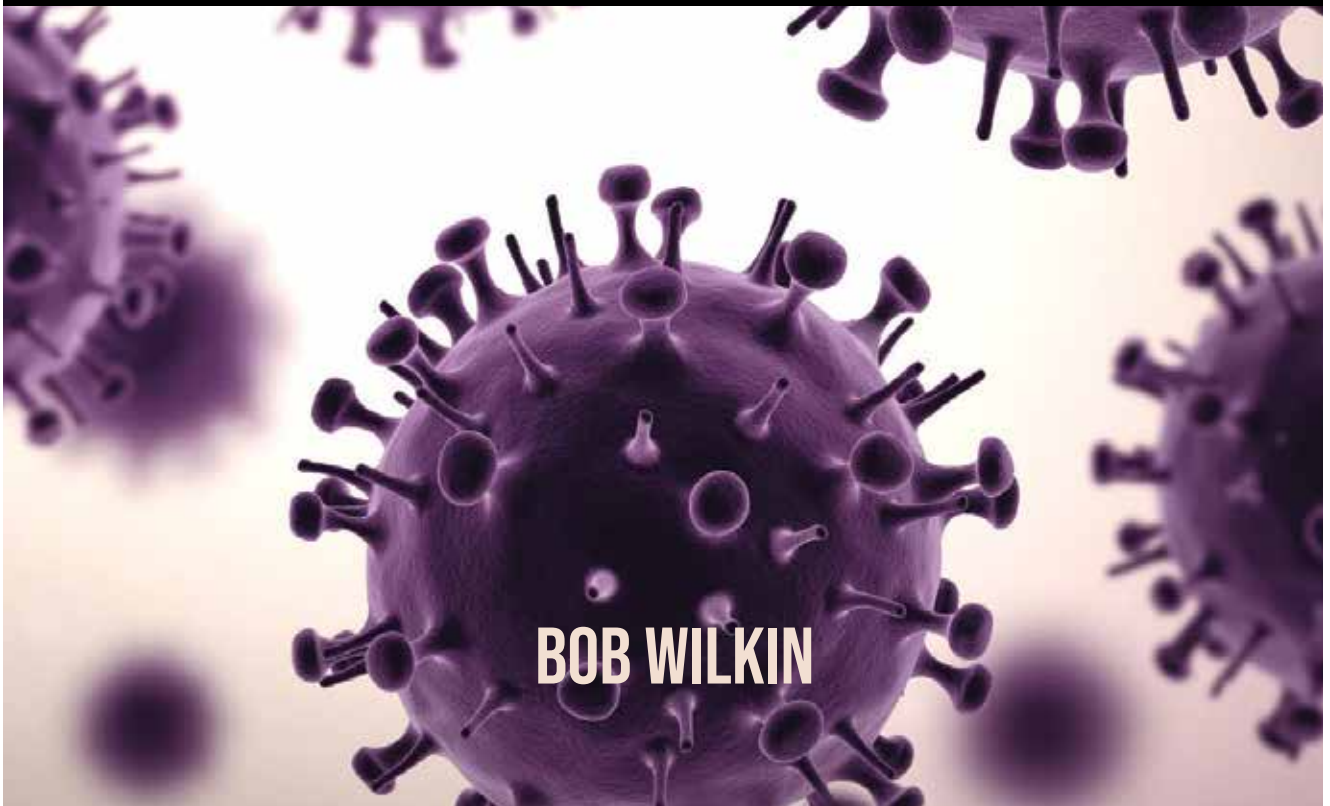
"Encouragement goes both ways. Thanks for all you do!" ~Blair, NE

"Thank you for all the time you guys put into making the Bible come alive for me! Y'all have offered so many resources which I have loved taking advantage of. Thanks for making the Bible so understandable and for helping people get the simplicity of belief in Jesus for everlasting life." ~Edwards, MS 

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The Christian and the Coronavirus

TWO RESPONSES



BOB WILKIN

123RF

RESPONSE #1—IF THE LORD WILLS (JAMES 4:13-17)

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin (Jas 4:13-17).

