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ROMANS 8

PLUS CONDEMNATION / BEGGING JESUS FOR THE RIGHT REASONS / ETERNAL SECURITY IN JOHN'S GOSPEL /
RE-DEFINING DISCIPLESHIP? / HIGHER CRITICISM / GOOSEBUMP EVENTS / AND MORE!

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

EDITOR AND DESIGNER
Shawn Lazar

OFFICE MANAGER
Bethany Taylor

CIRCULATION
Mark “Snowflake” Gray

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FROM THE EDITOR

How did you do last year? The year 2020 was odd. Very odd. The restrictions and lockdowns that resulted from Covid-19 were something we had never seen before: several hundred thousand American Covid-related deaths, required mask-wearing, social distancing, most businesses declared non-essential, church gatherings forbidden and then greatly restricted, millions of lost jobs, working from home, schools closed, difficulty in seeing doctors, shortages of paper products and food stocks, massive mail-in balloting, protests, riots, and looting, and that is just part of what made last year unique and in many ways very difficult.

GES was impacted, too.

Of course, since much of our ministry can be done remotely, we could still produce our magazine, journal, blogs, radio/podcasts, and books. We were even able to have our national conference. We had one regional conference in Georgetown, TX before the March restrictions, and one after in Miami, FL in August. In December, Shawn and I recorded 37 short videos (5 to 10 minutes) that we will post on the GES YouTube channel over the next 6 months.

However, Ken and Kathryn were not able to go overseas. Instead, they were able to teach over Zoom.


Like incomes, donations were down in the second half of 2020, which was the first half of our fiscal year (July 1, 2020 till June 30, 2021). Due to the support of many of you over the past years, we do have reserves. Hopefully, the economy will turn around this year. But whether it does or not, we at GES are committed to



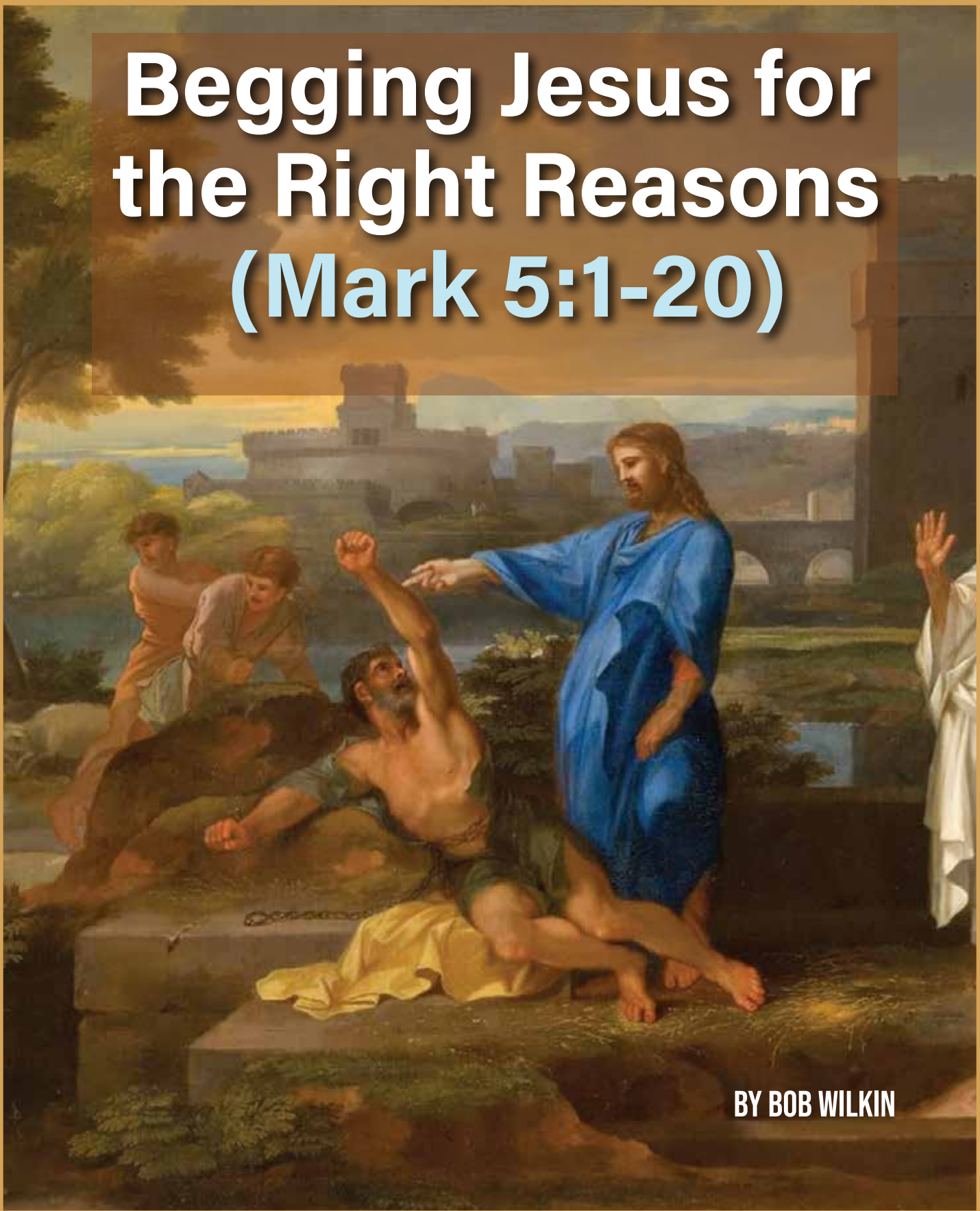
Watch for the Lord

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

continuing to bring the Free Grace message to as many people as we can using as many means as we can.

This might be the year that the Lord returns. If so, we will see you in the air. If not, let's keep on watching for Him. We long for His approval (1 Cor 9:27; 1 John 2:28). We desire that *Grace in Focus* magazine will help all of us stay focused. 

Begging Jesus for the Right Reasons (Mark 5:1-20)



BY BOB WILKIN

**“The account of the Lord
casting out thousands of
demons from the Gadarene
demoniac perfectly illustrates
begging the Lord for the
wrong and right reasons.”**

The Scriptures invite both believers and unbelievers to petition God. Matthew 7:7-12 and the Lord’s calls to ask, seek, and knock are prime examples.

In Scripture, we often find that people do not ask for the right reasons or ask for the wrong things. The account of the Lord casting out thousands of demons from the Gadarene demoniac perfectly illustrates begging the Lord for the wrong and right reasons. We will consider Mark’s reporting of the incident (Mark 5:1-20).

MARK’S CAST OF CHARACTERS

Some early manuscripts of Mark 5:1 read *Gerasenes*, not *Gadarenes*. English translations like the NASB, NIV, NET, and HCSB, which follow the so-called Critical Text, read “Gerasenes.” However, most manuscripts, the Majority Text, read *Gadarenes* and should be accepted as original.

The cast of characters includes the demons, the man who was possessed and then delivered, the pigs, the people tending the pigs, and the people of Gadara and the surrounding areas who hear about the miracle. Most of the people in the story are Gentiles, which was rare in Jesus’ ministry.

Three of the characters in the story beg Jesus to do something for them: the demons, the man who was delivered, and the town’s people.

It is surprising what each asks.

The key word in Greek in the passage is *parakaleō*. It occurs four times in these 20 verses in vv 10, 12, 17, and 18.

It sometimes means to *ask* in the NT. But in these verses, it means “to make a strong request” (BDAG), that is, *to beg, plead, or implore*.

Unfortunately, the NKJV and the NIV and most translations do not translate it the same way each time. They translate it as *begged* in vv 10 and 12 and 18 and *to plead* in v 17. It should be translated the same each time.

Several translations have the word *begged* in all four places: HCSB, RSV, and WEB (World English Bible).

The NET Bible has *begged* in vv 10, 12, and 17, but the word *ask* in v 18.

The NASB(95) has the word *implore* in all four of the verses.

This passage revolves around the word *beg*. It is good to beg Jesus to do or allow something, but only if we are begging for a good thing.

THE SETTING FOR THE MIRACLE (5:1-6)

This miracle occurs after Jesus stilled the storm while He and the disciples were in a boat facing drowning (Mark 4:35-41).

Soon after He gets out of the boat, a demon-possessed man confronts Jesus.

Gadara was both a city and a region south of the Sea of Galilee. The demon-possessed man lived in the rocks and caves in the region.

He was a very dangerous man. No chains could hold him. He was as dangerous as the deadly storm on the Sea of Galilee that the disciples had just survived.

Verse 6 says, “When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped Him.”

