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## THE RAPTURE IN MATTHEW 24? NINE PROOFS



**PLUS** ROMANS 7 / TIME FOR DEVOTIONS / TAKING ROMANS 8:28-30 BACK FROM CALVINISM /  
SAMSON'S WEAKNESS / CORONATION NAMES / "RIGHTEOUSNESS" IN ROMANS / AND MORE!

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FROM THE EDITOR

**P**aul said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). He could handle the tough times and the good times. So can every believer if we rely upon God to see us through.

Thanksgiving and Christmas will likely be a bit different this year. The coronavirus has been a tremendous strain on all of us. Millions of jobs have been lost. Many churches have not met in person for over half a year. Many Christian conferences and retreats have been canceled. Vacations have been postponed. Even important doctor’s visits have been put off.

On top of that, there has been rioting in the streets of many of our major cities. Social and political unrest has been very troubling.

None of this comes as a surprise to our Lord. He knew this was coming. We can handle these things in a way that brings glory to His name.

Let’s keep our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the reason for the season. He is the reason why we have everlasting life. He is the reason why we can do all things, because He strengthens us as we walk by faith in Him.

There is plenty of bad news out there on TV, the internet, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, magazines, books, and so on. May we not let that bad news spoil our thankfulness. We have much to be thankful for. ■




## Full of Thanks

Robert N. Wilkin, **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

A person is shown in mid-air, having just jumped off the edge of a dark, rocky cliff. The person is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and shorts. The background is a vast, blue sky filled with soft, white clouds. Several bright, golden rays of light emanate from behind the person, creating a dramatic, ethereal effect. The overall mood is one of freedom, hope, and transcendence.

# The Rapture in Matthew 24? **NINE PROOFS**

BY BOB WILKIN



*[Jesus said to them...] “Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:40-44).*

## INTRODUCTION

Somewhere around 2000, I became convinced that in Matt 24:40-44 the Lord is teaching the pre-trib Rapture. I was influenced by conversations with Zane Hodges. Around 2005, I then heard a message defending the pre-trib Rapture in the Olivet Discourse by Dr. John Hart. In 2007-2008, we published three articles by Hart in *JOTGES* supporting his view.

This article follows Hart’s ten points, but the comments are my own. I highly recommend readers carefully analyze Hart’s three articles, which are available at [faithalone.org](http://faithalone.org).

Because of space restrictions, I will merely hit the highlights. After all, Hart took sixty-five pages to develop his argument.

## NINE PROOFS OF THE PRE-TRIB RAPTURE IN MATTHEW 24

First, the Lord gives many signs for the event described in Matt 24:4-31. Thus, you can know when the event is happening. But the Rapture, while imminent, is a sign-less event. Hence, when the Lord says, “of that day and hour *no one knows...*” (Matt 24:36), He must be referring to the Rapture, not to the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation.

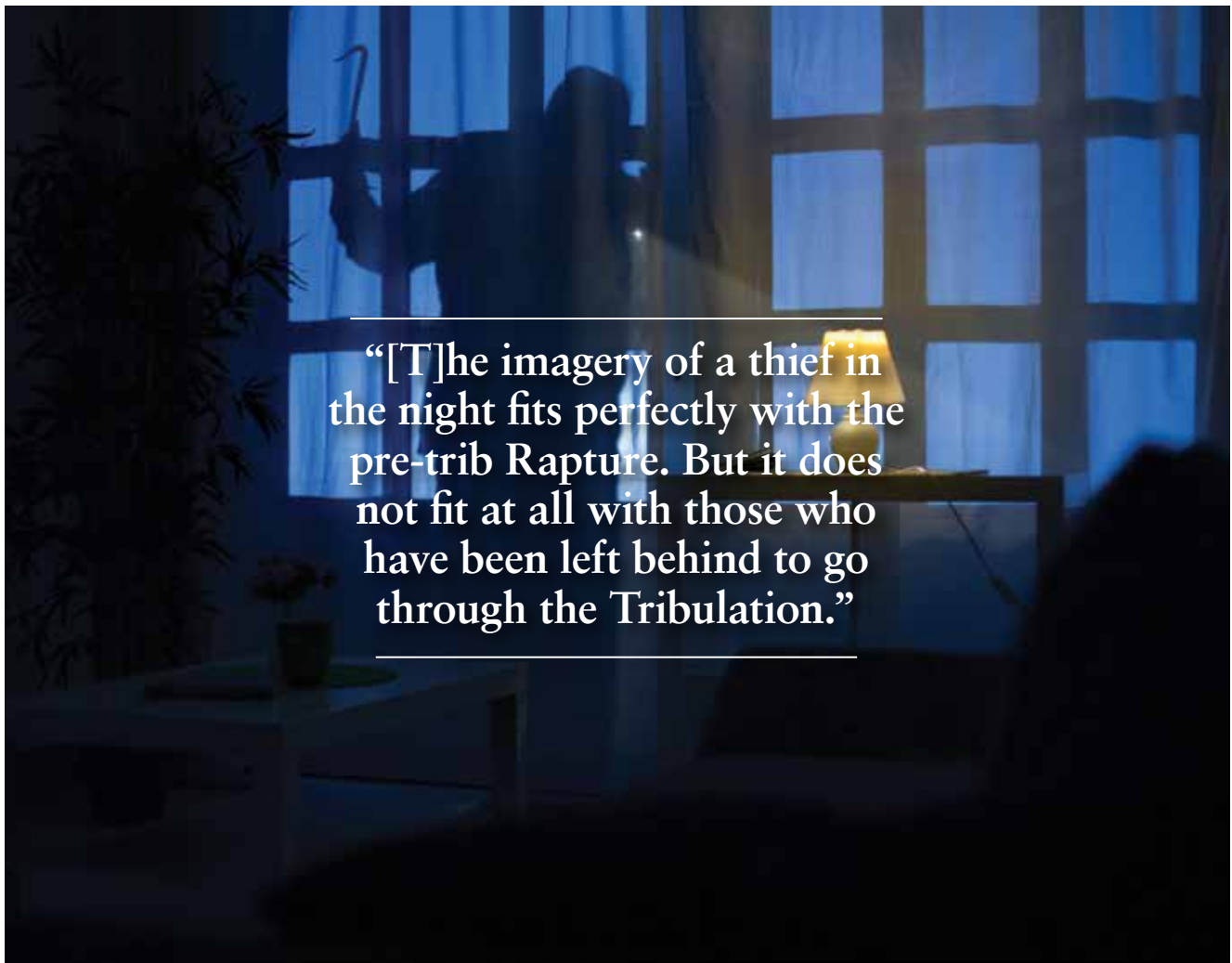
Second, the words “now concerning” (*peri de*) start v 36 and indicate that a new idea is being discussed.

Third, the words “that day and hour” (v 36) refer to the start of the day of the Lord, that is, the Rapture. And “that day and hour” is distinguished from references to “those days” (plural) in the prior section (i.e., Matt 24:19, 22, 29).

Fourth, the Lord’s reference to *the days of Noah* (Matt 24:37-39) fits perfectly with an imminent event whose time is unknown. But it does not fit with someone being in a period of seven years with identifiable signs, including a sign that the mid-point has been reached (i.e., the abomination of desolation). Things before the flood were business as usual in Noah’s day, and they will be business as usual at the time of the Rapture as well.

Fifth, a comparison between Matt 24:40-44 and Paul’s words in 1 Thess 5:1-11 shows that the pre-trib Rapture is in view in Matthew 24. Paul picks up the Lord’s *thief in the night* imagery and refers to the Day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:2). Paul indicates that people will be saying “peace and safety” (1 Thess 5:3) when the Day of the Lord starts, then “sudden destruction” will come upon them (1 Thess 5:3). *They* will not escape that time of wrath (1 Thess 5:3). But believers will be saved from the Tribulation wrath (1 Thess 5:9-10).

Sixth, Peter’s words in 1 Pet 3:20-21 and 2 Pet 3:10 show that the pre-trib Rapture was in view in Matthew 24. In 1 Pet 3:20-21, Peter talks about the time of Noah and his family being



“[T]he imagery of a thief in the night fits perfectly with the pre-trib Rapture. But it does not fit at all with those who have been left behind to go through the Tribulation.”

saved from the wrath of the flood via the ark. That salvation was not regeneration, but a type of the Rapture of the Church. In 2 Pet 3:10-12, Peter uses the Lord's image of the thief in the night to refer to the soon return of Christ, which will culminate in the destruction of the current heavens and the earth and the creation of a new heavens and earth.

Seventh, the reference to *one will be taken* naturally fits with the pre-trib Rapture. And those *left behind* (remember the Tim LaHaye books by that title?) naturally refer to unbelievers who are not delivered but must go through the Tribulation. Hart notes, “If the one ‘taken’ is taken away for judgment, it is peculiar that a word characterized by personal accompaniment is employed while the one ‘left’ to enter the kingdom is described with a word frequently used for

the forsaken” (*JOTGES*, Autumn 2008: 47). The language most naturally suggests that the ones taken refer to those taken in the Rapture.

Eighth, the imagery of a thief in the night fits perfectly with the pre-trib Rapture. But it does not fit at all with those who have been left behind to go through the Tribulation. Once the Man of Sin signs a covenant with Israel, anyone who reads the Bible can see that day one of 2,520 days has begun. When the two witnesses are killed, there will be 1,260 days before the Second Coming. Jesus' Second Coming will not be like a thief in the night for anyone who has read God's Word. Hart says, “There can be no forewarning if we are to honor the surprise element resident in the thief analogy in 24:43. A thief does not willingly signal his presence, but numerous telltale signs will precede Christ's Second Coming at the

climax of the tribulation” (*JOTGES*, Autumn 2008: 51).

Ninth, the exhortation *to watch* (*grēgoreō*) absolutely shows that the Pre-trib Rapture is in view in both Matthew 24 and 1 Thess 5:1-11. Hart writes, “If pre-tribulationists agree that 1 Thess 5 uses *grēgoreō* to instruct believers of the NT church to ‘stay alert’ for the coming pre-tribulational Rapture, then isn’t it logical that Jesus could have utilized the same word in the same way in the Olivet Discourse?” (*JOTGES*, Autumn 2008: 57).

## OBJECTIONS TO THIS VIEW

When John Hart presented these nine proofs at the Pre-trib Study Group Conference, I thought he would win over most of the audience. However, while all the attendees believed in the pre-Trib Rapture, very few were persuaded by John’s arguments. In fact, he was followed by someone presenting a paper on John 14:1-3 who specifically rejected the idea of the pre-trib Rapture in Matthew 24.

Far and away, the greatest objection to this view is that it doesn’t fit one’s tradition. Post-tribulationists cannot see a pre-trib Rapture anywhere. While pre-tribulationists certainly have no overwhelming reason why they can’t see the Rapture in Matthew 24, tradition is powerful. If nearly all classic dispensationalists reject the pre-trib Rapture being found in Matthew 24, it is hard (or Hart) to go against the tide.