It has become popular in sports, business, and politics for people to guarantee that they will win and be successful. Such guarantees often energize the team, the company, and the voters. Guarantees like this sometimes help lead to a victory. But is this right? Does God want us to make bold guarantees that we cannot be certain of fulfilling? Doesn't such boasting fall under the category of something God hates, arrogance?

James was the first NT book written. It was probably written within one year of the Lord's resurrection, in AD 33 or 34. He speaks of a church that is still exclusively Jewish. He is writing to Jewish believers about the need to put their faith into practice.

The outline of the book is given in 1:19. The first section concerns being quick to hear. That covers 1:21 through the end of chapter 2.

The second section deals with our need to be slow to speak. That is chapter 3.

The final section covers James's exhortation to be slow to anger.

One major theme running through the book is that life is a vapor, exceedingly short, and that we need to make the most of this short life so that when Jesus returns, we will have maximum opportunity to serve Him in the life to come.

This section surely deals with the fleeting nature of our lives.

The verses before us fall in a section that covers 4:6 through 5:6. Wrath, James says, is cured by humility. In 4:13-17 we see that humility is very important in the Christian life, and it is directly related to our planning and predicting. True humility brings a reluctance to boast. Stated oppositely, boasting is an expression of hubris, not humility.

If I know that I don't control when my fleeting life ends, then I know that whatever I hope to do is always contingent in part on whether God lets me live that long.

THE BOAST (4:13)

These are Christians making this boast. They are speaking of going to a city where they plan to do business for one year. Here's what they are promising:

- They will make the trip successfully.
- They will do business in the city.
- They will complete their venture in one year.
- They will turn a profit in that time.

Frankly, nothing sounds wrong with that in light of the way we speak and think today. But four words are missing. Those four words are found a few verses later. There are many things that could go wrong and would mean that such a boast would not come true. They are making promises they can't possibly be sure of completing. James goes on to tell them why such boasting is wrong.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE BOAST (4:14)

They don't even know what will happen tomorrow, let alone for the next 365 days.

Life is very fleeting. It is like the vapor that comes up off a lake in the morning. It is here and gone.

We live “for a little time and then [we] vanish away.”

These Christians couldn’t be sure they’d even be alive for the whole next year. For one thing, the Rapture could occur. For another, they might die. Or they might become ill or injured.

- Colleges, schools K-12, restaurants, health clubs, all closing.
- Conferences cancelled or postponed.
- All sporting events postponed or cancelled.
- People losing half of their retirement savings.
- MCAT testing that people have planned for a year now cancelled.

Who would have foreseen any of those things a year ago or even 3 months ago?

Only God knows what the future holds. Only He knows when something like Covid-19 will strike and what the ramifications will be. Only He knows the day of our deaths.

That is why we shouldn’t be boasting. We are not in total control of our lives. Such boasting puts us in a godlike position, where we no longer depend on Him and His sovereign actions in our lives.

THE ALTERNATIVE TO BOASTING (4:15)

The alternative involves saying something different. We need to add four words: *If the Lord wills*. Then the rest of the statement is no longer a boast, but a plan subject to the sovereign intervention of God.

The will of God here is not His moral will. Nor is it some ambiguous desire God has that He conveys to us by impressions or the like. This is the secret sovereign will of God. The context makes this clear.

The sovereign will of God is everything that actually happens. But before it happens, we don’t know what will occur.

Many Christians go about trying to figure out what car God wants them to buy, what house, what job, what mate, etc. Some go so far as to try

to pray for the right clothes, the right foods, the right toothpaste, whatever.

God gives us principles in His Word to guide us on many choices. Some things are out of bounds. But on in bounds things, we have freedom which is only restricted by God’s sovereign intervention. That is what James means here by “If the Lord wills.”

Note that two things are dependent on the sovereign will of God: 1) us living and 2) us fulfilling our plan (doing this or that).

First, we might die. That would surely stop the fulfillment of our plan.

Second, we might live, but still not complete our plan due to circumstances beyond our control, such as the coronavirus.

BOASTING IS ARROGANT AND EVIL (4:16)

If we leave the Lord out of our plans, we are arrogant and even evil.

- Countries shouldn’t guarantee victory in wars.
- Companies shouldn’t guarantee a rosy future.
- 9/11 and Katrina and the coronavirus should remind us we don’t hold the future in our hands.