Worship refers to kneeling before someone. Here the man kneels before Jesus.

This is amazing since “he” refers to the demons within the man! Here are myriad demons worshipping the Lord Jesus. Amazing.

THE DEMONS WORSHIP AND IMPLORE JESUS NOT TO TORTURE THEM (5:7-9)

In v 7, the speaker uses the first person singular: “What have *I* to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” (emphasis added). We are not told how he knew His name was Jesus and that He is the Son of God.

Though a singular pronoun is used in v 7, it soon becomes clear that the speaker is not the demon-possessed man but is instead the spokesman for the thousands of demons who possessed him.

There are several ways in which these demons could have learned Jesus’ name and identity. Even in a predominantly Gentile region, the many demons might have heard reports about Jesus. But since new demons came to possess the man over time, demons who could have been from Capernaum or other cities of Galilee would regularly bring new information. Think of the Borg in Star Trek. The demons within this man were a collective. They shared information. Of course, Satan might have a way of communicating directly with his servants as well.

The demonic spokesman says, “I implore [adjure, urge, strongly request] You by God that You do not torment me.” It is ironic that demons are imploring Jesus *by God* not to torment them.

What he fears is being tormented *before the time*. Compare Matt 8:29, “Have You come to torment us before the time?”

The demons know that the fallen angels and demons will be cast into the lake of fire for eternal torment after the Millennium. But some fallen angels were cast into torment early and are now in a place called the Abyss (2 Pet 2:4). The demons wonder if they too will be sent to torment in the Abyss long before most of the fallen angels and demons will be tormented. Luke reports, “And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the Abyss” (Luke 8:31).

The Lord then commands the demon to come out and asks the demon his name. In v 9, the demon clarifies who he is: “My name is Legion; for *we* are many” (emphasis added).

A Roman legion was 4,000 to 6,000 soldiers. That suggests that there were thousands of demons inside this one man. That accounts for the great strength. He had superhuman strength.



THE DEMONS BEG JESUS TO SEND THEM INTO THE PIGS (5:10-12)

The head demon, the spokesman for the Legion, begs Jesus not to send them outside the country, or region. The demons realize that Jesus, the Son of God, is in control. He could send them to the Abyss. Or he could send them into the wilderness, far from any people. They are begging Him because they are powerless in His presence.

They ask for Jesus to send them into the herd of swine.

Jewish people did not eat pork, and they normally did not raise swine.

Gadara was one of the ten major cities in the Decapolis, a primarily Gentile area. While Jesus was sent to the house of Israel, He did interact with a few Gentiles and Samaritans during His ministry (e.g., a Roman centurion, a Canaanite woman, as well as the woman at the well and other Samaritans at Sychar). This is one example of that. The demon-possessed man was most likely a Gentile, and so were the herdsmen and most of the people of the town and countryside.

Demons are spirits without bodies that live in bodies like hermit crabs live in abandoned shells. This is the only case in the Bible where we learn of demons going into animals.

WHAT HAPPENED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MIRACLE? (5:13-15)

Jesus permitted them to go into the herd, and they entered about 2,000 pigs. Most likely, each pig had one or more demons in it.

The herd basically committed mass suicide. They ran down into the sea and drowned there. Pigs can swim. It seems that the pigs chose to die, rather than be possessed, though we cannot be sure of that. Many commentators think that the demons wanted to kill the pigs. But it seems more likely that the pigs were unwilling to be possessed.

Remember that the disciples had nearly drowned in the sea right before this incident took place. Now they see 2,000 swine drown in the sea. It must have been a very odd sight.

Those who tended the swine went into the city and the countryside and told everyone what had happened.

The result is that people of the city and countryside came out, saw the man “sitting and clothed and in his right mind,” and they were afraid. The man had been uncontrollable before. He had been out of his mind and extremely dangerous. The Gentiles of the region were probably asking the same sort of questions the disciples asked after Jesus stilled the storm, “Who can this be...that even a demon-possessed man obeys Him?” (compare Mark 4:41).

THE TOWN'S PEOPLE BEG JESUS TO LEAVE (5:16-17)

How do you think they should have reacted?

Here was a great miracle. A man who had been wild and insane and dangerous was now no longer a danger, no longer wild, and no longer insane.

Of course, someone lost a lot of money in the 2,000 drowned swine.

But here was a miracle so great that they should have begged Jesus to teach them about God and salvation.

Instead, they beg Jesus to leave: “They began to plead [or to beg] Him to depart from their region” (Mark 5:17).

Why were they afraid (v 15)? Was it because they feared losing more money? That seems unlikely. Most likely, they feared the supernatural. The demon-possessed man had been supernaturally strong and caused great fear in them. Now someone much stronger than the demon-possessed man had come. He overpowered and tamed the untamable man. They feared what Jesus might do to them.

William Lane comments,

The consequence was the pathetic request of the inhabitants that Jesus leave them. Their motive may well have been that they were afraid to have in their midst one whose power was as great as that which Jesus had demonstrated (Lane, *Mark*, p. 187).

R. C. H. Lenski agrees, saying,

Instead of being drawn to Jesus they shrank from him. They were blind to his mercy, they feared only his power. This reaction was wholly abnormal and unreasonable as all the reactions of unbelief are (*Mark*, p. 214).

THE HEALED MAN BEGGED JESUS TO LET HIM FOLLOW (5:18)

Jesus is about to leave with His disciples when the healed man “begged Him that he might be with Him” (v 18). It was a great request. Jesus wanted people to follow Him.

But Jesus wants him to stay and be a witness there.

This is a strange reversal. Normally Jesus wanted people to leave everything and follow Him. But He wanted this man to stay.

THE HEALED MAN PROCLAIMED JESUS IN DECAPOLIS (5:19-20)

The name Decapolis means *ten cities*. This was a region that had ten main cities.

Jesus and His disciples had been rejected. But Jesus wanted a witness there. He sent the man

who had been healed. That man would find many willing to listen.

Of course, the Lord Jesus only told him to “Go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (Mark 5:19). The man took the initiative to talk to far more than simply his friends or even the people in Gadara. He went on a preaching tour throughout the ten cities and the countryside between.

We are not told what he said. Surely, he told of his healing. He probably also told them that Jesus is the Messiah and that all who believe in Him have everlasting life. While Mark does not report that the Lord Jesus led the man to faith in Him, it is inconceivable that the Lord would deny his request to be with Him and would send him out to share his story unless He had first shared the promise of life with him.

Lane writes, “Thus in the midst of the Gentiles, the God of Israel was glorified through the proclamation of what Jesus had accomplished” (Mark, p. 189).


We might call this man Jesus’ first Gentile missionary.

APPLICATION

Always remember that our Lord is the one who controls everything, including nature and Satan and his servants. Jesus is in control. He is all powerful. Nothing is outside His control. We can praise God that our Lord is sovereign.

It is right to beg the Lord to do that which we know is pleasing to Him, especially begging that we might be with Him (which in our day would be to ask that we might continue in fellowship with Him). Being a beggar is a good thing when it comes to asking the Lord for the right things.

It is foolish to beg the Lord to leave.

We should tell others what Jesus has done for us. 



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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“Condemnation” in Romans

By Ken Yates

The word for *condemnation* in the Book of Romans is *katakrima*. It only occurs three times in the book. In fact, these are the only times the word occurs in all of the NT. The three instances are found in Rom 5:16, 18, and Rom 8:1.

In 5:16, Paul writes, while talking about Adam’s sin, that this sin resulted in *condemnation*. Paul rewords this statement in 5:18. In both places the Apostle says that this condemnation is a judgment upon man because of Adam’s sin. In Rom 8:1, Paul states, “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

It is safe to say that most Christians, when they see the word *condemnation* in these three verses, conclude that it is talking about going to hell. Because of Adam’s sin, it is held, men and

women are destined to hell/condemnation (Rom 5:16, 18), unless they become believers. When a person does believe, he is in Christ Jesus, and is therefore not subject to this condemnation (Rom 8:1). Simply put, for many Christians, *condemnation* in the Book of Romans refers to being condemned to hell.

The careful reader of the Book of Romans, however, will pause before making this conclusion.

FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

All three occurrences of the word are found in Romans 5–8, which is the section of the book that deals with Christian *living*, not how to be saved from hell.

In his commentary on Romans, Zane Hodges makes a great point about this word (Zane Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, p. 152). He points out, by appealing to Greek lexicons, that *condemnation* is not just a



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pronouncement of guilt. Instead, it refers to the burden that accompanies a judicial pronouncement. Specifically, it refers to the *servitude* that results from a judgment. An illustration would be when a person is found guilty in a court of law. He is first declared guilty, but then he must carry out the sentence. He must serve his time.