Hart discusses several other objections in Part 3 of his *JOTGES* articles.

Some think that since Paul calls the Church a *mystery*, it means there was no reference to it before Acts 2. However, in Matthew 18, the Lord clearly referred to the Church. And nearly all classic dispensationalists believe that the Rapture of the church is in view in John 14:1-3. A

*mystery* is not something *previously undisclosed*, but something *previously unknown*. There is a big difference. While the Church could not be discerned from reading the Gospels alone (or some texts in the OT as well), it can be seen when those same texts are read in light of later revelation.

One of the biggest objections is from Luke 17:37, which follows the Lord’s discussion of a man and woman who would be taken. When Jesus was asked, “Where, Lord?” He said, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” The argument goes that since that is normally interpreted as a reference to the judgments of the Tribulation, not the Rapture, the parallel passage in Matt 24:40-44 must not be about the Rapture either.

Hart has an excellent alternative explanation: “Without excluding a possible allusion to judgment, a better suggestion is that the disciples meant, ‘Where are You to be revealed, Lord?’ This understanding of Luke 17:37 fits the parallel passage in Matt 24:28 where the proverbial saying applies exclusively to the Parousia (24:29-31)” (*JOTGES*, Autumn 2008: 63). Luke 17:37 is very close

in wording to Matt 24:28 (*aetoi*, eagles, is in both texts) and Luke 17:23. As a summary statement at the end of Luke’s presentation of the sermon, it makes sense that the question is not about vv 34-36, but about the Lord’s return.

Whatever Luke 17:37 means, it cannot and does not contradict what the Lord taught in Matt 24:36-44. The nine proofs given above overwhelm a possible objection based on what is itself a difficult verse to interpret.

## CONCLUSION

The evidence is strong (overwhelming?) that Matt 24:40-44 refers to the church’s pre-trib

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**“If pre-tribulationists agree that 1 Thess 5 uses *grēgoreō* to instruct believers of the NT church to ‘stay alert’ for the coming pre-tribulational Rapture, then isn’t it logical that Jesus could have utilized the same word in the same way in the Olivet Discourse?”**

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Rapture. Indeed, since there is no hint of the Tribulation in John 14:1-3, this is the only place in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus refers to the pre-trib Rapture.

Peter and Paul both use the imagery of the Day of the Lord and His coming as a thief in the night in reference to the pre-trib Rapture.

While I certainly do not *need* Matt 24:40-44 to tell me that the Rapture is true and imminent (I have that from other texts), I find it encouraging that the doctrine originates with the Lord Jesus. It would be surprising if the Lord taught about the Tribulation and yet did not say anything about the pre-trib Rapture.

Rapture truth has had a powerful impact on my life, from my early days when I came to faith in 1972 during the height of the Jesus people movement. Hal Lindsey's writings about the Rapture were very meaningful to me. When I later became a student at his alma mater, Dallas

Theological Seminary, my love and appreciation for the Rapture grew even more.

Like Hart, I urge readers to consider whether the pre-trib Rapture might be in Matthew 24. Meditating on this important passage should prove spiritually enriching. It has been for me. 



*Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 44 years, Sharon. His latest book is Faith Alone in One Hundred Verses.*

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# “Righteousness” in Romans

By Ken Yates

One of the most interesting things about studying the Book of Romans is how Paul uses the word *righteousness*. It is used over 35 times in the book. And that is counting just the noun, not the verb. Sometimes the word is translated *righteousness*, and other times it is translated *justification*. Most famously, it is used to describe what the person who believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life receives. We are declared righteous (or we might say we are justified) by God by faith (Rom 3:21-22; 4:3).

But many are not aware that Paul uses a couple of other different words that are translated in the same way. I would like to look at one of them. The word is a rare word. It only occurs twice in the NT. Both times it is found in the book of Romans. Specifically, it is found in Rom 4:25 and 5:18.

In Rom 4:25, both the NASB and the NKJV say that Jesus was raised for our *justification*. In 5:18, the NKJV says, “even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in ‘justification’ of life.” In this verse, the English once again translates this rare word by the word *justification*. The NASB does as well.

This raises some questions. Why did Paul use a different

word if he meant the same thing (righteousness/justification)? Should we think that this rare word has another meaning? If so, what does it mean?

In Rom 4:25, we most clearly see that Paul meant something else with this different word. Paul says that Jesus was “raised for our ‘justification.’” Most Evangelicals think Paul is saying that Jesus rose from the dead for our righteousness/justification in the sense that His resurrection proved that His death paid for all our sins.

Such an interpretation means that the rare word used here means the same thing as Paul’s usual word for righteousness/justification. When we believed in Jesus for eternal life, we were declared “righteous,” and Christ’s resurrection proves that we are declared “righteous” (or, we were justified).

But can I suggest another way of looking at this rare word?


I think Paul uses a different word because he means something different.

When Christ rose from the dead, that showed that He was alive. Because He is alive and the Holy Spirit lives within us, we can live righteously. Christ was raised for our *righteous living*.

This fits the context of Romans 5 perfectly. Romans 5–8 speak about walking by the Spirit and how to live righteously. Since Christ is not in the grave, not only are we *declared* righteous, but we can *live like it*. Paul’s normal word for *righteousness* is the result of Christ’s *death*, and the rare

word He uses for *righteousness* in 4:25 is the result of His *life*. When Paul uses a word for how the Christian should live, he uses a different word.

The other time Paul uses this rare word bears this out. In Rom 5:18, Paul says that the obedience of Christ to the Father (by dying on the cross) resulted in “justification of life.” Christ’s death made this possible. When the believer lives by the Spirit, he experiences life. He enjoys, grows, and reaps the life Christ has given him, the very life of God. He is living righteously.

When we look at the Book of Romans and see the Greek words for *righteousness/justification*, we need to understand that Paul is telling us two different things and thus uses two different words. Because of Christ’s death, when we believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life, we are *declared* righteous. But because He also rose from the dead, His death and resurrection give us the opportunity to *live* righteously or to experience a justification on a daily basis that is produced by the very life of God we possess. 



Ken Yates is GES’s international speaker. His latest book is *Hebrews: Partners with Christ*.

# Samson's Weakness (Judges 14:1-4)

By Mark Piland

## INTRODUCTION

**R**ob Lowe, the former teenage heartthrob who knows a thing or two about skeletons coming out of the closet, had this to say about the perils of being famous in America: “Anyone who’s lived their life to the fullest extent has a scandal buried somewhere. And anybody who doesn’t have a scandal I have no interest in meeting...You show me somebody who’s led a perfect life, I’ll show you a dullard.”

Rob Lowe would have loved meeting Samson.

Samson was no dullard. His life was far from perfect. And he didn’t bury his scandals at all. Everything he did, he did in the open.

In fact, Samson had enough skeletons to fill two closets and enough dirty linen to keep a laundromat going 24 hours a day. He should have been a godly man...but he wasn’t. He shouldn’t have been in Hebrews 11...but he was.

Samson was a he-man with a she-weakness. And his life illustrates a temptation that many Christians face today.

## LOOKIN’ FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

*Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, “I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife” (Judg 14:1-2).*

In the East, parents did, and often still do, negotiate the marriage alliances for their sons.

During that period, the Philistine invaders had settled in the towns, and the dealings between them and the Israelites was often of such a friendly and familiar nature that it resulted in marriage.

*Then his father and mother said to him, “Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” And Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she pleases me well” (Judg 14:3).*

*She pleases me well*—literally, “she is right in mine eyes.” Not by her beautiful countenance, or by her handsome figure, but *right* or *fit* for *his purpose*. And this throws light on the historian’s remark in reference to the resistance of his parents:

*But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines (Judg 14:4a).*

The Lord was about to destroy the Philistine power. And the means which He meant to use would not be the power of a large army (as was the case of the preceding Judges), but the miraculous prowess of the single champion of Israel.

In these circumstances, the provocation to hostilities could only spring out of a *private* quarrel, and Samson’s marriage to a Philistine girl was doubtless suggested by the secret influence of the Spirit as the best way of accomplishing the intended result.

## THE DANGER OF FALLING IN LOVE

When Samson desired to marry a woman in Timnah, what he really cared about was how



things looked *to himself*, not how they looked *to the Lord*.

“Love at first sight” is a powerful but dangerous thing. Why? Because it is entirely possible for us to fall in love with someone that we have no business falling in love with—which was exactly the case with Samson here.

Moreover, “love at first sight” may *feel* wonderful, but it doesn’t *last* in its initial form. We can be attracted more to the *feeling* of love itself than to the *person* whom we focus upon. And while we can *love* someone at first sight, we don’t really *know* him or her at first sight.

## IN LOVE WITH THE WRONG PERSON

It is possible to fall in love with someone who is actually very wrong for us. This is why Prov 4:23 says:

*Keep [literally, guard or protect] your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*

If we don’t guard our hearts, we can end up in trouble. So, “Above all else, guard your heart.”

If we find that we are already in love with the wrong person, the only thing to do *is to give up that person*, because that is right before God. After all, Jesus told us that following Him would require that we give up the things we love most (Mark 10:29-30).

We keep looking for the right person, the one who will make us “happy.” But consider this quote: “A happy marriage is not about finding the right person. It’s about being the right person in the relationship.”

Often we have a list of what we want in a spouse. But that list *could* have just one quality on it, namely, not how shapely or how sharp he or she is, but does he or she love Jesus Christ? After that, be the right person. That matters more.

## WANTING WHAT GOD HAS FORBIDDEN

*And Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she pleases me well” (Judg 14:3b).*

In demanding a Philistine wife, Samson showed a sinful disregard for his parents and for God’s will (cf. Deut 7:3-4). Bound by romantic feelings, there are many people who still “demand” of God a mate out of God’s will. But the command that forbade the Israelites to intermarry with the pagan nations around them *applies* to the Christian today—a Christian must not marry someone who is not a Christian:

*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (2 Cor 6:14).*

It isn’t because non-Christians are *not lovable*. Sometimes they are more lovable than believers.

Nor is it because they aren’t good enough or aren’t worthy of our love.

It is simply because in order *to live* the Christian life, Jesus Christ must be the most important thing in your life. And when a Christian and a non-Christian get together, you have two people who disagree on the most important things in life.

## MISSIONARY DATING?

By extension, a Christian really has no business even *dating* a non-Christian. Those who do run a serious risk of falling in love with someone they have no business falling in love with.

In fact, the whole *philosophy of dating* needs to be re-examined by Christians. Dating often teaches people more about how to break up and how to endure the pain of a broken heart than it does about building a lasting, enduring relationship.

Additionally, believers are advised to carefully discern if the Christian commitment of the person they are interested in dating is genuine. There have been many pretended conversions, calculated to merely entice a Christian to marriage.