Even countries and companies should say, “If the Lord wills, we will do well.”

“If the Lord wills” should always be part of our thinking.

IT’S SIN TO FAIL TO DO WHAT GOD COMMANDS US TO DO (4:17)

Sin is not merely doing the wrong thing. Those sins we call sins of commission. Sin is also, as James points out here, failing to do what we know we should do. Those sins we call sins of omission. In context, of course, boasting is a sin of commission, and failing to say or at least imply “if the Lord wills” is a sin of omission. In his commentary on this verse Hodges writes,

Sin, therefore, can occur not merely as a wrong act, but also as a right act which remains undone. Accordingly, we dare not

omit from our conversation the recognition that not only our lives, but all of our activities, are as fragile as a wisp of smoke. We must acknowledge that God alone can enable us to do whatever we hope, or plan, to do (*The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing*, p. 102).

RESPONSE #2—I CAN HANDLE THIS WITH GOD’S HELP (PHILIPPIANS 4:13)

...I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4:11b-13).

Philippians 4:13 is a much misunderstood and misapplied verse. It does not mean that any Christian can do anything.

I can’t play in the NBA.

I can’t become an Olympic champion. A man can’t give birth to a baby.

Pete Rose can’t get into the Baseball Hall of Fame unless he is reinstated by the commissioner. That is beyond his control.

Here is what Phil 4:13 means. Notice the verses before it. It means:

- Christians can handle *prosperity* through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- Christians can handle *poverty* and adversity through the work of the Spirit in their lives.

The expression “all things” in Phil 4:13 refers to the good and the bad. Notice the emphasized words above.

Of course, both extremes are potentially trouble for Christians. But I can do all things, including handling the loss of much of our retirement savings, including not being able to buy toilet paper, including having trouble getting groceries, including fear of getting the coronavirus, including social unrest, including a major recession, etc. Whatever God allows to happen, we can handle it in the power of the Holy Spirit. How does the Holy Spirit enable us to handle both prosperity

and adversity? The answer is in mindset. See Rom 8:6; 12:1-2; 2 Cor 3:18.

CONCLUSION

We don’t know when social distancing for this virus will end. As I write, social distancing has been extended for another month, and the current restrictions might continue for many more months to come. We are not in control. You may have lost a significant portion of your emergency funds and your retirement savings. You may have been furloughed or lost your job altogether. You may be concerned about what our country will look like after this is over. But as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that God is in control. This virus has not taken Him by surprise. It is part of His sovereign will. We can be calm during this storm because the One who stills the storm is in the boat with us. We have a chance to shine as lights in the darkness. If people see in us both a healthy respect for the dangers of the virus and yet also boldness that we can do all things through Christ who strengthen us, then they will be encouraged in their faith, or drawn toward Christ if they are unbelievers. We may not anticipate the next big thing that comes our way. But, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be sure that 1) God is in control, and 2) we can handle whatever happens by the power of His Spirit within us. ■



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 / Live: The Power of Repentance.

Top 5 Truths to Instill in Your Children Before They Leave the House

By Summer Stevens

As a parent, I love the word “instill.” It means *to put in, drop by drop*. Values, principles and a Biblical worldview are truths that we have the privilege of *instilling* in the lives of our children. Every hour, every day, every month, we add drops of truth into the souls and minds of the precious little people God entrusted to us, with the goal that when they graduate and leave the house, we have infused them with the truth they need to love God and live a life of purpose. Here are my Top 5. If you have young children, I would encourage you to sit down with your spouse and determine your own Top 5.

YOU ARE VALUABLE

Like most parents, I want my children to be spared from many of the mistakes and hurts I experienced. When we instill a belief in our children that they are valuable, they will make life decisions based on that belief—what kinds of friends or relationships they keep and how well they take care of themselves physically and emotionally. Misunderstanding one’s value can lead to addictions, promiscuity, anxiety and depression. Alternately, being able to invest oneself fully into meaningful relationships and expressing deep needs in a healthy way all come from a firm grasp of one’s value. God created every person with value, because we are made in His image. Our job as parents is to instill every day those drops of truth that communicate, “You are valuable. You were born valuable. You are



valuable to God and you are valuable to me. Even if people don’t always treat you with value, that doesn’t change the fact that you are valuable.” This shows up in practical ways like caring for our children’s physical and emotional needs, celebrating their birthdays or personal successes in a way that makes them feel loved, and taking the time to listen to and engage in the things that are important to them. A healthy presentation of a child’s value also leads to opportunities to share the gospel. “You are so important to God that He wants to be with you forever! Here’s how...”