This makes perfect sense.

When Adam sinned, he was sentenced to death. As a result, he became a slave to sin. The condemnation here is that slavery. In the verses that follow, Paul speaks of the disobedience, the transgressions, and reign of sin in the life of those who are descendants of Adam (vv. 18-21). This is the sentence they must carry out.

HOW TO AVOID SLAVERY TO SIN

Romans 5–8 instruct us on how, as believers, we can avoid this slavery to the power of sin. We do not have to continue in sin (6:1, 15). After introducing the idea of *condemnation* in 5:16, 18, Paul speaks of the power of sin in the life of a believer and being a slave to sin (6:13, 16). Through the power of the Spirit, we don't have to live in that bondage. Instead, we can live righteously (chaps. 7–8).

This is clearly pointed out in the last occurrence of the word *condemnation* in Romans. If we translate it as “slavery to sin,” Rom 8:1 fits the context perfectly. Paul says that there is now no slavery to sin *to those who walk according to the Spirit*. Even though some translations do not mention walking by the Spirit in v 1, this

is certainly what Paul means. The majority of Greek manuscripts include this requirement. Also, all manuscripts make this clear in v 4.

This last use of the word *condemnation* in Romans 8 makes it clear that Paul is not talking about being condemned to hell. A person does not have to walk/live by the Spirit in order to be saved from hell. That would involve works. Instead, Paul is talking about a lifestyle.

The Book of Romans is not primarily a book telling us how to gain eternal life (i.e. be saved from hell). It is telling us how to live a righteous life. After we become believers, we still live in this physical body that can and does sin. If we walk by the flesh (also Rom 8:1), we can still be slaves to the power of sin. But we don't have to do that. Through the Spirit, we can be set free from the *condemnation* of this slavery.

This type of study reminds us again that Jesus did not just come to give us eternal life, as great as that is. He also, through His resurrection life, gives us freedom in *this* life. The condemnation of Romans relates to our living here and now. We do not have to live under the condemnation of having to serve the power of sin. ■



Ken Yates is GES's international speaker. He is also the pastor of Little River Baptist Church in Jenkinsville, SC. His latest book is *Hebrews: Partners with Christ*.

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Romans 8

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

By Zane Hodges

THE SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION OF OUR MORTAL BODY (8:1-13)

8:1. The statement of this verse succinctly expresses the core of Christian victory. In referring to the issue of **servitude to sin** (*katakrima*), Paul has reference to the problem discussed in the previous chapter and in 5:12-21. As Paul's exposition in 5:12-21 has shown, "through one offense [that is, Adam's sin] judgment" has come "to all men to produce *servitude [katakrima] to sin*" (5:18; cf. 5:16).

Contrary to the widely held opinion that in 8:1 Paul is discussing the truth of justification as the removal of all *condemnation*, Paul is referring to the reign of sin and death that was initiated by the fall of Adam.

This *servitude to sin*, Paul declares, does not exist for those (1) [who] **are in Christ Jesus**, and (2) [who] **do not walk in relation to the flesh but in relation to the Spirit**. Regrettably, the words in point 2 are omitted by most modern translations, due to their reliance on a few older Greek manuscripts that differ from the reading found in most manuscripts.

Being *in Christ Jesus* is essential to experience this freedom from sin's bondage (cf. 6:1-11). But, as Paul's previous discussion has shown, by itself it is not enough. The second step to victory therefore is walking *in relation to the Spirit*. Here we pick up the word *walk* that Paul has used in 6:4.

The statement of this option (repeated in vv 4, 13) introduces a component that was not present in Paul's struggles as described in 7:15-25—the Holy Spirit. *The Spirit* was not a factor at all in those struggles. His introduction into the process of Christian living is, for Paul, the key to spiritual victory. The role of *the Spirit* will be immediately expounded in the following section (vv 2-13).

A paraphrase might be: "those who walk flesh-wise," and "those who walk Spirit-wise," that is, with a fleshly or with a spiritual orientation.

8:2. The reason that servitude to sin does not exist for those described in v 1 is that **the Spirit of life liberates them from the law of sin and death**.

But the liberation being described is experiential and cannot be automatically predicated of all believers (cf. 7:15-25). Paul personalizes the statement—[He] **has freed me from the law of sin and death**. The fact that he does not say "us" is not an accident. Each believer must claim this victory in his own experience.

8:3. The incapacity of the law was due to the impediment that *the flesh* posed to Paul's fulfillment of its holy demands. *The law*, therefore, **was weak because of the flesh** and could not aid Paul in the resolution of this problem.

The reason Paul has been freed from "the law of sin and death" (v 2) is due to God **sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [the incarnation] and as a sacrifice for sin [the cross]**.

As Paul has been at pains to show (see 3:21-26; 4:23-25), by His death Christ has made it possible for God to “be righteous and [to] justify the person who has faith in Jesus” (3:26). Such a person now becomes righteous *in Christ*. Thus the death of Christ is also a sentence of doom upon *sin in the flesh*, destroying its present power and presaging its final removal from the experience of the one who is “righteous by faith” (1:17).

Therefore, “the law of sin and death” (v 2) has no right any longer to rule the experience of the justified person. He has died in Christ and sin has no legal claim on him, “for he who has died is justified [freed] from sin” (6:7). He or she can now *live* to God (6:11).

8:4. The very thing Paul found himself unable to do as he strove to obey the law (7:15-25) has now become possible for him by means of the Spirit. **The righteous action of the law can be fulfilled by him as he walks in relation to the Spirit.**

Paul uses here the Greek word *dikaiōma* (*righteous action*) which he has used previously in Romans only at 1:32; 2:26; 5:16, 18. In fact, 5:16 specifically contrasts *katakrima* and *dikaiōma*, the very words used in 8:1 (*katakrima*) and here (*dikaiōma*).

Many English translations misconstrue Paul’s point, translating *dikaiōma* as *righteous requirement* (NKJV, NASB, NET, ESV), not *righteous action*. No one fulfills the law (1 John 1:8). But believers can manifest righteous action.

The righteous action which the law stipulated, but failed to produce (see 7:15-25), can be achieved *under grace*. Understood this way, the singular of *dikaiōma* is important.

The singular occurs because Paul’s statement is a statement of principle. What Paul is affirming is that *the thing that couldn’t be done by living under the law can in fact be achieved by walking in relation to the Spirit*.

But, as already indicated in 8:1, freedom from “servitude to sin” (cf. 5:16, 18) depends not only on being “in Christ Jesus,” but also, as repeated here, on not walking *in relation to the flesh but in relation to the Spirit*. Paul will now proceed to discuss this Spirit-led walk (8:5-13).

8:5. Paul clarifies the basis on which he can affirm the “righteous action of the law” is carried

out only by those who “walk...in relation to the Spirit.” This is true because the phrases he uses to describe a person’s *walk* suggest an individual’s *orientation*. **Those who are in relation to the flesh** describes people who are oriented to **the things of the flesh**. But in contrast, **those who are in relation to the Spirit** are people oriented to **the things of the Spirit**. It is this latter orientation that is crucial to spiritual victory.

The key word in this concept is the Greek verb *phroneō*, translated here as **have their minds set on**. This verb occurs for the first time in Romans in this verse. The cognate noun *phronēma* also occurs in 8:6, 7, 27 and nowhere else in the NT. The concept involved in these two words is crucial to Paul’s thought in this section (8:1-13).

The orientation of the individual Christian—that is, his focus, or mind-set—is seen by Paul as a pivotal element in the Christian “walk.”

While striving for holiness under the law, Paul had focused on the commands (e.g., “lust”) so that his mind-set was *fleshly*: “I must steer clear of all lust.” This fleshly orientation doomed him to commit the very sin he sought to avoid.

Simply put, if one lives with a fleshly orientation—even if it is the result of a vigorous effort to keep the law—he is going to fail because he has the *wrong* mind-set.

8:6. These two mind-sets, **the mind-set of the flesh** and **the mind-set of the Spirit**, Paul affirms, are poles apart. One belongs to the sphere of, and results in, death. The other belongs to a contrasting sphere with contrasting results, **life and peace**.

The trap into which a Christian falls when he is principally concerned with the law itself is that he cannot escape a preoccupation with the spiritual deadness within and around him. The mind-set of the Spirit, however, lifts his preoccupations to the level of supernatural *life and peace*. Paul’s discussion (to the end of chap. 8) proceeds to explore this concept.

8:7. Since **the mind-set of the flesh** is inescapably preoccupied with the sphere of sin and death (v 6), it cannot be rescued from this preoccupation and from all the evil inclinations that manifest themselves in that sphere. Thus,

Paul's experience of spiritual defeat could not be changed if this mind-set remained unchanged.