## WHEN YOU’RE MARRIED TO AN UNBELIEVER

If someone goes against God’s plan and marries an unbeliever, or if one spouse becomes a Christian before the other one does, there are specific commands applying to those situations.

The Apostle Paul clearly wrote that this one must do all that is possible to *stay in the marriage*, and be the best spouse you can be (see 1 Cor 7:10-16).

## ALLOWING IS NOT THE SAME AS APPROVING

God used Samson’s marriage for His purposes. In accomplishing that purpose, God did not *make* a reluctant Samson pursue the Philistine woman for marriage. Rather, God *allowed* Samson to do what he wanted to do, though the act itself was sinful. God allowed it both for reasons in Samson’s life and for reasons on a larger scale. God did use Samson mightily, but God used him *despite* his sin, not *because* of it.

Today, someone might justify his desire to marry a non-Christian because he trusts some good will come out of it—such as his non-Christian partner eventually coming to Jesus. Things *could* work out that way. But don’t forget, even though God used Samson’s marriage to a Philistine woman, it all came at a great personal cost to him (ending in his enslavement and death!).

No matter how much good God can bring out of the bad things we do, He can always bring far more good out of our obedience. And we ourselves experience much less pain. ■



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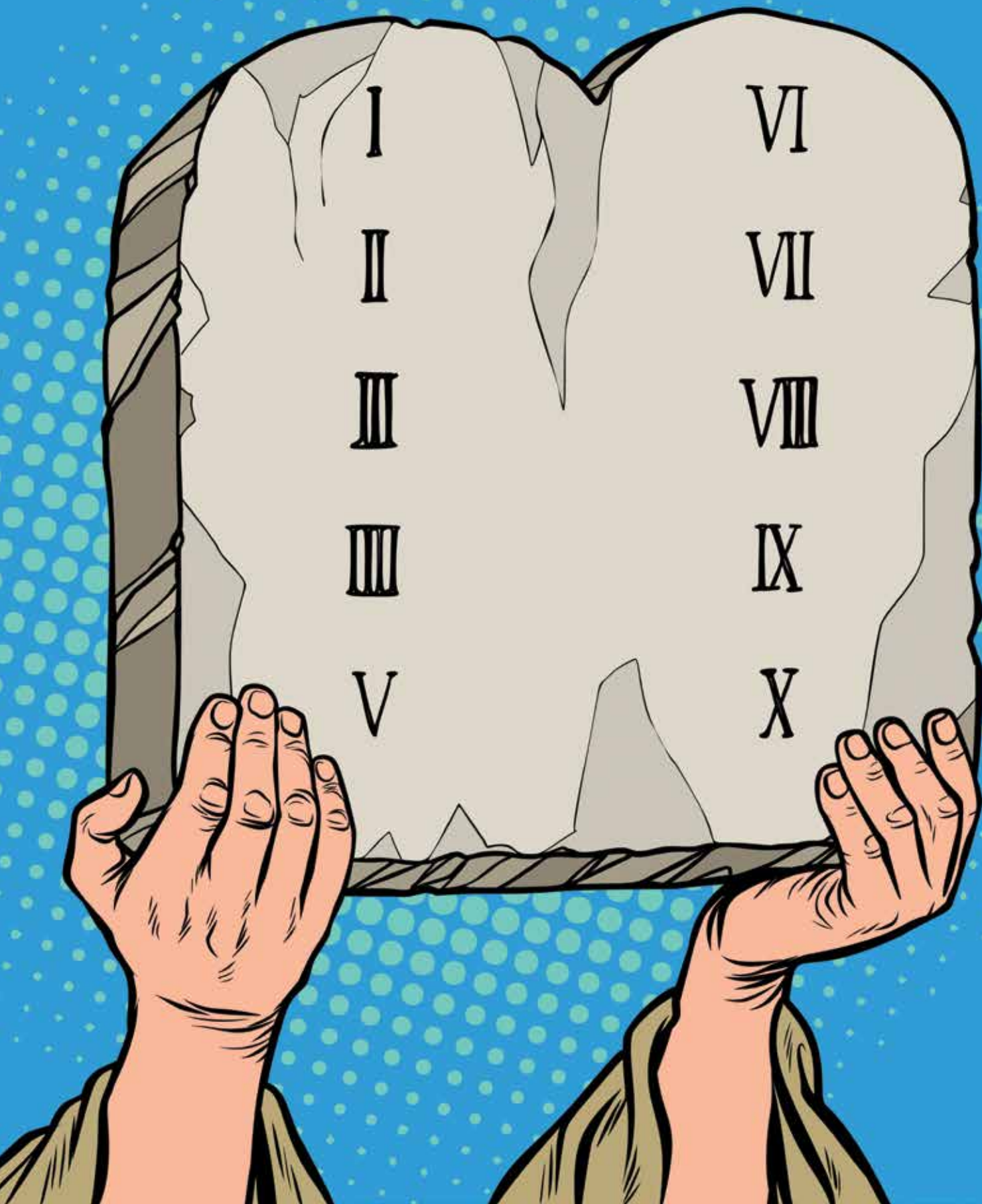
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# Romans 7

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

By Zane Hodges

### OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAW HAS ENDED (7:1-6)

**7:1.** Paul is now addressing those who know the law, in particular, Jewish believers and Gentiles who may have been connected with the synagogues before coming to faith in Christ.

The law only has authority over a person for as long as that person lives. This does not mean that it does not express any timeless principles of righteousness. But as a body of legislation, it was intended to regulate life *on earth* (e.g., Deut 25:4, quoted in 1 Cor 9:9). One of these, which Paul will now use as an example, is the law's regulation of marriage.

**7:2-3.** The example chosen by Paul is one intended to teach by analogy the freedom the Christian has from the Mosaic law. Under the Mosaic legislation (leaving the issue of divorce aside), a **married woman** was not allowed to contract a new marriage while her husband was alive. Only upon his death was another marriage permissible, since otherwise such a second marriage would have been an act of adultery.

**7:4.** The fundamental consideration here is that **through the body of Christ** believers have been **put to death to the law** (see 6:3-4 and the discussion there). *In Him* we have died and are free from the law. We can therefore be properly married to **Another Husband**, namely to **the One who was raised from the dead**.

The aim of the new marriage is that we **might bear fruit for God**. Paul is thinking of the “fruit producing holiness” to which he has just referred (see 6:22).

Our new marriage to our Risen Lord—that is, our spiritual union with Him—is the true source of holiness. When we “walk in newness of life” (6:4) we are realizing our union with Him and “giving birth” to deeds of holiness.

**7:5.** In describing this pre-conversion experience, Paul switches from the plural “you” (v 4) to the plural “we” (vv 5-6). What he will now set forth had been his experience as well as theirs.

The law played a role in their experience in their unregenerate days. This role was manifested in **the yearnings for sin that the law produced**.

In the light of Paul's subsequent statement about the law arousing lust (v 7), it is likely that he has in mind the way negative commands so easily awaken *yearnings for* forbidden sin.

In the unregenerate experience, Paul states, these yearnings **were at work in our body's members**. Paul is thus suggesting that the yearnings to which the law gave rise operated with effect in the physical members of their bodies so that the result was fruit consummated by death (**to bear fruit for death**).

Such, then, was their law-based experience while they *were in the flesh*. But this need not be their experience any longer.

7:6. Paul has already stated this death to the law (v 4) and he now refers to it again (**by dying to that by which we were held back**).

Thus, *believers* are now free to **serve in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of a written code**.

Paul uses the word *newness only here and in 6:4 in Romans*. (These are its only two NT occurrences.) The “newness of life” in which it is now possible to walk by virtue of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (6:4) is nothing less than a service rendered to God in *the newness of the Spirit*.

This new life lived by means of the Spirit is contrasted with *the oldness of a written code*.

Paul’s word for *serve* here is the word for slave service and picks up from 6:22 his concept of being “enslaved to God.” The service we render to God *in the newness of the Spirit* is an expression of our inner man’s complete adherence to God’s will. This truth will shortly play a major role in Paul’s teaching in this chapter (see especially 7:22-24).

## OUR EFFORTS TO LIVE UNDER THE LAW FAIL (7:7-25)

7:7. Paul now asks, **Is the law itself sin?**—that is, *Is the law* an instrument of sin and therefore fundamentally sinful? **Far from it!**

**In fact**, the law actually *exposes sin* so that it can be properly recognized as sin. There could be no better example of this function of the law than the case of **lust**. How could a person **have perceived** certain desires as sin if God had not pronounced them sin with the command, “**You shall not lust**”? But once the law had pointed out lust, human beings could recognize it for what it was—the expression of an evil urge.

7:8. This role of **the law** in exposing sin does not make the law sinful. On the contrary, sin takes advantage of the sinner **through the commandment** to produce what the law actually forbids. In the specific case of lust, **sin took advantage** of him to create in him **every kind of lust**.

The law made Paul aware of the evil dispositions his own heart was capable of harboring. In this way, *sin took advantage* of him by stimulating and drawing forth from him the sinful desires inherent in his sinful nature.

Therefore, insofar as sin lies unrecognized apart from the prohibition that **the law** announces, sin can be said to be dead. In other words, sin as such is not an issue until it takes on the character of sin. It is **dead** because no moral question is at stake in the human heart or mind. But *the law* raises a moral issue so that sin comes to life in an otherwise common, ordinary human attitude.

7:9. This verse marks an important turn in Paul’s discussion of the law, signaled by the emphatic **I** (*Egō*). Surprisingly, this is the first time in

Romans that this personal pronoun appears, and this fact helps it to stand out. Furthermore, it occurs eight times from 7:9 through 7:25. *Egō* is the pivotal word of this section.

Paul continues to trade on the death/life analogy here. He himself **was once alive without the law**, but that condition ended when the law aroused sin, and at that point he **died**.

There is no coherent way that an experience like this can be sensibly assigned to the days when Paul was a self-righteous Pharisee. It is one thing to say that the law makes men conscious of sin, but quite another to describe them as *alive without the law*. “Life,” for Paul, when spiritually considered, is sourced in Christ.

Paul is referring to a time in his Christian experience when he was *living in harmony with*

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**“The ‘newness of life’ in which it is now possible to walk by virtue of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (6:4) is nothing less than a service rendered to God in the newness of the Spirit.”**

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God, that is, he was walking by the Spirit (cf. 8:13). But then the law confronted him with one of its commands (**when the commandment came**) and aroused sin in him, resulting in the end of his harmonious experience of life (*I died*).

Paul's experience here has been replicated countless times in the experience of Christians, particularly those young in the faith. After their conversion they were living joyously. But suddenly they were confronted with a command that they either did not know or had forgotten. Their joy was suddenly replaced by a struggle with temptation, their struggle ended in defeat and sin, and their experience of walking with God was terminated. From being alive, they had passed over into an experience of death. They had died exactly as Paul later warns (8:13).