THE BIBLE IS THE TRUSTWORTHY WORD OF GOD

Every Christian parent that I polled when researching this topic mentioned the Bible. We all want our children to know and believe the Bible. But it’s more than that. My husband and I want our children to not only read and believe the Bible because it contains truth and God’s words and instructions to us, but because it is our best way to know the heart of God, His character, and His never-ending love for us. We want our kids to go to the Bible because they meet God in the pages and because His words to us give us



LIGHTSTOCK

spiritual nourishment and strength that we need every day, just like we need food and water. So how do you communicate a hunger for God's Word to your children, and not just the necessity of reading it? First, you model it. You tell them about it. You get in the habit of sharing what the Holy Spirit revealed to you through His Word. When you serve in your church or give sacrificially to a friend in need or forgive when it hurts because that's what the Bible says to do, you include your children in those conversations so they can see that God's Word affects how you live. Prioritize Scripture memory, perhaps your favorite verses, or those that clearly communicate the gospel, or verses that will help in times of disappointment, anxiety or temptation.

JESUS WAS PERFECT SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE

One of the reasons parenting is so difficult is because we have to train our children to "be good" (honest, hard working, responsible, kind) and yet we have to communicate our acceptance of them when they aren't good. When they fail, our job is to wrap them in love and forgiveness, and then tenderly lead them to Jesus and His beautiful redemption story. Sometimes, it's in the

middle of his sin that a child can truly see his need for Jesus. "The way you treated that girl on the bus, teasing and making fun of her...that's sin. That's why Jesus had to die, because we sin. Think about that for a minute. But that's the beauty of God's love for us. He forgives us wholly and completely." As parents, we have to create an environment where it's ok to fail. To fail big. We want our kids to fail big at home so they have the love and support of family to pick them up, dust them off and point them to Jesus. Don't miss these opportunities. When (not if) our children fail, we want parents to be the "safe place" where they come to confess, receive counsel and love, and as they transition to adults, they will come to see God as their safety and refuge during times of failure. As "Free Grace parents" we can assure our children of their salvation based on whether or not they believe in Jesus' promise of eternal life, and we can remind them that when failure in life comes, they don't have to doubt God's love for them or their eternal destiny.

LOVE OTHERS WELL, ESPECIALLY IN THE CHURCH

The Bible has revealed that in this age, God's primary instrument of movement is through the

church. Jesus says Christians will be identified by their love for one another (John 13:35), and the author of Hebrews commands that we “do not neglect meeting together” (10:25) so that we can encourage one another when persecution, doubt or hard times come. The church is a gift. Do you believe that? Do you teach your children this? One of the truths I desire to instill in my children is the commitment to love people, and especially those in the church. Of course, you have to attend church to truly love those in it. As American culture becomes increasingly post-Christian and hostile to Biblical morals, it is essential that our children feel a strong connection with their spiritual brothers and sisters. These relationships will give them a sense of belonging and affirm the faith in which they have been raised. The church is where we worship together, where we serve, where we learn, where we bear the burdens of others and where others bear our burdens in times of need. When it functions as God designed it, the church is beautiful. It isn’t perfect because we aren’t perfect, but as parents, we need to be 100% pro-church and model commitment and love for this God-ordained, supernatural entity.