The flesh's mind-set not only **does not submit to the law of God**, it is incapable of doing so. For a Christian to be trapped in the wrong mind-set is to be trapped in a life of continuous defeat, precisely as Paul has described in 7:7-25.

8:8-9. Unregenerate persons (that is, the unjustified) are people **who are in the flesh**. Since the mind-set of *the flesh* is the only one possible for them, they are completely **unable to please God**. The Christian life can be lived only by Christians.

It is important to keep in mind that walking in relation to the flesh (see vv 1, 4) is not, in Paul's thought, the exclusive experience of those who are *in the flesh*. The Christian still has the sinful flesh in his physical body (e.g., 7:22-25; cf. 8:13) and can therefore walk in relation to the flesh. But he also has another option. At the level of his innermost man (see 7:22, 25), he is **not in the flesh but in the Spirit**. This means that he can also walk in relation to the Spirit.

This is the first time in Romans that Paul has used the terminology *in the flesh* and *in the Spirit*, but it is clear that they are the functional equivalents for him of the "unjustified" and the "justified." The distinguishing feature in the contrast here is whether the person has **the Spirit of Christ**. If someone **does not have the Spirit of Christ**, that person **does not belong to Him** at all.

8:10. On the one hand, the physical bodies of believers remain morally **dead**. On the other hand, the inner presence of **the Spirit** gives them **life** within those very same dead bodies.

Paul makes clear that the Christian's body is incapable of producing the life of God on its own. This is precisely what Paul had discovered in the fruitless struggles recorded in 7:15-25. Apart from intervention by the Spirit, the resulting spiritual defeat cannot be reversed.

8:11. **The Spirit** can impart to these **mortal bodies** (v 10) an experience of life. This statement does not refer to our future resurrection. Instead, it refers to the life and peace produced by the mind-set of the Spirit (v 6b). Thus the Spirit can overcome the death that characterizes the fallen state of our present mortal bodies (v 10) and can

make them vehicles for expressing the divine life within us.

The resurrecting power of God the Father (**the One who raised Christ from the dead**), exercised through **His Spirit**, can bring us into experiential union with the risen life of Christ so that we actually walk in that "newness of life" (6:4) that He Himself possesses.

In every respect the "resurrection" of the believer's mortal body that Paul describes here is accomplished **on account of His Spirit who indwells us**.

8:12-13. Paul now brings this unit of his discussion (8:1-13) to a close. We Christians (**brothers**) are in no way **obligated to the flesh to live in relation to the flesh**.

But Paul is far from denying the possibility of this. In fact, he bluntly warns his Christian readers that **if you live in relation to the flesh you will die**.

In fact, Paul had already tasted a "death experience" in the days when he struggled unsuccessfully against his sinful impulses (see discussion 7:9, 11). Thus, a kind of *fellowship death* had occurred, cutting him off from the experience of God's life.

By contrast, **if by the ministry of the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body**—that is, if we cease to obey the body's desires—then we can enjoy the eternal life that God has given to us as a free gift (cf. 6:22-23).

The word translated **you will live** (*zēsesthe*) recalls the word *zēsetai* in 1:17 ("Now the one who is righteous by faith *shall live*"). Precisely in the manner outlined in Rom 8:1-13, the justified person can, by the power of the Spirit, live righteously in his experience.

OUR SPIRITUAL TRIUMPH OVER SUFFERING (8:14-39)

8:14. Clearly the life experienced in the Spirit's pathway (8:1-13) is appropriately described as being **led by the Spirit of God**.

In the context of Romans 8, this has nothing to do with a mystical *leading of the Lord*, or inner direction (that is more mystical than Biblical). Here the larger context suggests that being *led*

by the Spirit of God is a life in conformity to the revealed will of God as found in His Word.

Strikingly, this is Paul's first use in Romans of the Greek word *son* (*huios*) other than in reference to Jesus Christ (as in 1:3, 4, 9; 5:10; 8:3).

This statement does not simply mean that those led by the Spirit are Christians.

In Galatians, Paul clearly distinguished between a "minor child" (*nēpios*) and a "son" (*huios*). The former is under the governance of a tutor (the law), while the latter is the "adult son" who is no longer under this tutor (see Gal 4:1-7). If the Galatians passage is compared carefully with Rom 8:14-17, their similarities will be obvious.

Both passages refer to *sons* (Gal 4:4; Rom 8:14), *heirs* (Gal 4:1, 7; Rom 8:17), and *adoption* (Gal 4:5; Rom (8:15)).

In the light of Paul's teaching in Gal 4:1-7, it is natural here to take the expression **the sons of God** as a reference to the life-experience of the adult sons who are not under the law. In contrast to the earlier struggle (described in Rom 7:7-25) in which the regenerate inner man strived vainly to fulfill God's law, now the one *led by the Spirit* lives the life of an adult son who is no longer under the law (note especially 6:14).

8:15. To be under the law is to experience a **spirit of bondage**, that is, to live under coercion and not in spiritual liberty. This spirit says, "I *must* do this," rather than, "I *want* to do this."

Such bondage had the effect of producing fear, since disobedience to the law stood under the threat of retribution. Man's inability to keep the law resulted in him living continuously under this retributive threat (cf. Gal 3:10).

As Paul made clear in Rom 6:4-14, the believer has entered into "newness of life" by virtue of his union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. This union, in fact, was effected by the work of the Spirit (see discussion under 6:4). The Spirit did not **again** place us under the law.

All of this is what is intended by the expression **a spirit of adoption as an adult son** (cf. Gal 4:5).

He lives, so to speak, a "grown-up" life which, for Paul, means a life "led by the Spirit of God" (v 14). This grown up son, moved by means of the Spirit, can **cry out, "Abba, Father!"**

8:16. As we pray (v 15), both the Holy Spirit and our own spirit testify together **that we are the children of God**. Paul will shortly say the Spirit is involved in our prayer life and personally makes intercession for us (vv 26, 27).

This verse is often misunderstood as a reference to some kind of inner (mystical) witness *to* (as

opposed to *with*) our human spirit that gives us a subjective assurance that we are born again. Paul knows nothing of this kind of "inner witness." This false conclusion is usually based on the English translation which sounds like it could mean that. But the meaning of the verb "testify with" is "to provide supporting evidence by testifying,

[to] confirm, support by testimony" (BDAG, p. 957). Thus the Holy Spirit *supports* the testimony of our human spirit when we claim God as our heavenly Father as we cry, "Abba, Father." It is as though the Spirit said to the Father as we prayed, "This is Your child."

The result of this "twofold witness" is that in the heavenly audience room our status before God as His children has the firmest possible claim on His divine attention. Our conviction that God will indeed listen to our prayers is thereby strengthened, even when we are unsure exactly what we should pray for (vv 26, 27).

This knowledge is foundational to what Paul is now about to say about Christian suffering.

8:17. To begin with, we are **heirs...of God**. In v 17, Paul has *two forms of heirship* in mind. This double heirship is clearly signaled by the construction (**on the one hand...on the other hand**). Not only are God's children *heirs of God*, but they *may also become co-heirs with Christ on the condition* that they "co-suffer" with Him.

According to OT inheritance law, the firstborn son in a family normally received twice as much as the other sons (Deut 21:17). To be *co-heirs*

"To be under the law is to experience a spirit of bondage, that is, to live under coercion and not in spiritual liberty."

with Christ is to be *co-heirs with* the Firstborn (8:29).

This second heirship—co-heirship with Christ—is predicated on “co-suffering” that leads to “co-glorification.” Paul’s Greek text emphasizes the “co-” element by a repeated use of a Greek prefix with all three words: co-heirs; co-sufferers; co-glorified. The word *if* indicates the conditional nature of this statement.

It is this last aspect of our heirship that leads Paul directly into the theme of suffering which will occupy him until the end of the chapter (8:39).

The mention of the suffering/glory motif in v 17 turns Paul’s discussion toward the intrinsic relationship between these two things in the experience of God’s children/sons. It also leads him to the natural now/then correlation which those two themes suggest. Suffering is a *present* experience, while glory is a *future* one.

8:18. Paul now underlines the huge disparity between the present suffering and future glory. Although our **sufferings in the present time** so often seem dreadful and nearly unbearable, they are dwarfed by the superlative greatness of the glory to which they lead. So much is this the case that our sufferings cannot stand any real comparison with **the glory that is going to be revealed for us** (or “which is waiting for us,” Jerusalem Bible translation).

Paul’s point is that the glory God has prepared *for us* far exceeds in worth and value the temporary deprivations that sufferings entail (cf. 2 Cor 4:17).