7:10-11. Of course, God *intended* that the commands of the law should have a positive, not a negative, effect. The words translated **the very commandment intended to produce life** show that the law's actual purpose was to keep man from the deeds that lead to death. But through sin's allurements, the commandment instead produced for Paul an experience of death. It did this by taking **advantage** of his sinful proclivities, **deceived** him about the value of the sinful act and, once he had committed it, sin had **killed** him. A vibrant experience with God (fellowship with Him) was terminated.

7:12-13. The experience of "dying" that Paul has just described in no way diminishes the sanctity of **the law**. It remains **holy and righteous and good**. These adjectives are probably not intended by Paul to represent distinct characteristics of the law, but rather are a rhetorical instrument for underlining the law's complete moral perfection.

But was the law a deadly instrument for Paul?

**Far from it!** The law served its basic purpose of making sin known (Rom 3:20). Even in the

spiritual "fall" Paul has described (vv 9-11), the law still exposed the character of sin as being just that—sin.

Indeed, sin's successful utilization of the law enhanced the condemnation under which the law had placed it. This happened because sin—to the end **that it might appear as sin—produced death for Paul through what was good**. In other words, a desire is proved to be sinful whenever it is confronted by God's **commandment** and refuses to die. The fact that this impulse had led to sin

and death in the very face of the commandment forbidding it was further evidence that it was truly sin. In other words, sin used a good thing (the law) to produce death, and it was allowed to do this in order that more than ever *it might appear* as the sinful thing it was.

In this way, the sinfulness of sin was enhanced. Obviously it was sin if the law said so, but the fact that sin acted in defiance of the divine command, producing death, made it **supremely sinful**. Sin becomes sinful "in the extreme" when it does its work in direct contravention of God's known will.

7:14. Furthermore, **the law** is not only good, it is **spiritual**. It is not mundane or fleshly but partakes of the spiritual nature of the God who gave it.

**The problem is that I myself am fleshly**. Paul found himself **under the dominion of sin**. Sin ruled him precisely because of his basic human nature.

As a *fleshly* person by nature, Paul describes himself as **sold under...sin**. Here Paul uses again the concept of man's enslavement to sin (6:16-21) and he uses the terminology of the slave market (*sold*) to make his point. It is doubtful that Paul has in mind any specific occasion on which this selling occurred. The word *sold* seems obviously rhetorical and portrays the complete helplessness

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**"The words translated *the very commandment intended to produce life* show that the law's actual purpose was to keep man from the deeds that lead to death. But through sin's allurements, the commandment instead produced for Paul an experience of death."**

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(apart from God's deliverance, Romans 8) of his servitude to sin.

**7:15.** The statement, **I don't know what I am accomplishing**, describes an ineffectual struggle that is consistent with his recognition of his bondage.

Specifically, **what I wish is not what I do, but what I hate is what I do**. Thus, from the very start of this memorable discussion (which goes down to v 25), the problem is focused on the issue of Paul's will. What he *wills* cannot be carried out.

The key word in Paul's statement is the Greek verb *thelō*, translated here by the word *wish*. In the present section (7:15-25), it occurs seven times. Paul is beginning to show here how Christian living is far more than a determined exercise of the will. Indeed, for true Christian living, the Christian's own personal wishes can never accomplish his goals. This is a truth that will emerge clearly by the end of chap. 7.

**7:16-17.** The futility of Paul's struggle with sin leads to a discerning self-analysis. If he is in fact doing what he does **not wish to do**, it follows from this that at the level of his innermost desires he is **agreeing with the law that it is good**. He means that when he violates the law in some particular way, his inward desire to do otherwise shows that he fully agrees that what the law commands on this point is good. He is thus aware that what he does is evil.

Given what Paul has just said about his inward—but ineffectual—desire to do what the law prescribes, his disobedience to the law must be ultimately assigned to **the sin that dwells in him**. It is *not* to be assigned to his inner self (**I myself**).

In making the statement that **it is no longer I myself who accomplishes it**, Paul picks up the same word (*katergazomai*) that he had used in v 15. His frustration that he cannot *accomplish* what he truly desires (i.e., obedience to God) is now resolved into the realization that his disobedience is in fact the *accomplishment* of sin. Thus, at the level of his “inward man” (see v 22), he remains “enslaved” to God's law (v 25). In the words we are looking at, Paul gives expression to the truth that the Christian's inner self *remains sinless* (see the discussion under v 25).

**7:18-19.** The sharp differentiation between sin and himself that Paul has just made (v 17) facilitates the recognition that he fundamentally lacks the ability to do any good thing. There is **no good thing that dwells in him**, that is, in the flesh. To be sure, his inward man has the capacity to **wish to do** that which is good. The capacity to *desire* this lies ready at hand for him. That is not the problem. But the ability to **accomplish what is good** is absent because of his flesh.

With the statements of these verses, Paul is beginning to show that “the body [his flesh] is dead because of sin” (8:10). His complete inability to *accomplish what is good* is because he dwells in a spiri-

tually dead body. Try as he may, he is unable to **discover how** to surmount the impediment of his body in order to obey God's law.

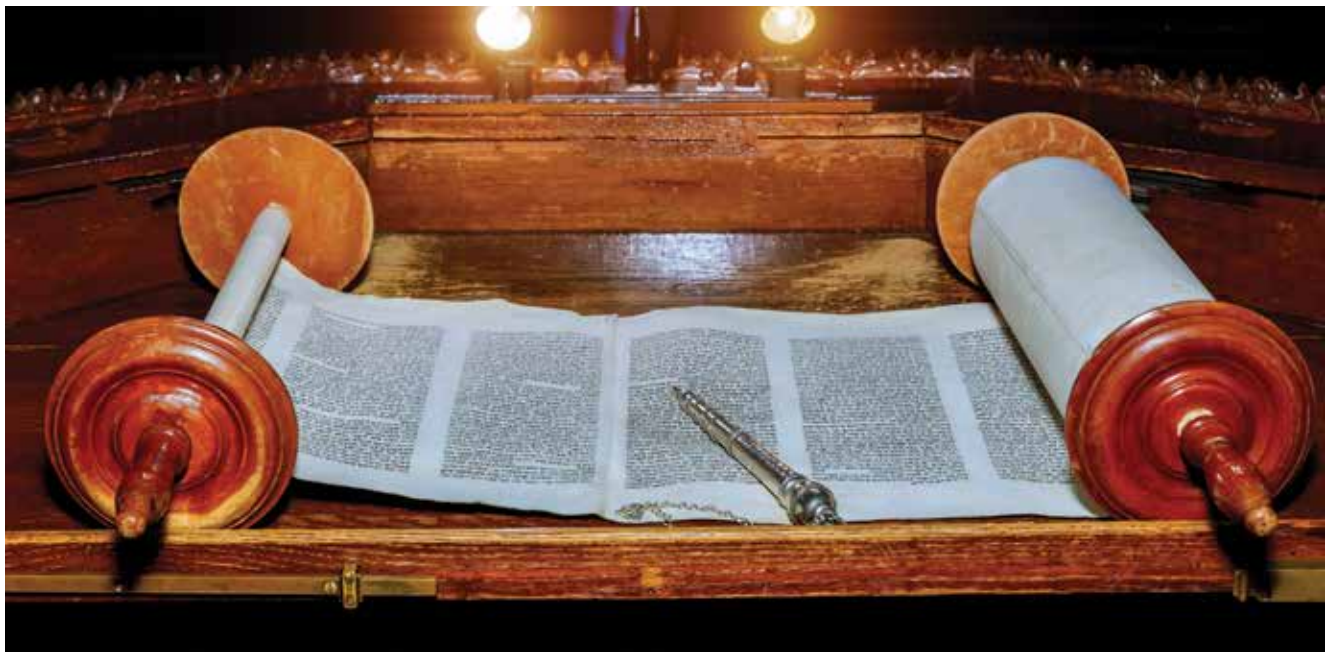
The expression **I do not discover** is of interest. The experience Paul is describing is more than one in which he futilely tries and fails. It is also an experience of seeking to find out (*discover*) how to do what God desires him to do (cf. v 24).

Paul's words therefore hint that the believer often does not find the secret of victorious

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**“Paul does not share the illusion that some modern Christians have that if we have been regenerated, then obedience to God's law is both simple and natural. They are forgetting a fact of which Paul was painfully conscious—that although the Spirit within us is life, the physical body remains dead to God's will.”**

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Christian living until he is urgently seeking to discover it.

**7:20.** Paul repeats the conclusion already expressed in v 17, emphasizing this point. In his innermost self, he is in harmony with God's will (see v 22). Thus, Paul affirms that when **I myself** act contrary to my deepest desire, **I myself** do not in fact really do the evil thing. Instead **the sin that dwells in me** does it.

Both in v 17 and here, the English phrase *I myself* is emphatic. The Greek pronoun in this passage is used consistently as a reference to Paul's deepest, truest self that *wants* to do good.

**7:21.** Paul's experience has allowed him to **discover** the fact **that when he wishes to do what is good, evil lies ready at hand** for him.

This discovery takes the form of a law (**this law**). It is an unbreakable principle that is invariably operative in his human experience. That is, *this law* pertains to him and impacts his personal experience as he struggles against sin.

Paul does not share the illusion that some modern Christians have that if we have been regenerated, then obedience to God's law is both simple and natural. They are forgetting a fact of which Paul was painfully conscious—that although the Spirit within us is life, the physical

body remains dead to God's will (see 8:10). They are forgetting the law Paul is referring to here.

**7:22-23.** Paul elaborates the concept of law. We note four "laws" here: (1) **the law of God**; (2) **another law in my body's members**; (3) **the law of my understanding**; and (4) **the law of sin which is in my body's members**.

Of course, by the term *law of God* Paul has in mind chiefly the Mosaic moral code. In that law his **inward man** can and does delight.

But *another law in his body's members* opposes the willingness of his *inward man* to conform to God's law. That law is actually **waging war with** the desire of his *inward man*. In the light of v 25 (see discussion there), Paul most likely means by this particular law the inclination of his sinful flesh which always desires the opposite of what the Spirit desires (see also Gal 5:16-17).

The desire of his inward man to obey God's law is expressed by the term *the law of my understanding*. Paul means by this that his *inward man understands* that the law is "holy" and "spiritual" (vv 12 and 14) and that its command is "holy and righteous and good" (v 12). Therefore, it is highly desirable.

But the *law in his body's members* (law #2) overcomes the desire of the *law of his understanding* (law #3). It does so by utilizing *the law*

of sin which is in his body's members (law #4) so that **by means of this law** (#4), he is taken captive.