WE HAVE A HOPE

It is so easy to get caught up in worldly pursuits—remodeling a house, planning for vacation, earning a degree. Most of us with older children are already starting to think about what vocation they will choose and what college they will attend. Sometimes I look around at my life and my daily desires, and they don’t look much different from my unbelieving neighbors. Oh, dear friends, this shouldn’t be! The one thing that separates us, right here and now, from the world is that we have a hope! Jesus is coming back, He is going to make all things new, and we have the promise of a glorious eternity. One of my favorite verses right now is Eph 3:20, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or imagine...” When I think about

heaven, that verse comes to mind. If I can even imagine the splendor or the joy or the laughter or the exhilaration or the contentment of heaven, God will do *exceedingly abundantly* more. Wow. We have the opportunity to instill this hope into our children. When my oldest son was five years old, we told him about the Rapture. For months, around the dinner table, he prayed that the Rapture would come soon. He drew pictures of Jesus in the clouds. He talked about it all the time. He was thrilled! Our hope should produce thrill! As parents, we need to talk about eternity, a lot! We talk about it because it provides comfort on the sad days when our children are facing heartache and loss; we talk about it on the good days because it’s a glimpse of the coming glory and what we have to look forward to; we talk about it when we work hard for Jesus because we know that there will be rewards in heaven. Today’s generation is saddled with anxiety and depression. Teen suicide is on the rise. Why? Because of a misplaced hope or no hope at all. This world, even the best it has to offer, does not offer eternal hope. Only Jesus does that. Let’s fill our kids up with the hope they need to fix their eyes on Him, the author and perfecter of our faith.

When Paul talks about the armor of God in Ephesians 6, the first piece of armor is the belt of truth. When our full-time parenting comes to an end, let’s be confident that we have instilled necessary truth into the hearts and souls of our children so they can have the belt of truth firmly buckled around them as they go into the world, to stand firm against the enemy and to confidently fight the battles God has prepared for them. ■



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God Is Logical

By Dix Winston

What is the most important verse in the Bible? Several years ago I heard a Jewish conservative radio personality being asked that question. Since then I have asked many Christians the same question. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world...” is the most often chosen verse. A distant second is, “You shall love the Lord your God...” (Matt 22:36-40). Another is 1 John 4:8, “God is love...” How would you answer it? (Before reading farther, pick what you think is the most important verse in the Bible.) Dennis Prager says it is Gen 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” He says it is the most important verse because if “Genesis 1:1 is not the case, then nothing that follows matters, and nothing that follows makes real sense.”¹ I agree.

Paul Johnson, prolific and profound author,² also agrees with him. In *The Quest for God: A Personal Pilgrimage*, he states the striking implications of a theistic versus atheist worldview.

The existence or non-existence of God is the most important question we humans are ever called to answer. If God does exist, and if in consequence we are called to another life when this one ends, a momentous set of consequences follows, which should affect every day, every moment almost, of our earthly existence. Our life then becomes a mere preparation for eternity and must be conducted throughout with our future in

view. If, on the other hand, God does not exist, another momentous set of consequences follows. This life then becomes the only one we have, we have no duties or obligations except to ourselves, and we need weigh no other considerations except our own interest and pleasures. There are no commands to follow except what society imposes upon us, and even these we may evade if we can get away with it. In a Godless world, there is no obvious basis for altruism of any kind, moral anarchy takes over and the rule of the self prevails.³

This “momentous set of consequences” has been around for centuries. The Bible speaks of the man who concludes in his heart “There is no God” (Ps 14:1). But over the past two decades a group known as the “New Atheists,” such as

Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, have brought it to the marketplace of ideas. And therefore, Atheism presents a major challenge for Christians.

In my apologetics seminar, I go out into the audience and ask questions. “Do you believe in God?” The answer is always “yes” (It is a seminar made up of Christians). But I will press the issue, “Why do you believe in God?” “Well the Bible tells me there is a God.” “Oh, so you believe in the Bible. Why?” “It is the Word of God,” they respond. “Really? How do you know it is

the Word of God?” “Well it says so.” “So how do you know it is true?” “God wrote it!” At this point you can see where this goes.

I have found Christians and non-Christians have one thing in common—neither knows *why* they believe *what* they believe. For most, their faith is firmly planted in mid-air!

Peter admonishes us to always be “ready to make a defense, to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3:15). Biblical hope is always evidential hope. True hope is reasonable, not wishful!

“Everyone assumes and lives as if there is meaning, value, and purpose in life. But if there is no God, there is no real basis for meaning in life, values in life, or purpose in life.”