8:19-21. The words **what is eagerly desired** personify **the creation**. Because of the very presence of corruption and death, nature has an intense longing to attain release from these things.

But such a release can only come when there is a **revelation of the sons of God** (cf. 8:14, 15). The adult status possessed by all believers, and experienced as they are “led by the Spirit” (see discussion under v 14), will be on full and glorious

display at the coming of Christ, and that display will result in the liberation of **creation itself** from its **bondage to corruption**.

Verse 20 is best treated as a parenthetical comment, and v 21, with its initial *because*, picks up the link with v 19. Verse 19 asserts that the creation desires something that awaits *the revelation of the sons of God*, while v 20 explains exactly what the creation stands in need of.

God’s splendid creation was subjected to **futility** *unwillingly* as a result of man’s fall in Eden (see

Gen 3:17-19). This subjection to futility was **because of Him** Who did this with special reference to man’s hope for the future (**in hope**).

Indeed, just as God offered hope to mankind in general (Gen 3:15), so also that hope, by implication, was extended to the creation that Satan’s triumph had damaged. The Serpent’s head was to be crushed (Gen 3:15), with all that this prophecy implied.

The later prophets also spoke of this hope (Isa 11:6-9; 65:25; Hos 2:18) as part of Israel’s expectation when her kingdom would be established by Messiah.

Having specifically articulated the dire condition of nature (in v 20), Paul returns to the point stated in v 19, namely, **the creation waits** for God’s sons to be manifested. It waits precisely because when *the revelation of the sons of God* takes place, then **the creation itself will be released from bondage to corruption**. Corruption and death will be completely removed from the natural world. Nature will no longer be in bondage to these things.

This deliverance will allow creation to share **the liberty of the glory of the children of God**. As a result of their being “heirs of God” (8:17), these children will at that time have fully entered into the privilege of their “adoption as sons” (8:15). They will be totally free from all the effects of sin, corruption and death when they are resurrected (or “transformed” at the Rapture). The new body will be a body of glory (cf. 1 Cor

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15:43), fully at liberty from all sin-related bondage. Such is the glorious heirship of every “child” of God whether or not he attains to co-heirship with Jesus Christ (8:17). Into that kind of liberty, *the creation* also will come.

8:22-23. Paul now describes **the whole creation** as racked with severe pain. The creation not only **groans together** but also **suffers labor pains together**. In unison, the entire created natural order is groaning and undergoing agonies that look toward a new age (v 19).

But it is **not only *the creation*** that groans. **Also we who have the first fruits of the Spirit** do the same.

Paul has already spoken of a spiritual resurrection of our bodies that is accomplished by the power of *the Spirit* (8:11) and which empowers us to live in newness of life (8:12-13; see 6:4). Yet such resurrection life is never perfectly realized in our “mortal bodies” (8:11) and awaits a total fulfillment. That will come when we are resurrected/transformed into our future bodies to enjoy “the liberty of the glory of the children of God” (8:21). It awaits what Paul in this verse calls **the redemption of our body**.

The result of experiencing this kind of *first fruits of the Spirit* is to produce an intense desire for its full realization in the future. Consequently, *we who have the first fruits of the Spirit*, and therefore walk in newness of life, do indeed **groan within ourselves** precisely because we long for the complete realization of **our adoption as sons** (see 8:15)—namely, *the redemption* of this present mortal body. In other words, we long for complete victory over all sin. Our spiritual resurrection is therefore *the first fruits* of our physical one. We eagerly wait for the full realization of our status as sons.

8:24-25. Paul now returns to a fundamental theme of Romans: **we have been delivered in hope**. The *deliverance* Paul has in mind is precisely the experience of walking in newness of life (6:4) that Paul has expounded in Rom 8:1-13.

The present “spiritual resurrection” of our bodies by the power of the indwelling Spirit is, by its very nature, a “first fruits” of our final resurrection and of our entrance into the unhindered experience of eternal life forever and ever.

Thus *we have been delivered in hope*, since the very experience of the Spirit’s power in our mortal bodies accentuates and deepens our longing and expectation (hope) for the *full* experience (that is, “the redemption of our body”).

However wonderful our present experience of the Spirit’s “delivering” power may be, it does not fulfill our ultimate longing, which is for a *perfect deliverance*. This “deliverance” **we do not see** yet, for if we did see it, it would no longer be **hope**.

The groanings of both creation and ourselves express our mutual longing and expectation. And when *our* hope is realized, so will also be realized the hope of creation itself (v 19).

In the meantime, as **we hope for what we do not see**, we should do so **with endurance**. With the mention of the word *endurance*, Paul will now turn to the intensely practical issue of how we bear up under our sufferings as **we wait** for the ultimate glorious reality which inspires our hope (see the discussion of 5:1-11).

How then can we endure sufferings? Paul addresses this in 8:26-32.

8:26-27. Paul now very deftly transitions to the theme of how to bear up under suffering. We urgently need divine **help in our weaknesses**.

In fact, *our weaknesses* are manifest precisely in our times of prayer. Into this gap comes the intercessory work of **the Spirit** who dwells within us.

Consequently, during our own **inarticulate groanings**, **the Spirit Himself makes intercession** for us. The preceding context speaks clearly of our own groanings (v 23), and the reference is surely to that. He prays the requests we ourselves do not know to pray.

God searches our hearts at such times and knows therefore what His Spirit within us desires (**the aspiration of the Spirit**). This is precisely the phrase that Paul also employs in 8:6. The realization of the Spirit’s “mind-set” is after all a realization of His aspiration for us. In Christian living (8:6) He desires us to experience “life and peace.” There is no reason to doubt that the aims of His intercessory work for us are exactly those things. In fact, when suffering is borne “with endurance” (8:25), it enhances our experience of “life and peace.”

That the intercession of the Spirit is unquestionably effective on our behalf is declared in the words **because He makes intercession on behalf of the saints in harmony with God**. This statement contains the first reference to believers as saints in Romans since 1:7.

In the Holy Spirit we have the ideal Intercessor in time of testing precisely because He and **the One who searches the hearts** are united in their aspiration for the saints.

8:28. This famous Pauline statement has been misunderstood.

The words **All things** (*panta*) do not refer to all events in our personal lives. Instead, they refer to *the entire creation* (vv 19-23). The Greek word often stood in the NT for the totality of existing things (cf. Heb 2:8-10).

From Paul's perspective, as we suffer for Christ, our groanings are part of the larger travail of "the whole creation" (v 22) which longs for freedom from sin and death. That, of course, is the ultimate **good**.

The phrase **those who love God** is the direct object of **work together with**. The meaning is that *all of creation works harmoniously together with those who love God to produce the good* that lies ahead in the age to come. Another way of putting this idea is that when we suffer as Christians, we participate in God's larger goal of preparing for the day when God's children are manifested (vv 19-21).

When a Christian suffers for Christ, he should no longer think of it as merely "his personal troubles," but rather as a part of God's glorious purpose for creation and for His "sons" whose "glory" is about to be revealed (vv 18-19). True Christian suffering is therefore an intrinsic part of a cosmic drama that is currently unfolding. To understand them that way is to find strength to endure them.

There are many sufferings that Christians bring on themselves because of their sinfulness, and Paul is not talking about these. He is talking rather about suffering *for Christ*.

In short, *those who love God* share deeply in God's cosmic plan. They do so precisely because they may also be described as **those who are called in harmony with His purpose**.

In the immediate context, God's purpose is clearly seen to be the release of *all things* (*panta*) from bondage to corruption at the same time as this release is manifested in the sons of God (vv 19, 21). God's purpose is that both God's children and the created order should experience this splendid freedom.

8:29-30. Laid out in these verses are five elements: [God] (1) **knew in advance**, (2) **predetermined**, (3) **called**, (4) **justified**, and (5) **glorified**.

(1) *Knew in advance*. Individual Christians in no way catch God by surprise when they become believers. In fact, God knew such believers far in advance of their exercise of faith.

(2) *Predetermined*. God predetermined (not *predestined*) that those so known should **share the likeness of His Son** (i.e., **not eternal salvation per se, but rather conformity to Christ**) so that **He might be the Firstborn among many brothers**. But as v 17 declares, *co-heirship* is also a possibility since if we *co-suffer* with Him, we shall also be *co-glorified* with Him.

(3) *Called*. According to v 28, those with whom "all things" are cooperating toward eternal "good" are those who have been "*called* in harmony with *His* purpose."

(4) *Justified*. In a context where suffering is the major concern, it is crucial that our fundamental relationship to God involves justification with its accompanying peace and access to the divine throne. Only in the assurance that such a relationship with God exists for us can we find the spiritual strength to endure our sufferings. The concept involved here is more fully explicated in vv 31-34.