This final law (*the law of sin*) can be understood as the “reign” of sin in his physical flesh (see 6:12) resulting in the subservience of his physical body to its dictates. Thus the impulses of his body, by means of its enslavement to *the law of sin*, are invariably aligned against his desire for obedience to God. These impulses thus become a *law in his body's members* (#3) that is driven by *the law of sin* (#4). The result is Paul's captivity to “the evil thing” that he does “not wish to do” (v 19).

**7:24-25.** Paul found the situation he described intolerable. The disconnect between his inward, holy desires and the impulses/actions of his physical body left him **wretched**. He cried out wondering who might be able to deliver him **from the body of this kind of death**. The solution became plain to him (v 25).

Paul means exactly what his words suggest here. The Christian person—who has Christ in Him—lives in a spiritually *dead* body, as is plainly stated in 8:10. The body is therefore like a dead albatross hanging around the spiritual “neck” of the regenerate inward man. It continually drags him down to defeat.

He states the answer at once. He is thankful that God can deliver **through Jesus Christ our Lord**. This triumphant assertion prepares the way for Paul's exposition of victorious Christian living that follows in the next chapter.

But before launching that discussion, he pauses to summarize the conclusions to be drawn from the experience described in 7:7-24.

Out of his frustrating experience of spiritual defeat, two truths emerge clearly. First, **I myself serve the law of God with my understanding** (inward man, see v 22). Second, **with the flesh I serve the law of sin**.

His inner servitude to God's law is counter-balanced by his servitude to the law of sin. The former servitude cannot find expression because of the latter servitude. The fruitless struggle described in the preceding verses (vv 15-23) has made this fact plain.

Paul's *understanding* is the *sphere* in which the law is served, while *the flesh* is the *instrument* with which he carries out sin's desires.

Finally, we must notice that in the first clause of this last statement, Paul says that the “real I” does not sin.

In this kind of treatment of the problem of sin, we meet a concept not unlike that found in 1 John 3:9 and 5:18. There the regenerate person is said not to sin nor to be able to sin. Due to the fact that God's “seed remains in” the regenerate person, “he cannot sin because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9). It is easy to see that this “impossibility” that John describes can be conveyed by Paul's metaphor about being “enslaved” to *the law of God*. Paul's “inward man” does not, and cannot, “do” the sin he hates (Rom 7:20-23). **GH**



Zane Hodges was a pastor, author, and professor of Greek at Dallas Theological Seminary. He was promoted to glory in 2008.



# Time for Devotions

By Allen Rea

**E**ven as a pastor, I've had my share of spiritual struggles.

I know of plenty of times when I've gotten out of the will of God, or when I allowed waves of discouragement to overtake me.

However, I've also noticed that every single spiritual defeat I've experienced can be traced back to my devotional life's weakness or even absence.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of strong and consistent devotionals in the life of a Christian.

What does a devotional life look like?

## A TIME IN THE WORD

The key is spending time with God in His Word.

We are called upon to continuously praise Him and to pray to Him (Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:17). However, we must also take time to spend in His Word and to memorize it (Ps 119:11). Lester Roloff, a man I quote often and have learned much from, said: "You will never have any more love for God than you have for the Word of God." This is a profoundly true statement.

## A TIME FOR DELIGHT

Devotions are not something to mark off your daily list of chores. They are a time of communion with God in which you delight. I've made that mistake many times. If you're not delighting in your time with God, then something is wrong.

Psalms 119:161 says "my heart stands in awe of Your word." And God is to be delighted in (Psalm 37:4). Therefore, our time in His Word should bring us great awe and delight.

Practically speaking, if devotional time is a chore, then you'll eventually stop having it. However, if devotional time is a delight, you'll keep going.

The main thing in your devotional life must be the Bible itself. While devotional books are good and useful tools, nothing should usurp the prominence of the Bible. Keep the Word of God as the center of your devotional life.

Dr. Curtis Hutson used to say that "the Bible Belt needs another belt with the Bible." I would gladly "amen" that!

## A TIME TO HEAR

Devotional time is not when you prepare a sermon or a Sunday school lesson. It is not the time to be poured out, but to be filled up.

You are not seeking to prepare something else, but seeking to hear from Someone who is preparing you. And you hear from God as you read the Bible.

There is no doubt about it—I've learned from experience that a weak devotional life makes for a weak Christian. I implore you to take the time to delight in devotional life!

## A TIME TO CHANGE

I am a Baptist by birth and by conviction, and Baptists used to be known as "people of the Book." I am afraid we are no longer worthy of that title.

We have changed and left our roots.

We need to change back and become people of the Book once again.

Tradition, reason, and experience are all to be placed under the scrutiny of Scripture. But we will be ill-equipped to do this apart from a delightful and disciplined devotional life. ■



*Allen Rea is pastor of Higgston Baptist Church in Ailey, GA.*



*A great time studying the Word in Miami!*

## **Board Meeting Plano, TX August 1**

**O**n Saturday morning we talked about GES's need to be vigilant *long term*. Will GES remain faithful twenty-five years from now? Fifty? We need to reproduce our ministry and our ministry leaders each generation. That is true of churches and it is true of ministries like GES as well.

We also discussed the possibility of GES undertaking a 5-year project to produce a commentary on the Old Testament. The Board was in favor of the idea and authorized Shawn and Bob to come up with a plan.

## **Miami Regional August 7-8**

We weren't sure if it was going to happen. But Pastor Cody Wallace, his wife Meg, the elders, and the wonderful volunteers at Southwest Community Church helped to make our Miami Regional a success under very difficult circumstances.



*Shawn and Cody.*

We practiced social distancing, wore masks, and refrained from hugging or shaking hands, but the people who came were still edified through the hearing of God's Word.

The subject was Biblical spiritual practices, and the speakers were Shawn, Cody, Al Valdes, Kent Young (who graciously came as a last-minute replacement for Ken Yates), and Keith Pesce. All the speakers were strong and did a great job presenting their topics, ranging from Bible study to the Lord's Supper. Audio from the conference will be available soon at [faithalone.org](http://faithalone.org).



## **Bayside Community Church Tampa, FL August 29-30**

This is the third time I (Ken) have spoken at Bayside. The church has two services, and I spoke on two women in the Book of Mark who are heroes. The first was the widow who gave her two mites. The second was the woman who anointed Jesus for burial at the home of





*The believers at Bayside.*



*Dinner with the Board.*

Simon the Leper. The messages were well received, and I had a wonderful time. Thanks to Don Rice for all the logistical help for my trip. Also, thanks go out to Bob and Karen Carter and Susan Service for providing great meals and even better company. I really enjoyed the conversations about the military! I've included a picture of the first service. Many of the folks are watching the services online, but the church is praying that the situation with the virus will improve and all the people can come in person soon.

## **Victor Street Bible Chapel Dallas, TX August 9**

In Mark 4 the Lord Jesus presented three parables, all dealing with seeds. The chapter ends with Him stilling a storm. The disciples did not understand the parables without the Lord's explanations, which He gave in private. Nor did they understand it when He stopped a deadly storm. The chapter ends with the disciples asking one another: "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (Mark 4:41). Born-again people need to learn more about God's Word and about *the Word* (John 1:1). The Holy Spirit will open our understanding of the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ as we diligently seek Him.

In the Lord's Supper we overviewed the ninth minor prophet, Zephaniah.

## **GES Overseas Ministry**

Kathryn and I (Ken) are continuing a study through Zoom on the Gospel of John. The study includes people

from various countries and meets each Saturday. It started out with some people in Spain who are having a difficult time finding Free Grace teaching. It has now spread to other places. We have around 15 each week. We are currently in John 10. Kathryn puts a study guide together for each week along with related articles from the GES website. We look forward to the study each week, and it seems to be going well.

I am continuing my study in the Book of Hebrews for the staff at a Bible college in Zambia through Zoom each Tuesday. This is a school that Kathryn and I have taught at in person but is currently closed because of the coronavirus.

## **COVID and the National Conference**

Many of you have called to ask what precautions we will be taking at the National Conference.

We will be following the guidelines set down by Dallas County, where Coppell Bible Fellowship is located. Unless the situation changes, we will be taking the following precautions: 1) masks will be required for all except when you are eating or drinking (GES will provide masks for those needing them)—and except for speakers while they are giving a message, 2) hand sanitizer will be available, and we encourage regular use, 3) 6-foot social distancing will be enforced, except for members of the same family, 4) there will be no handshakes or fist bumps or even elbow tapping, and 5) anyone with a temperature or flu-like symptoms will not be permitted to attend sessions. We followed similar guidelines for the Miami conference, where everyone stayed safe.

# The Mailbag

By You

I love *Grace in Focus* and *Partners in Grace*. I am amazed at how the Lord is using you around the world. It really is an open door set before us. I love you all.” ~Bynum, TX.

“I get very excited when I think of all that GES is doing. The Lord can accomplish much with little. Thank you for your labor for the Lord. It is so needed!” ~Oswego, IL.

“Your website and books have taken me back 20 years when I was saved by simple faith.” ~email.

“Just wanna let Shawn know I think he’s done some great videos on YouTube. You just do a great job. Point to ponder: why would God give me salvation when I didn’t deserve it, then take it away, when I don’t deserve it? God bless y’all in Jesus’ name!” ~DeKalb, MS.

“Thank you for your wonderful work getting the free grace message out.” ~Novato, CA.

“Blessings on the continuing of the grace message through GES, especially in these stressful times!” ~Fort Worth, TX.

“Thank you for your faithfulness! I enjoy *Grace in Focus* very much. This will be a recurring monthly gift.” ~Red Bank, TN.

“I watched ten of your videos [on YouTube] and I love your message that we are eternally secure and saved by believing on Jesus.” ~email.


“If I believe in faith alone through grace alone, who can I turn to? I am unable to attend church as I am bedridden. Any help you could give me would be so much appreciated. I was given a diagnosis by an oncologist of having a form of



leukemia. I feel like my time is limited. Please pray for me.” ~Twin Falls, ID.

“I was saved by faith almost 20 years ago, but was immediately introduced to a works-based gospel. Over the last 20 years, I have been drowning in doubt, despair, and depression. I have recently read free grace and realize how wrong that works teaching is. I am slowly coming out of this bondage but need help.” ~email.

“Thank you for the excellent teaching you bring through your blog and radio programs.” ~MN.

“I really appreciate your ministry and your magazine. This issue [Sept/Oct 2020] was especially helpful. The articles on faith alone, total depravity, and Lordship Salvation all deal with questions that seem to come up often. Thank you for keeping your readers informed.” ~Santa Rosa, CA. 

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Send your letters to [ges@faithalone.org](mailto:ges@faithalone.org) or to GES, PO Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202.