My approach is first to listen. If someone tells me he is not interested in talking about spiritual matters, I politely say, “I get it; would you mind if I ask why?” Many will say, “I was not raised in a religious family and see no need of God in my life.” Again, I gently ask, “Do you believe in God?” If they say no, again politely I ask, “Would you mind telling me how you came to that conclusion?” (By the way, in case you have not figured it out yet, we are now talking about spiritual things.) Their answer is often founded in the evil and suffering in the world, and perhaps in their own life. My response is, “I get that. In fact, I think the problem of evil and suffering is the greatest argument against God’s existence. But I do think there are three insurmountable problems to atheism.” I then, very politely ask them if

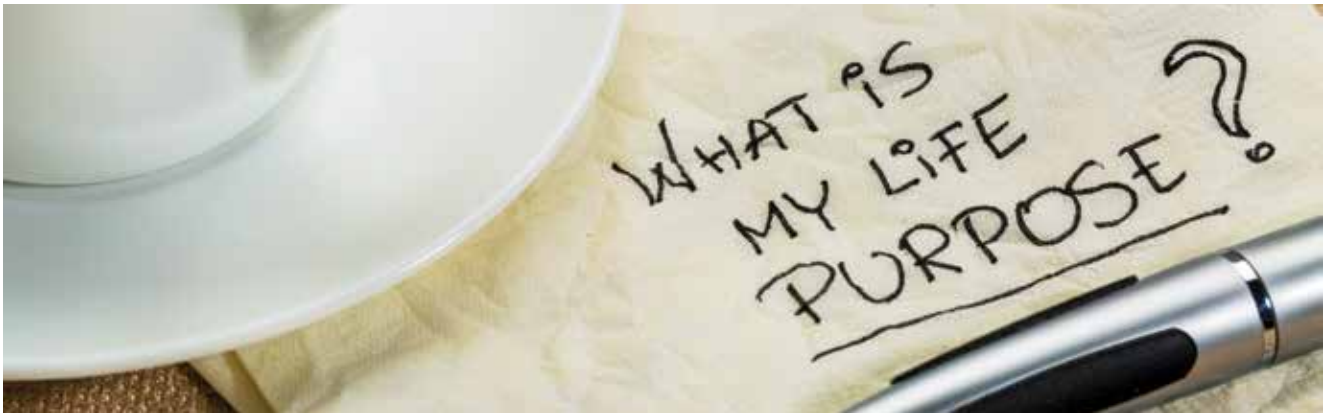
I might share those three things with them. The majority of the time they will let me do so.

At this point, I am not making the case for theism, but rather pointing out some serious problems with atheism. My goal is to politely point out the holes within the person’s worldview and the wholeness of the Biblical worldview.

There are three glaring problems with it: it is logically untenable, practically unlivable, and humanly intolerable.

LOGICALLY UNTENABLE

Let’s look at the logical problem first. Atheism claims there is no God, and therein is a problem. One cannot prove a negative. Imagine, if you will, a circle that contains all of the knowledge in the universe.⁴ If you were to shade in an area commensurate with your personal knowledge,



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how much of the circle would be shaded? Even the most educated individuals could scarcely shade in more than one percent. Therefore, is it not possible that the knowledge of God is outside your personally acquired knowledge? Of course it is! But that does not mean that God does not exist.

Let me illustrate the point. I live in Denver, Colorado. It gets cold here during the winter. It gets so cold that the water in the local lakes will freeze so hard that you can walk on them. Now let's say that you told a group of indigenous people in a tropical climate that water becomes so hard that you can walk on it. Try as you might, it would be impossible to describe ice to them since it was outside of their frame of reference or experience. But that does not negate that H₂O, a liquid where they live, can become a solid where I live.

In other words, one would have to be God (having all knowledge) to say that God does not exist. Just as we saw in the illustration with the indigenous people, it is possible that the knowledge of God is outside their frame of reference or life experience.

PRACTICALLY UNLIVABLE

But not only is atheism logically untenable, it is practically unlivable. Everyone assumes and lives as if there is meaning, value, and purpose in life. But if there is no God, there is no real basis for meaning in life, values in life, or purpose in life.

If there is no God, there is no basis for meaning in life. William Lane Craig straightforwardly states this.