(5) *Glorified*. Although glorification is actually future, here it is presented in the same past tense (aorist) as are the statements that precede it in this series. Since an aorist is quite capable of what the grammarians call a "gnomic" sense, its use as a statement of a fixed principle or a regular action is natural. All five of the aorists could well be rendered as "gnomic"—i.e., "those whom He knows in advance...predetermines...calls...justifies...glorifies."

Here Paul picks up the theme of "glory" mentioned first in v 17 and then developed in vv 18-21. The climactic statement of v 21

specifies the shared “glory” of the creation and the “children of God,” which is perfect freedom from the “bondage to corruption.” So, it is clear that “all the creation” (v 21) participates in the glory to which all the children of God are heirs. But the mention in v 29 of the Firstborn Heir also recalls the fact that Paul has already suggested that there is a *co-heirship* predicated on suffering (v 17b). But what does this mean in the present context?

The following verses make that clear.

8:31-32. What an encouragement the truth of vv 29-30 ought to be for the suffering believer. **If God is for us, who is really against us?** Who can truly oppose God?

But beyond this stabilizing fact, the believer also can expect, as a result of his sufferings, a tremendous compensation. Paul has already indicated in v 17b that we will be “co-heirs with Christ if we suffer together *with Him* so that we may also be glorified together *with Him*.” When He is glorified as the Ruler of all creation, they will be co-glorified *together with Him* sharing the same rulership.

Paul does not say that God has given **His own Son** to us, but **on behalf of us all**. That is, Christ died in place of us and for our eternal salvation.

Paul’s logic is clear. God **did not even spare** the life of *His own Son* but **delivered Him up** to lay it down *on behalf of us all*. If our eternal interests required God to make so enormous a sacrifice, why would He hesitate to give us the whole creation *together with* the Son He refused to spare?

The greater benefit (the death of God’s Son) makes the lesser one (*all things*) reasonable, even though both benefits are staggering to the human mind.

Here then we meet a theme that is extremely prominent in the NT (cf. Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-28; 3:21): the future King will rule *all things* and so will we *together with Him* if we

endure suffering for His sake. To co-suffer leads to being co-glorified with Jesus Christ in His exaltation over all creation (8:17b).

8:33-34. Paul proceeds in vv 33-34 to tie the suffering/glory theme again to the truth of justification.

In the midst of any experience of suffering there is the temptation to think, “I am guilty and I deserve this.”

But there is no legitimate condemning voice against the believer who co-suffers with Christ.

Who can **bring a charge against God’s chosen ones**? God Himself is the Justifier of such persons.

God does not accept charges against His *chosen ones* who are already in the stream of His plans for them which end in eternal Christlikeness (vv 29-30). After all, **He is the One who justifies them**. Nor can this justification be properly challenged by anyone (**Who is the one who condemns?**), since it is based on the fact that **Christ is the One who died and who also rose** (cf. 3:21-26; 4:22-25).

But here Paul adds that the Lord Jesus **also is at the right hand of God** and there He **also intercedes on our behalf**. Paul

nowhere else in his epistles refers to the intercessory work of Christ on our behalf in the presence of God. (He has referred to the intercession of the Holy Spirit within us: 8:27.)

8:35-37. Paul returns to the rich theme of God’s love (cf. 5:3-5). He has also made the cross of Christ the central demonstration of that love (5:8).

Here, however, Paul explicitly refers for the first time in Romans to **the love of Christ**. Our Intercessor is more than a disinterested defense attorney—His intercession is motivated by love.

Considering all that Christ has done, and is doing, for us, **who will separate us from** such love as that? Paul’s list (seven items) is intended to refer to all eventualities, whether living beings or any possible experience.

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However, the accumulation of words in v 35 is not intended to indicate matters that are fully distinct from one another. Instead, the accumulation of seven negative terms has a rhetorical effect equivalent to “nothing whatever.”

The first two, **tribulation** and **hardship**, are general words and are close to being synonymous. But the following five terms (**persecution**, **famine**, **nakedness**, **danger**, and **sword**) suggest the various forms in which *tribulation* and *hardship* often come.

Such troubles are attested by Scripture as experiences of the godly. Paul now takes up the words of Ps 44:22 and applies them to himself and to other suffering believers: “*for Your sake we are put to death all day long.*” As the previous verses of the Psalm disclose, this was not the result of sin (cf. Ps 44:20-21).

But tragic as the experience he describes may appear, **on the contrary** (i.e., despite appearances) in all these things **we are more than conquerors**.

This ultimate victory, Paul asserts, is achieved **through Him who loved us**. With the phrases “love of Christ” and Him who loved us in v 35 and “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v 39), Paul employs a triad of references to his Savior’s love that tie vv 35-39 together as a unit.


The suffering believer’s situation is impregnable and moves irresistibly toward complete and unequivocal victory.

8:38-39. In a superbly elegant hymn of praise to the permanence of God’s love in Christ, Paul brings the entire first movement of his first section (1:18–8:39) to a climactic conclusion. This virtual song of triumph is composed of ten elements combined into a strophic arrangement of 2 (death, life) + 3 (angels, principalities, powers) and 2 (things present, things to come) + 3 (height, depth, any other created thing). Paul affirms his complete conviction (**I am persuaded**) that none of the entities enumerated can separate him from the ongoing reality of divine love.

The experiences or forces which cannot cut the persecuted believer off from Christ’s love are: (1) **neither death nor life** (that is, nothing in our experience of living, nor in the cessation of that experience); (2) **nor angels nor principalities nor**

powers (that is, no supernatural being whatever its exalted position); (3) **nor things present nor things to come** (that is, no eventuality already present or that will be present in the future); **nor height nor depth nor any other created thing** (that is, nothing at the highest level of existence or the lowest level or anything in between).

In the final threefold enumeration, Paul is probably thinking of beings like Satan with access to heaven (height), of beings whose sphere is in the bowels of hell (depth), and of created beings wherever they may be (cf. Eph 1:19-23; Phil 2:9-11).

The Risen and Exalted One who is at the right hand of God (v 34) is for Paul the Possessor of absolute power over every experience and every being. He is the ultimate bulwark that shields us from separation from God’s love, inasmuch as that love is found in Him who is **Christ Jesus our Lord!** 



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



Bob speaking on God the Father. Watch on YouTube.

25th Annual Conference October 26- 29

It was originally scheduled for May 18-21. Due to Covid-19, it was pushed back. The venue changed from The Hope Center in Plano, TX, to Coppell Bible Fellowship.

The last few years we have had around 200 at our conference. With all the lockdowns, we were hoping to have more than 50 and ideally more than 100.

We had 110 on the first three days and 100 on the fourth. In person. Another 30 to 60 watched remotely on YouTube live. But the really encouraging part is



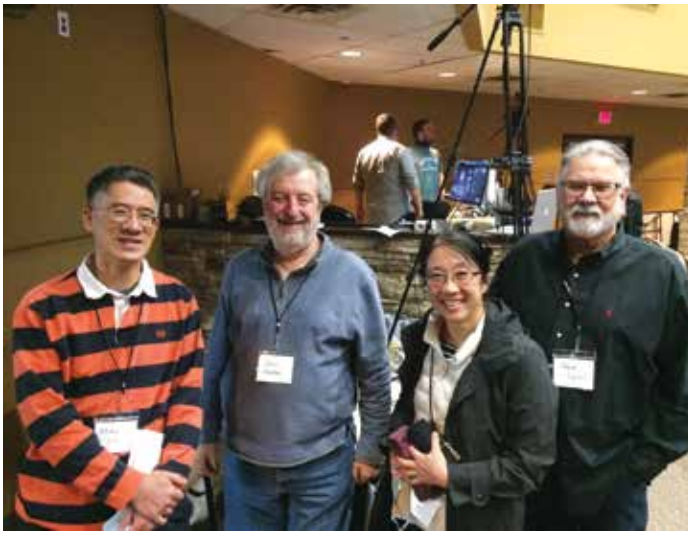
Shawn, the Pesces, and the Betheas

that all of the main messages and all the workshops in the main room, 19 messages in all, are available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/GESvids/videos>. Each of the messages has been viewed between 150 and 700 times in less than a week. So the total number of people who “attended” this year’s conference was well over 300. And we anticipate people continuing to watch these YouTube GES videos for months and years to come.

Here are some of the comments: “Awesome! Great to be here!” “So encouraging.” “The Conference exceeded my expectations, especially in light of Covid-19!” “Great experience!” “Excellent—so glad I attended.” “Stimulating, stretching, encouraging, at times convicting.” “Stimulating and provoking us to love and good deeds!” “Great!” “Mind-blowing. Pure Gold. Revolutionary.”