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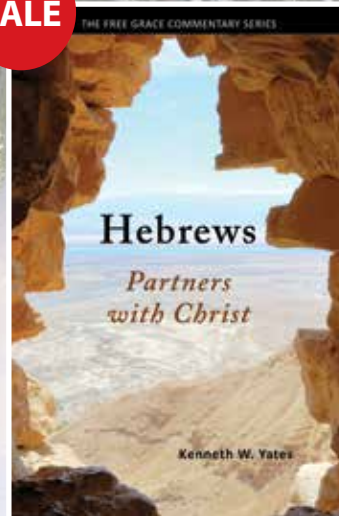
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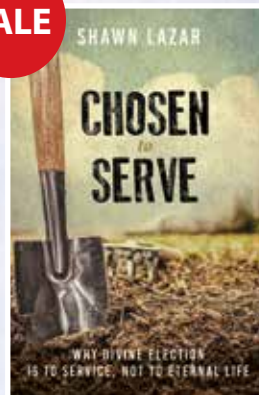
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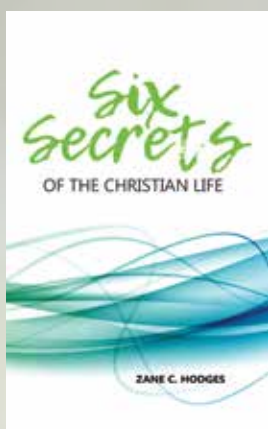
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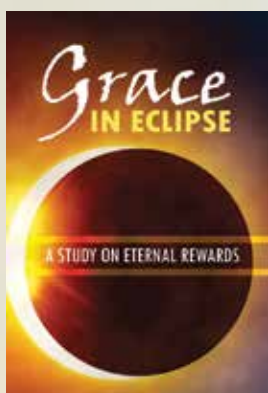


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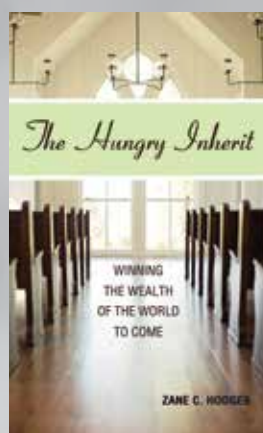


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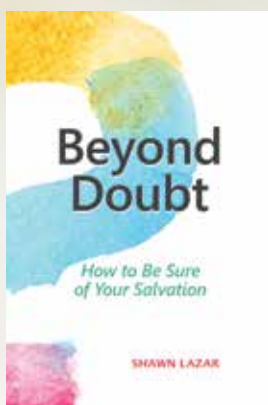


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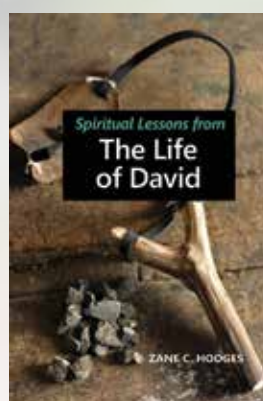


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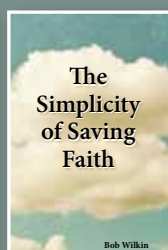
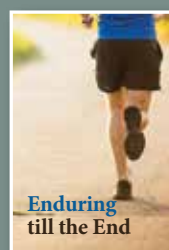


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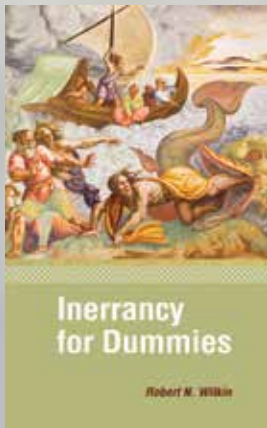


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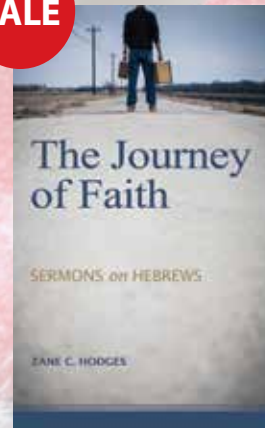
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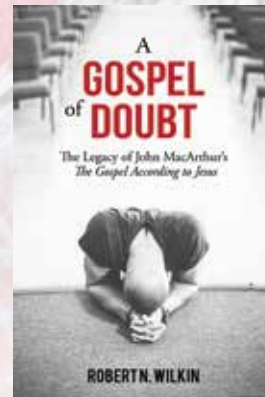


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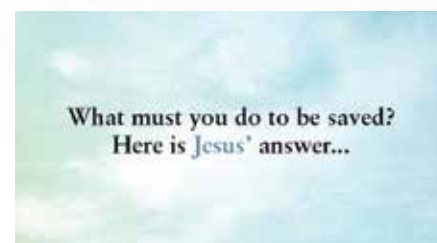
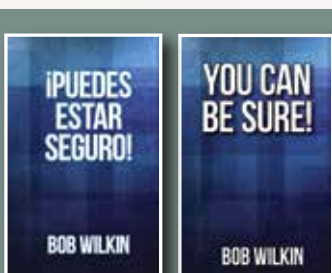


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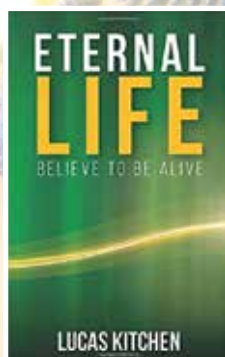


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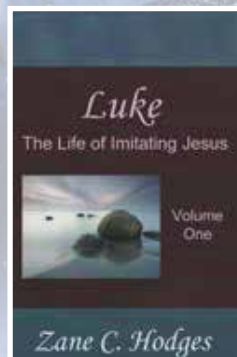


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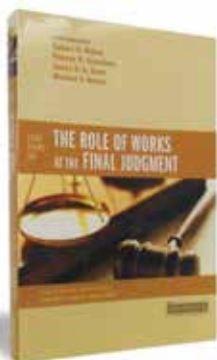


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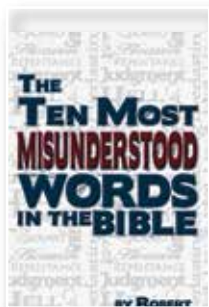


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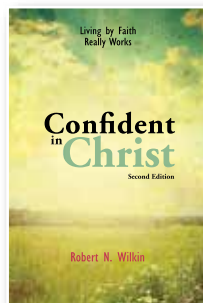


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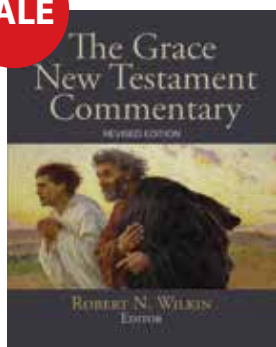
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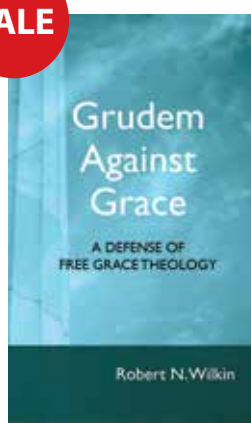
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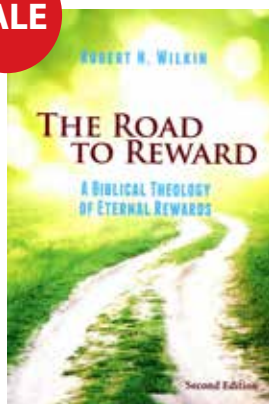
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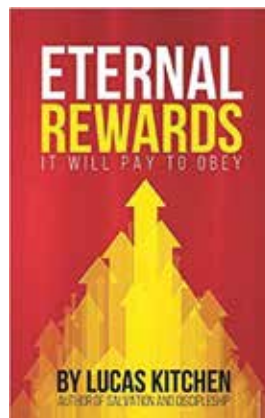
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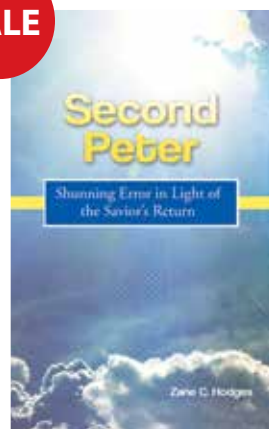
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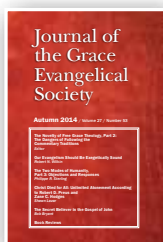
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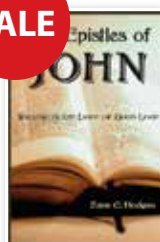


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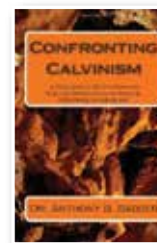


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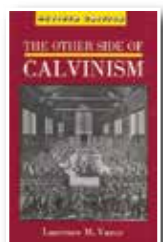


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# Taking Romans 8:28-30 Back from Calvinism

By Daniel Weierbach

Calvinists believe that Rom 8:28-30 supports the doctrine of election and predestination. This would mean that God determines all who go to heaven before they are even born. But is that the most accurate interpretation of this passage? Does this passage have anything to do with the receiving of eternal life? It does not.

## WHAT DOES “ALL THINGS” MEAN?

In these verses, Paul says that “all things” work together for good (v 28). What does he mean by that? Do our sinful desires work together for good? Does everything in a Christian’s life work together for good?

Paul has just finished comparing people with creation in vv 19-23. All of creation groans and is going through birth pangs (v 22). Creation is waiting for deliverance. In v 17, Paul says that Christians can be joint-heirs with Christ if they suffer with Him. Those Christians will be rewarded with an inheritance in the kingdom, but this inheritance is not the result of sinful actions. On the contrary, trials, sufferings, and striving against the flesh are birth pangs for the believer. So the suffering believer also waits for deliverance.



Zane Hodges, in his commentary *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, takes a view very similar to mine. He says it better than I do, so a quote would be appropriate:

From Paul’s perspective, as we suffer, our groanings are part of the larger travail of “the whole creation” which “groans together and suffers labor pains together right up until now” (v 22). But this groaning and this travail of the whole creation are in symphony with our own, since not only does the creation do it, “but also we who have the first fruits of the Spirit” do it too (v 23). The creation is waiting as we are for the “birth” of the new age which will bring freedom from corruption both to us and to the natural world (v 21). This freedom from sin and death, of course, is the ultimate good. In this experience, *all things (panta) work together with* our own experience toward the same splendid goal, the age to come. Both creation’s groanings, and ours, are “labor pains” (v 22) that occur together and are full of “hope” (vv 20, 24-25). This shared experience is goal-oriented toward the good of the age to come (Hodges, *Romans*, p. 236).

So, the “all things” refers to the godly fighting through trials, sufferings, and striving against the flesh—that is what works together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose.

## WORKING WITH CREATION

Paul is saying that the struggles of creation and the struggles of a particular group of people work together, or co-operate, for good. This group is “those who love God, and those who are called according to his purpose” (8:28). This does not

refer to just *any* Christian, or to *all* Christians, but to *faithful* Christians who are battling the carnal flesh and the sufferings that accompany a godly life. It is these believers who truly love God (John 14:15).