If each individual person passes out of existence when he dies, then what ultimate meaning can be given to his life? Does it really matter whether he ever existed at all? It might be said that his life was important because it influenced others or affected the course of history. But this only shows

a relative significance to his life, not an ultimate significance...

Because the human race will eventually cease to exist, it makes no ultimate difference whether it ever did exist. Mankind is thus no more significant than a swarm of mosquitos or a barnyard of pigs, for their end is all the same. The blind cosmic process that coughed them

upon in the first place will eventually swallow them all again.⁵

Secondly, if there is no God, then there is no absolute basis for values or morality. As Dostoyevsky stated, "without God... all things are lawful."⁶ If there is no God, then all things are permitted. If there is no absolute or transcendent basis for morality, then there is no basis other than personal preference to prefer the morals of Mother Teresa to those of Adolph Hitler. To prefer Mother Teresa to Hitler, one must appeal to an absolute standard other than what is in vogue among men and women.

Finally, if there is no God, then life is purposeless. It is, in the words of Shakespeare, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying

**"In order to have
a real basis for
meaning, value, and
purpose there must
be a God."**

nothing.”⁷ No matter how much meaning you might wish to inject into life, “without God the universe is the result of a cosmic accident, a chance explosion. There is no reason for which it exists. As for man, he is a freak of nature—a blind product of matter plus time plus chance. Man is just a lump of slime that evolved into rationality. There is no more purpose for life for the human race than for a species of insect; for both are the result of the blind interaction of chance and necessity.”⁸

Now someone may say beauty, meaning, value, and purpose are in the eye of the beholder or mind of the thinker. They are self-created. But that is akin to whistling through a graveyard at night to ward off potential evil. In the end, there is no real, only an imaginative, basis for either. No. In order to have a real basis for meaning, value, and purpose, there must be a God.

Finally, and perhaps the most telling point is that everyone assumes there is meaning, value, and purpose in the universe. Everyone thinks that what he or she does has some degree of purpose, that his or her values are better than Adolph Hitler’s, and that his or her life has some degree of meaning. So while one can claim to be an atheist, one cannot live consistently with that claim.

HUMANLY INTOLERABLE

Finally, many people have never considered how intolerably inhumane atheism is. Wrongly they ascribe all the ills and evils in the world to religion or Christianity. How often have you heard the statement: religion has killed more people and started more wars than anything else?

Mostly this claim is leveled against religion in general. But, if a religion is named, it is Roman Catholicism and the Spanish Inquisition. When someone makes this claim, I will politely ask him, “Do you have a ballpark figure for how many died during the Spanish Inquisition?” Of course he never does.

Vox Day, in his book *The Irrational Atheist*, has researched it.⁹ From 1481-1834, 3,230 people were killed by the Inquisition, averaging nine a year. Now even one unjustified death is a terrible thing at the hands of a Christian theist. But Christian theists are no match for atheists.

During the Spanish Reign of Terror from 1936-1939, three years, 72,344 people were killed. This averages 24,114 deaths per year. But they are not even medalists in this bloodletting. The Nazis (pagan theist) between 1941-1945 killed 6,000,000, or 1,500,00 a year. They get the bronze medal. During the Holodomor (Ukrainian for “to kill by famine”), the Soviet Union (atheist) killed 3,500,00 from 1932-1933 or 1,750,00 people per year. They get the silver medal. In the Great Leap Forward, over a five-year period from 1958-1962, Communist China (atheist) killed 43,000,000 people. They are uncontested in this evil contest, winning the gold medal of infamy.

Clearly, if perpetrating evil and death upon humanity disqualifies an ideology, then atheism is debunked.

So while the tree of atheism might look attractive, it yields a deadly cruel fruit that is logically untenable, practically unlivable and humanly intolerable. ■



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1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BqWdu1BnBQ>

2. His book *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Nineties* is the most insightful analysis of how we

arrived at such a state of global dysfunction.

3. Paul Johnson, *The Quest for God: A Personal Pilgrimage* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1997), 1.

4. See Larry Moody and Ken Boa, *I'm Glad You Asked: In-Depth Answers to Difficult Questions about Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1982), 18.

5. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1984), 59.

6. Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* trans. Constance Garnett (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica, William Benton, 1984), 312.

7. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Folger Shakespeare Library (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1992), 179.

8. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 63.

9. Vox Day, *The Irrational Atheist* (Dallas, TX: BenBella, 2014), 219

James and the Resurrection

By Shawn Lazar

Christians around the world celebrated the day when Jesus rose from the dead. Truthfully, we do that every Sunday, but, by tradition and convention, it's especially celebrated once a year—Easter Sunday.

Why do I believe that Jesus really rose from the dead?

Admittedly, the resurrection is an extraordinary claim. Although there are many documented cases of people dying and coming back to life, it is usually within minutes of being pronounced clinically dead—it's never after *three days*.

As a rational person, how do I know that Jesus rose from the dead?

For one, I think about His half-brother, James.

By the way, did you know that Jesus had brothers and sisters? In fact, He had at least four brothers and two sisters:

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” (Mark 6:3).

I say Jesus had at least two sisters because *sisters* is plural. Then there was Joses, Judas, Simon, and finally, James.

If anyone has ever seen your bad side, it's your family. Those of us living through the current coronavirus quarantine know all about that, don't we? Your family sees it all—every flare up of anger, every act of kindness, moodiness, surliness, and deceit—and hopefully moments of compassion and love, too. There are no illusions when it comes to your family.

That would have been true of Jesus' family, too. James knew Jesus.

And he found it hard to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, none of His brothers believed His claim and they even tested and teased Him for His ministry:

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, “Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.” For even His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:1-5).

“Even His brothers did not believe in Him”—including James.

In fact, he (they) probably thought Jesus was out of His mind:

One time Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon he and his disciples couldn't even find time to eat. When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. “He's out of his mind,” they said (Mark 3:20-21 NLT).

James thought Jesus was *out of His mind*—but He didn't go as far as the religious leaders who said Jesus was possessed by the devil:

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul,” and, “By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons” (Mark 3:22).

James worried about Jesus. The family tried to intervene, and Jesus had to distance Himself from them:

Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.” But He answered them, saying, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother” (Mark 3:31-35).

Did James feel that sting of rebuke? Did he wonder that maybe...maybe Jesus really was the Messiah?

James probably followed Jesus' ministry from a distance. He heard the stories. And when, after three years of ministry, he heard that Jesus was

arrested, tried, and crucified, James must have mourned. No one wants to see his brother go to jail—especially not for being out of His mind—let alone be tortured or nailed to a cross.

We don't know if Jesus' brothers went to see Him hang on the cross. But His mother, Mary, was there:

But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (John 19:25).

When Jesus saw Mary, He told the young apostle John to take care of her as if she was his own mother:

When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household (John 19:26-27).

Then Jesus died.

Now, here's the question that skeptics ask—*did Jesus stay dead?*

Again, think of James.

If Jesus had stayed dead, here's what you would have expected from James—to be sad, a little ashamed of "crazy Jesus," but you would expect him to have remained an unbeliever. In fact, if Jesus had stayed dead, James would have had even more reason to stay an unbeliever.

But here's the amazing thing—James didn't stay an unbeliever.

Forty days after the tomb was emptied, we find Mary praying in the upper room with the rest of the disciples on the day of Pentecost. And Jesus' brothers are there, too.

These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers (Acts 1:14).

There he is, praying and waiting with the other believers for the Holy Spirit.

Later, James became the pastor of the Jerusalem church, a leader in the new Jesus movement (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal 2:9-12), and even an author of Scripture where he humbly described himself as "a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jas 1:1).

From brother to bondservant.

What a turnaround!

What explains it?

How do you go from being an unbeliever who thinks his brother is out of His mind, to being a leader in the movement proclaiming that your brother is Messiah?

The best explanation for what happened is the one Christians celebrate every Easter—that Jesus really, truly rose from the dead.

As Paul recounted, after appearing to the five hundred, Jesus appeared to His brother:


After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren

at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles (1 Cor 15:6-7).

That must be when James believed.

How do I know that Jesus really rose from the dead?

I know from the result of James's life. Only the resurrection best explains the change that occurred in him.

After witnessing the resurrection of his brother, James believed that Jesus was the Messiah. And by so believing, he received eternal life (John 11:25-26). 



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society.

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