Distanced but full



Mike, David, Letitia, and Steve



Women's sessions were a hit (pictured Kristah Kitchen).

FGA Conference The Woodlands, TX

On October 12-14, Kathryn and I (Ken) attended the Free Grace Alliance National Conference in Houston, TX. This was the first time that either of us had attended it. The theme was "Grace in Community." Their conference is similar to ours in that they have plenary sessions in which everybody attends and then they have "break out" sessions where people can choose from 2 or 3 options. Many people came up to me and commented that they enjoy the GES magazine and blogs. A couple of speakers mentioned GES in a favorable light as well. Specifically, they were glad that we were putting our blogs into Spanish.

In keeping with the theme, a major emphasis was the need for more diversity in our churches. One plenary session was on grace in politics, and a few speakers spoke of the need to be open to diverse opinions in the political climate we find ourselves in.

Zoom Ministry

I (Ken) am continuing a study in the Book of Hebrews with the staff of the Bible college I teach at in Zambia. We do it through Zoom. We have gone more than halfway through the book, and we are using my commentary. Lord willing, we are hoping to go next summer to teach in person.

Also through Zoom, I am continuing to lead a study on the Gospel of John. We have arrived at the Upper Room Discourse. It is not a verse-by-verse study, but we discuss verses that impact Free Grace Theology. It started out involving some folks in Spain, but it now

includes people from different countries.

Kathryn is continuing her Zoom study with Free Grace Women. They just completed *Tough Texts* and will now study Bob's book, *Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*.

It was great seeing more women doing break out sessions at this year's annual conference. After the conference I (Kathryn) went for the weekend to record six sessions on "Testing Your Testimony" with Kristah Kitchen for the Free Grace Women group.



Sarah, Kathryn, Eily, and Kristah

100 Faith-Alone Verses in the Bible

Bob's new book was released at the conference. It is just under 300 pages. Most of the verses are covered in just two pages. Initial response has been good. Our hope is that this book will help many. You can buy it at our website for \$18.



The Mailbag

By You

Thanks for being faithful to promote and emphasize that salvation is only by grace, thru faith in Jesus Christ.” ~Vestavia Hills, AL.

“Greetings! Praising the Lord for the completion of *Faith Alone in 100 Verses*. I was able to get the Kindle version. This will be a very useful resource when talking with people. May the Lord keep you healthy as you continue to further understanding of the gift of eternal life and the reward for faithfulness!” ~Oswego, IL.

“May God bless GES’s ministry.” ~Dallas, TX.

“Thanks for the great magazine.” ~MN.

“God bless y’all. Keep up the word of the Lord, remaining strong in the face of the enemy!” ~Conroe, TX.

“Thank you. I am forever grateful to GES for clearly explaining how to have everlasting life.” ~Aurora, MO.

“Dear Bob, Shawn, and all who worked so hard to make the Conference so special. Although we were not there physically, we enjoyed and were edified by each speaker. Such a great thing does not just happen, so thanks again, and many blessings.” ~Irving, TX.

“My wife and I truly appreciate your magazine. Enclosed is a gift to support the good work that you are doing.” ~Titus, AL.

“I wanted to thank you for the recent national conference. I am not a pastor and have only come to hear clearly the Free Grace message over the last three years. I was so encouraged by this last conference, and yes, some of it went over my head, but I am encouraged to study more, learn




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the Bible in a deeper and more meaningful way, and I am excited about what God wants me to understand, rejoice in, give thanks in, and walk in faith. I give praise to God and thanks to the speakers for their hard work in their presentations with an emphasis on the distinctives of Free Grace.” ~email.

“Thank you for *Grace in Focus* magazine, and for your writing.” Chattanooga, TN.

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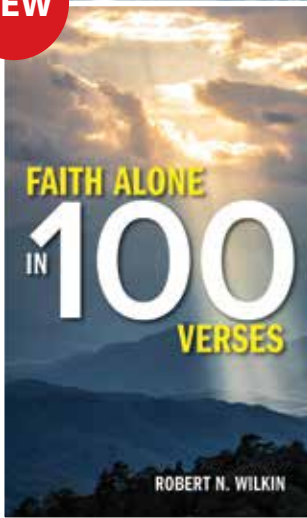
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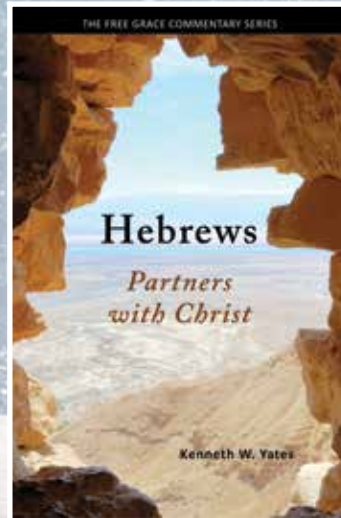
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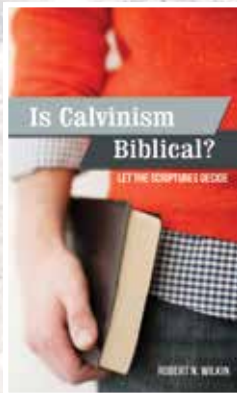
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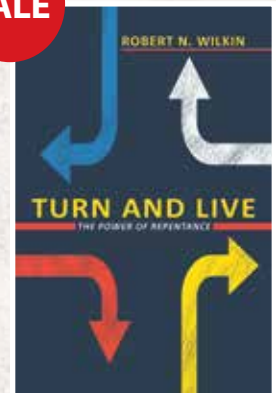
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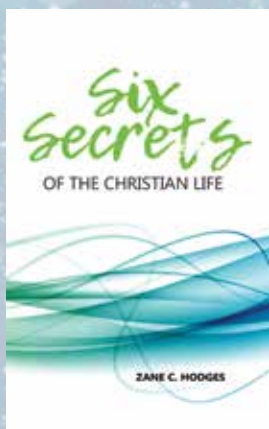
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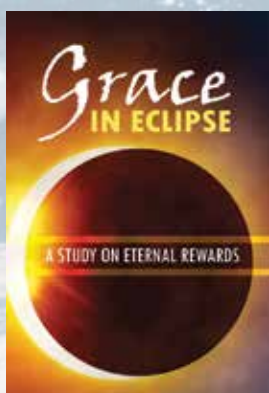


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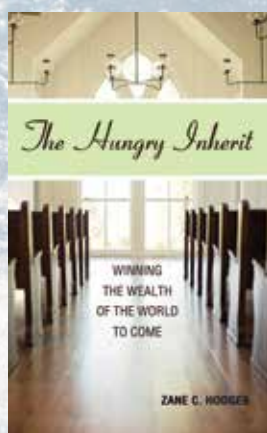


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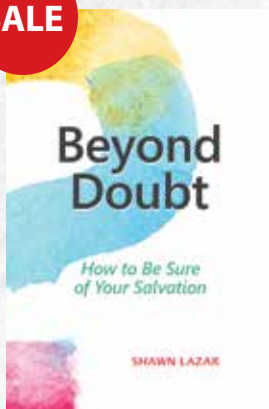
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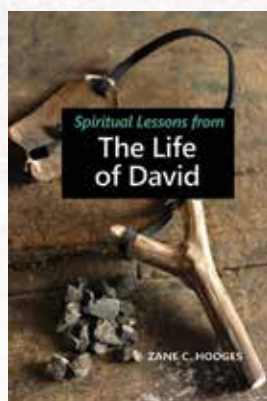


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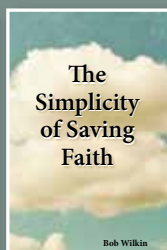
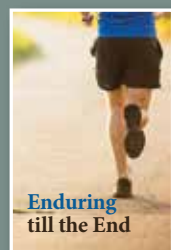


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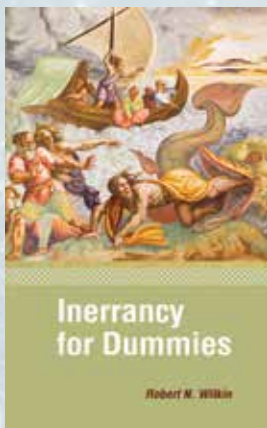
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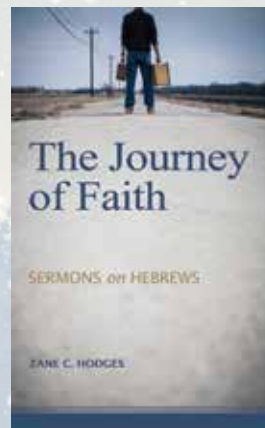