What is the “good” that such an experience brings about? We find the answer in v 29. It is being “conformed to the image of his Son.” A godly Christian, who suffers with Christ, is being made in the likeness of Jesus. Such Christians are groaning with creation, waiting for the return of Christ.

## FOREKNOWN AND PREDESTINED

Keeping in mind that the “good” is the conforming of godly Christians into the image of Christ, Paul says that these Christians were foreknown. This foreknowledge was not merely that God knew who would accept the gospel invitation and believe, but He knew who would suffer with Christ and be conformed into that image. We see this foreknowledge in Jer 1:5. Jeremiah was foreknown of God to be His prophet and to undergo some of the struggles he endured in his life for God’s glory, and to share in suffering.

God predestined these Christians He foreknew. Nowhere does this say they were predestined to eternal salvation. God says He predestined that they would be conformed to the image of His Son through these trials. This predestination is not a determination as to who goes to heaven, but rather the predetermination that all those who traveled the roads of suffering would be conformed more like Christ. And these would share in the joint-heirship of Christ (Rom 8:17).

## THEY ARE ALSO CALLED

This group of believers whom God had predestinated, He called and led to these choices. This calling is specific to this group of faithful Christians in the same way Jeremiah was called. Sometimes God calls us to share in the sufferings of Jesus in this life, and I believe it is this type of call that Paul has in mind. It is a call to suffering, not an effectual call or an unconditional election to eternal salvation. Those who are called are justified in their godly actions. They live godly lives,

and at the Judgment Seat of Christ, they will be vindicated and judged as having lived righteously. This will lead to their glorification, namely the receiving of glory because of the godly lives they lived through suffering. This will result in future rewards in the kingdom, including the promise of joint-heirship with Christ (Rom 8:17).

## GODLY SUFFERING A GOOD THING

When it comes to Christian suffering, Paul reveals that such suffering shouldn’t be seen as being forsaken by God. Rather the ability to share in Jesus’ suffering gives the believer the opportunity to be able share in the glory of Christ’s coming reign. These sufferings are mere birth pangs of the future deliverance from the bondage and corruption that the entire creation faces.

## CONCLUSION

So, what does Rom 8:28-30 mean? There is a specific group of Christians that are called to share in the sufferings of Christ (Acts 9:16). Though they suffer, they have been called to enter into this suffering, which is making them more like Christ. They will be blessed in future rewards and joint-heirship with Jesus Christ. In the midst of the sufferings and trials, God has not left them but called them to share in this precious privilege. God is not absent but fully vested in them, and no matter what, He loves them, and nothing will separate them from His care.

Nowhere in this passage is there any indication that this is an unconditional election unto eternal life by God. Such an idea is not found in the broader context, either. From Romans 5 through Romans 8, Paul is talking about walking by the Holy Spirit and living the Christian life in a way that pleases God. While God indeed loves all believers, Rom 8:28-30 is talking about the love of God directed towards those Christians who share in the sufferings of Christ faithfully, as well as God’s promises for the blessings these believers will have in the future as a result of that suffering. ■

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*Daniel Weierbach is the associate pastor at Open Door Baptist Church in Prattville, AL.*

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# Reaching the Spanish-Speaking World

By Kelley Easley

Back in March, right around the time that the virus hit, I received a message from Shawn, asking what I thought about translating the daily blogs at [www.faithalone.org](http://www.faithalone.org) into Spanish. I had been working with GES for the past several months to translate Bob's book, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*, but Shawn wanted to see if we could produce content that Spanish-speaking readers could engage with on a regular basis. It had only been a few years since I myself had returned to embrace Free Grace Theology after a period of doctrinal confusion, and I had GES to thank for clearing up much of that confusion. The prospect of getting to translate some of the very articles which were so critical to my own growth in grace was thrilling.

The very first article I translated for the blog was one that Bob had written for *Grace in Focus* entitled "Is Lordship Salvation a Saving Message?" (¿Es el mensaje de Salvación por Señorío un mensaje que salva?) I knew how much of an impact it could have within the context of Spanish-speaking cultures bound by traditionalism and legalism. I knew from my own research that there was a scarcity of Free Grace materials available in Spanish and that much work was needed.

Just as this new endeavor was beginning, the Lord sent an unexpected partner my way. Through one of the online Free Grace forums, I met Alla (Kristina) Lozenko, a Ukrainian national living in Zaragoza, Spain, who had recently come to an understanding of Free Grace, and who passionately desired to help spread the word. As an economic researcher, Kristina regularly wrote papers for the university in Spanish and had the skills needed to help edit and refine



our work. For some months, our goal was to post two Spanish articles per week, and we were proud to meet that goal.

However, the Lord saw fit to expand our ministry beyond just that. Three months later, in June, Shawn contacted me regarding a gentleman from Barcelona, Spain, Òscar Pellus, who had written in offering to help translate for the blog. Like Kristina, he had discovered GES's ministry over YouTube, had been impacted by the Free Grace message, and wanted to give back. Òscar teaches English as a Second Language professionally and writes beautifully. With his help, we are now able to post three Spanish articles weekly. At the time of this writing, we have published a total of 80 blogs in Spanish!

Though our work is still in its infancy, we've received some good feedback on our work. A comment reached us from the coordinator of a pastoral training institute in Nicaragua who shares our articles with his students. Byron wrote:


For too many churches, [Free Grace] doctrine is something "new." It's really common to find churches teaching that you have to keep your salvation through works or traditions. When we teach the assurance of salvation and

the grace of God, for some, it is offensive at first. But then they understand the meaning of the doctrine and their mistake. For that reason, it is really important to have good materials in Spanish to share with them. It's really good that we have these articles to share with them for study and as a reference on the website and Facebook page.

A young Salvadoran man involved in a Hispanic Baptist church in Florida similarly commented, "I really like the idea GES had to share posts in Spanish because I have a lot of family and friends in my country who believe in faith + works = salvation." He told us that he sends our articles over Messenger to his family and friends in Central America.

Kristina and Òscar have shared our work with countless Spaniards who have gained a clearer understanding of the freeness of His grace and of

the faith alone message. Together we're making inroads in both Latin America and Europe. A solid translation team has formed, and we look forward to what the future has in store for the Spanish-speaking outreach of GES!

If you have Spanish-speaking friends or family with whom you'd like to share our articles, please go to [www.faithalone.org](http://www.faithalone.org) and click on *Su Gracia Gratuita*. Our articles can also be found on GES's Facebook page. 



*Kelley Easley is a homeschooling mom of 3 and part-time translator and blogger living in Northwest Arkansas. She graduated from SMU in 1998 with bachelor's degrees in Spanish and Latin American Studies, and has lived in both Spain and Costa Rica.*

## WELCOME TO THE TEAM!

**By Shawn Lazar**

**W**e are proud to welcome Kathryn Wright to the GES team. For the last few years, Kathryn has proved her worth by volunteering alongside her father, Ken Yates, in his international ministry on behalf of GES. We thought it would be a good idea to make her role official. She will continue to help Ken as they do missions work in seminaries and Christian schools both here and abroad.

Normally, Kathryn would be traveling overseas throughout the year to teach at various Bible schools. Instead, due to COVID, she has



been teaching and moderating three Zoom courses weekly, with participants from all over the globe. These classes include a series on the Gospel of John, the Book of Hebrews, and a study following along Bob Wilkin and Zane Hodges's book on *Tough Texts*.

On top of the Zoom classes, she also has a couple of in-person classes that meet weekly.

Beyond teaching, she will also help with social media, regional and national conferences, and writing.

Thank you for supporting GES and allowing us to expand our international reach. 



# Jesus' Coronation Names

By Dix Winston

**N**ames in the Bible are important, especially when given by God. God names the first man in the Bible *Adam* because He created him from the *earth*.

Jacob's name means *cheater* or *swindler*, which he was, but after wrestling with the Angel (the pre-incarnate Christ), he was renamed *Israel*, meaning "one who wrestles with God."

And of course, Jesus renames Simon *Peter* which means *Rock*.

But the most significant names given by God are to His Son.

## HE SHALL BE CALLED...

The Angel instructed Joseph to call his unborn son Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). *Jesus* was His birth name, the OT equivalent to *Joshua*, meaning *salvation*.

But during the Christmas season we are drawn to His coronation names found in Isa 9:6, i.e., Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. Each one of these names tells us more about Who our Lord is and what He does. Dr. Warren Wiersbe rightly says, "Each name that He bears indicates some blessing He shares, and we can appropriate these blessings by faith" (Wiersbe, *The Names of Jesus*, p. 3).

Before telling us *what* our King will do, Isaiah tells us *Who* our King is, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us." He will be born as all humans are. But He will be "given" by God:



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*The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).*

The first designation speaks of His humanity, the second of His deity. In other words, He is the God/Man King. Only this One could bear the weight of the following four names.

## WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

In Handel’s glorious oratorio, *Messiah*, he separates these two words into two names. But this is not born out in the text.

The first coronation name is “Wonderful Counselor.” *Wonderful* is something that evokes wonder and is beyond understanding. As *The Moody Bible Commentary* points out, it is:

the supernatural work of God. A good example is its usage in Jdg 13:15-21, where the angel of the Lord does a “wonderful” thing (v. 18) and ascends to heaven in the flame of Manoah’s sacrifice (v. 20).

The word *counselor* has nothing to do with a modern-day therapist. In the OT, a counselor was one who advised or helped a king plan (1 Chron 27:33; 2 Chron 22:4; 25:16; Ezra 7:28). This Wonderful Counselor does not *seek* counsel but always *gives* it (Prov 19:21).

King David wisely benefited from this Wonderful Counselor (cf. Ps 16:7; 32:8). But Israel, for the most part, did not (Isa 8:19) and consulted mediums and spiritists instead. And when this Wonderful Counselor came in person to the nation, they “received Him not” (John 1:12).

Tragically, today so many believers give little time or thought to the Wonderful Counselor’s words recorded in the Bible and choose to build their lives upon sand (Matt 7:24-27).

## THE MIGHTY GOD

This second name is better translated *Warrior God*. The word for *mighty* is *gibbor* and is associated with great warriors or hunters (Gen 6:4, 10:8; Josh 6:2; 1 Sam 16:18, 17:51; 2 Sam 23:8; Judg 6:12). Jesus is our Mighty Warrior battling on our behalf in the spiritual realm.

The battle began in Eden with our first parents who chose to listen to the Serpent, instead of to God. As a result, the dark overlord now owned and ruled them, and they were of the “domain of darkness” (Col 1:13), having ceded ownership to the evil one. This was the satanic shot heard round the heavens and the opening of the “Seed War” (Gen 3:15). Jesus told his disciples Satan has one operational objective in this war—the annihilation of the race of Adam. He is driven to “steal, kill and destroy” (John 10:10).

But thankfully we have a Mighty Warrior whom Satan cannot withstand. He laid down his life for the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, was raised on the third day, and now offers eternal life to all who believe (John 11:25-26).

This Christmas we should reflect on the One who fought and died for us and now lives for us.

## THE EVERLASTING FATHER

This next coronation name seems to muddle the idea of the Trinity. If Jesus is God the Son, He can’t also be God the Father. Each member of the Trinity is distinct from the other, yet equally God—*una substantia, tres personae*.

So how are we to understand this third name? Weirsbe points out,

An Old Testament Jew reading Isaiah’s prophecy would recognize the “father” to mean “originator of” or “author of.” Jesus called Satan the “father of lies” (John 8:44), and Jabal was called the “father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock” (Gen 4:20). In calling Jesus Christ the “Everlasting Father,” the prophet was saying, “He is the originator of that which is everlasting.” (Weirsbe, *The Names of Jesus*, p. 69).

*He is perpetual.* Jesus has no beginning and no end. He has always been and always will be, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). (See also Exod 3:14 and John 8:58)

*He is the progenitor.* A progenitor is the one from whom all humans descend. Adam and Eve were our physical progenitors who passed on to us physical life. But if we want to live forever, we must be born again and receive eternal life (John

3:3-6). All mankind will exist forever, but only those who believe the promise of Jesus will gain eternal life (i.e., in the new heavens and earth), while those who do not believe will continue in eternal death (i.e., the lake of fire). See John 3:36:

*“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (cf. 5:39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 17:2-3).*

*He is the provider.* One of the things a father does is to provide for his children. Jesus being the Eternal Father abundantly provides His offspring with the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18) and every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3).

*He is the protector.* The evil one as previously stated wants to blow up every believer in the world (John 10:10). But like any good human father, Jesus protects His offspring. He kept the disciples in His name, and He keeps us today in that same name (John 17:12). He does this through the sealing of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). You seal something to protect it. We are sealed at the moment we believe the message of life until the day we arrive in Heaven (Eph 4:30).

*He gives purpose.* When we become believers, the Son invites us to participate with Him and His work. After the disciples believed in Him, Jesus did not say goodbye to the disciples but invited them to follow Him. Similarly, He invites us to learn from Him (Matt 11:28-30) and to engage in good works as a member of His Body (Eph 2:8-10). If we do, He promises we will be richly rewarded (Luke 18:29-30; Matt 25:21).

This Christmas we should reflect upon all the many blessings we have from our Lord.

## THE PRINCE OF PEACE

Finally, He is the Prince of Peace. The Jewish word for peace is *shalom*. It means the possession of adequate resources, wholeness, and harmony.

Today it seems like there are never enough resources for the day. We run dry emotionally, physically, and mentally. There are so many things to be troubled over today: the political

landscape, the viral landscape, and the financial landscape, to name a few. We live in a time that can be both frightful and uncertain.

But so did the disciples. They knew Jesus would soon leave them via death on the cross. In the upper room He said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27).

It is worth noting Jesus was going to leave them but not leave them alone. He had been with them for three years, and He was not going to quit on them now. He was going to leave them something—*peace*. Secondly, it was a unique type of peace, “His” peace. It came from Him. It was not an earthly peace, but a heavenly one, because He is from heaven. Thirdly, it is the guardian of their hearts. It is the cure for worry and fear.

There is much in our day to worry about and fear. But as believers we must remind ourselves we have been given the peace of the Prince of Peace.

## CONCLUSION

This Christmas let us reflect on the gift no amount of money can secure, the gift of peace that comes in Jesus.

He is our Wonderful Counselor, the Warrior God, the Eternal Father, and the Prince of Peace. Is there anything else you need for Christmas? ■



*Dix Winston is senior pastor of Crosspoint Community Church in Centennial, CO.*



# Top 5 Biblical Reasons to Celebrate with Food

By Summer Stevens

**W**ith the holidays—and holiday foods—just around the corner, and *everything* at a fever pitch, it can be easy to miss the Biblical significance of feasting and how celebrating with food can actually draw us near to the heart of God. Where in the Bible do we see the theological significance of eating?

**1. The Garden of Eden.** It is fascinating to consider that Adam was created in need. Even before the fall, he needed food. In the first three chapters of Genesis, there are twenty-one references to food and eating! The fibers of mankind's original story are woven with the sights, smells, and taste of food, which God created specifically for our sustenance and delight. When was the last time you took the time to examine the loveliness and intricacy of an orange or a pomegranate as a reflection of God's love for beauty? As you prepare your holiday meals, whether it's a family Christmas feast or a plate of decorated cookies for your neighbor, stop for a moment to thank the Lord for the gift of food that "is pleasant to the sight" (Gen 2:9) and receive it as an expression of His love for you.



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**2. Fasting.** In the OT, God used famine to draw the hearts of the people back to Him. You only have to miss one meal for your thoughts to stray to food. Miss two, and those thoughts are distracting. Miss three, and you're almost obsessed with finding your next meal. Fasting is significant not only for the need you feel with a growling belly, but I believe it's also significant when you break your fast and enjoy the sensations of eating and the rejuvenation of your body from food's nourishment, all of which were thoughtfully designed by our creative God.

**3. Feasting.** Feasting is a picture of a God of abundance. The Israelites were *required* to participate in the feasts (participation varied from offering animals for sacrifice to eating specific foods). How many of us see Fourth of July cook-outs or Easter dinners as mandatory? No one! But Leviticus 23 records seven feasts that God *commanded* His people to partake in. Many of the feasts specifically called for fasting before the meal was consumed. The Feast of the Firstfruits required that until the priest made the burnt offering and the grain offering, the Israelites were to "eat neither bread nor grain parched nor fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God" (Lev 23:14). Giving God the first and best demonstrated trust that He would provide throughout the rest of the harvest, as did enjoying its abundance rather than hoarding it. Simply put, feasting is a way to trust God's

CONTINUED ON P. 44



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provision, goodness, and ability to sustain us rather than to trust in our own capability.

In today's culture, we often value frugality to a fault. Our God is a lavish God!

I'm sure it took a lot of faith to feast for seven days (e.g., the Feast of Booths), but it was an act of belief that Yahweh would provide for His people. Though we aren't required to celebrate with a Thanksgiving or Christmas meal, we can choose to see those meals as expressions of the lavish provision of God.

**4. Jesus.** In the NT, Jesus takes the concept of abundance and supersedes it. When He fed the five thousand in John 6, the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of leftovers after the people had "eaten their fill" (John 6:12). In His first miracle in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine—equal to *one thousand* bottles of wine! To go even further, Jesus not only died for our sins, but throughout the Gospels He offers Himself as sustenance for us now. "I am the bread of life: whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall not thirst" (John 6:35). He offers the woman at the well living water that you can drink and "will never thirst again" (John 4:14). At the end of the elaborate Feast of Booths, Jesus stands up and cries, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). Jesus is the glorious fulfillment of the abundance of God. In Him there is total satisfaction. As we enjoy the special food and drink the holiday season

has to offer, we do it knowing that food is meant for our enjoyment, but ultimately it points to the source of our true desire: the presence of God.

**5. The Covenants.** God uses food in unique ways throughout Scripture, one of which is often to confirm covenants. God gives the food of the Garden to Adam and Eve. God confirms His covenant with Noah by expanding his food source: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you" (Gen 9:3). When God confirms the covenant with the Israelites in Exodus, Moses and the seventy elders of Israel go up and dine with God on a pavement of sapphire stone (Exod 24:10-11). Jesus institutes the New Covenant in His blood, which is His body, of which we are to partake through the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:24). Our first heavenly celebration will be at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. All throughout Scripture, we see food as a means to mark God's promises. So let's enjoy the God-ordained use of food as a means of celebration! And pass the pumpkin spice! 🍂



*Summer Stevens is married to Nathanael and they have five children. She has a Master's in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary and enjoys running (but mostly talking) with friends and reading good books to her kids.*



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# FOUR WAYS JESUS FULFILLED THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

(MATTHEW 5:17)



BY SHAWN LAZAR

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*“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matt 5:17).*

Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. In other words, the Lord was giving a *purpose statement* for His ministry, and whenever someone does that, you had better pay attention! Jesus’ confrontations with the Pharisees and the rabbinic laws of the day raised questions about His relationship to the Law. What was He trying to do? Jesus answered that He did not come to *destroy* the Law and the Prophets, but to *fulfill*. But what does that mean? How does Jesus fulfill OT Scripture? Michael Eaton lists four different ways:


1. “Jesus fulfilled the principles and precepts of the law” (Eaton, *The Way That Leads to Life*, p. 46). The Mosaic Law had hundreds of commands and prescriptions for Israel to fulfill. And the OT prophets often acted as covenant lawyers bringing suit against Israel for failing to obey those commands. In contrast to Israel’s disobedience, Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the Law in both His thoughts and His behavior. No one could critique His life or accuse Him of failing in His obligations to God. In a related sense, Jesus was also the greatest *expositor* of the Law, showing us, through His life and teaching, what it truly demanded. In sum, Jesus fulfilled *the ethical demands* of the Law and the Prophets.

2. “Jesus fulfilled the programs and prophecies of the Scriptures” (p. 47). Eaton explained that at the heart of the Scriptures was God’s plan to “undo the work of ‘the serpent’ (Gen 3:15).” The Bible is not primarily a book of laws, so much as a story of redemption. The Lord promised that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. In other words, a Messiah was coming. And over time, God gradually revealed more information about what Messiah would be

like, such as “a great Chosen King, a Suffering Servant, an Anointed Conqueror” (p. 48). Jesus fulfilled those roles (well, some of them; others await a future fulfillment in the kingdom). In sum, Jesus fulfilled *the Messianic prophecies* of the Law and the Prophets.

3. “Jesus fulfilled the patterns and pictures of the scriptures” (p. 48). Besides giving explicit commands and predictions, God’s Word also teaches through types and symbols. Trees, arks, lambs, priests, feasts, and sabbaths, and people such as Adam, Moses, Melchizedek, and David often foreshadow or prefigure what Messiah would be like and what He would do. Like Moses, Jesus taught on a mountain and delivered His people from slavery. Like David, Messiah will reign. Like a lamb, Jesus was sacrificed for sin. Like Melchizedek, He is a priest forever. In sum, Jesus fulfilled *the Messianic types* of the Law and the Prophets.

4. “Jesus fulfills the psalms and proverbs” (p. 48). How does He do that? By embodying the figure of the King we meet in the Psalms and of the Wise Man we see in Proverbs. In sum, Jesus fulfilled *the wisdom* of the Law and the Prophets.

So how does Jesus fulfill the Law and the Prophets? Probably in more ways than you realized! 



*Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. He has been married to Abby for fifteen years.*



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