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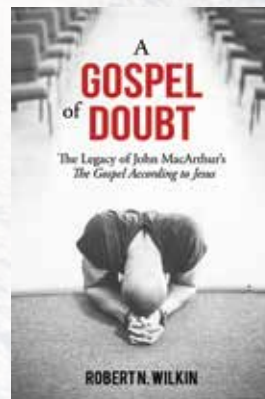


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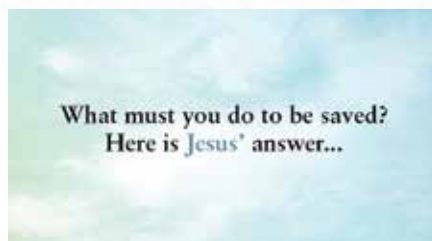


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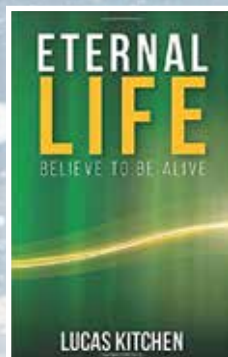


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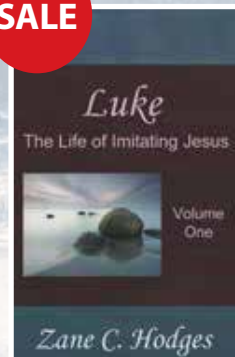
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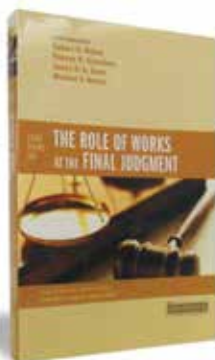


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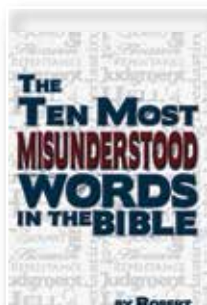


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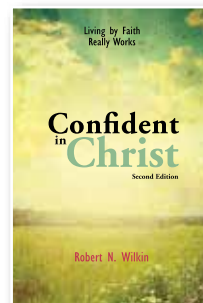


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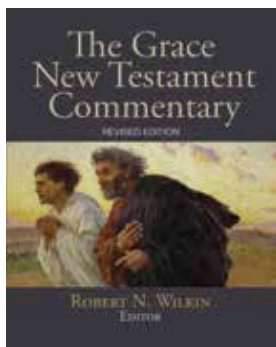


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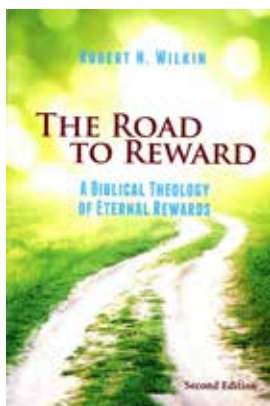
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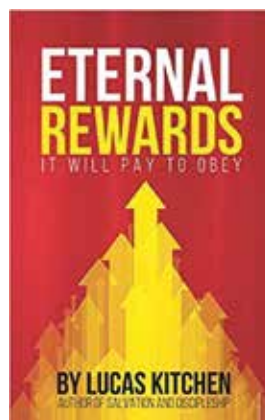
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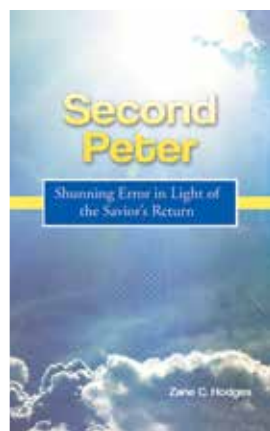
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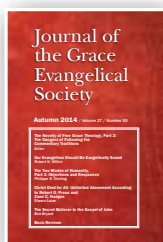
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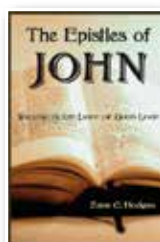
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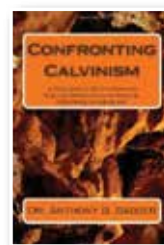


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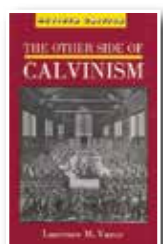


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GES Overseas and the Problem of Tithing

By Kathryn Wright

At the beginning of 2020, my dad, Ken Yates, and I had the opportunity to teach in Kenya through some friends: Catherine Ndinda and Jimmy Allan from Acres of Mercy. They run a school for young children outside of Nairobi. They also work towards reaching the pastors in their community with the gospel of grace. It was a wonderful time of fellowship and teaching. During our stay, Dad taught a few pastors' conferences, while I did a conference for Sunday School teachers and the pastors' wives. Lord willing, we will be able to return again in 2021.

CLASHING CULTURES

Whenever we teach overseas, we encounter different cultures and traditions. Sometimes, these traditions are benign, such as the food people eat or the songs they sing during worship.

Other times, those traditions can impact theology.

Assurance of salvation is often an obstacle when we teach overseas. Generally speaking, the pastors in Kenya are teaching that you can lose your salvation. For example, some Kenyans



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connect tithing to keeping or losing your salvation. Both Dad and I had repeated conversations with our students on the subject.

Tithing was highly emphasized in the worship services we attended in Kenya. It was not only tied to the idea that the Lord will prosper the giver, but it was also linked to his or her eternal salvation. For most of the pastors, tithing is their only source of income. So threatening the possible loss of salvation is one of their primary tools to guarantee that the congregation will tithe. In their minds, the alternative to issuing that threat is to risk going hungry.

To the native Kenyan, this is normal practice for the pastor and the congregation. These kinds of traditions often become the most difficult hurdles to overcome when teaching the truths of God's grace.

I was reminded of this issue again earlier this week when I received an email from one of my students in Zambia. Much like in Kenya, they are admonished to give to the church to receive wealth, happiness, and prosperity in this life.

Sadly, we often see works infiltrating the gospel, both overseas and here in the States. For Kenya, tithing is where this is often expressed.


To make matters worse, even if a pastor accepts eternal security, he will struggle with the issue of earthly prosperity as the prime motivation for giving. This kind of teaching distorts both discipleship truths as well as salvation.

There is much work to be done overseas, and I am encouraged by the response Dad and I had from those classes and the correspondence we have had since leaving Africa. Please be praying for future growth and opportunity as we aim to spread the truth of God's gift of eternal life by faith, apart from tithing or any other work, as we minister overseas.

Perhaps tithing isn't the specific tradition our churches struggle with. However, I think these examples should prompt us to be cautious in applying spiritual disciplines.

RESOURCES FOR TITHING

In August 2020, GES held a regional conference on spiritual disciplines in Miami, FL. I would highly recommend checking out the recordings from the conference (check our YouTube channel). Kent Young specifically spoke on the issue of tithing. Bob and Shawn did a *Grace in Focus Radio* episode on the issue of tithing as well, if you would like further information on the topic.

We all have traditions that can distort our understanding of the Lord's Word. May we strive to be Bereans (Acts 17:11) and aim to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, rather than being conformed to the traditions of this world (Rom 12:1-12). 




Kathryn Wright works for GES Missions.

A PARABLE FOR HIGHER CRITICISM

By R.C. Chapman

One day, while walking in the noon-day light of a mid-summer sun, beneath a cloudless sky, I was accosted by a person wholly a stranger to me, who, with kind, condescending air, made offer to show

me the way. I saw in his hand a lantern, and in it a lighted farthing candle. Pity checked my rising laughter; so, as gravely as I could, I declined his offer, and went on my way. I was afterwards told that his name was *Higher Criticism*. 

R. C. Chapman (1803-1902) was influential among the Plymouth Brethren. This is from Robert L. Peterson, *Robert Chapman: A Biography* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1995), 167. Submitted by Allen Rea.

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Goosebump Events in the Bible

By Marcia Hornok

When our children were young, we had fun singing “I Wonder How it Felt,” a song that imagines what Jonah, Paul, David, Daniel, and Miriam might have experienced before God rescued them.¹

As a spoof, I made up words for less-comfortable Bible events:

*I wonder how it felt to call your lying husband, “Yes, my Lord.”
I wonder how it felt to find your ear cut off by Peter’s sword.
I wonder how it felt to have your brothers throw you in a pit;
or hear your donkey scold you—think of it!
I wonder how it felt to pay your taxes from the guts of fish.
I wonder how it felt to sleep in church and die like Eutychus.*

Yes, Biblical accounts contain some intense, dramatic moments. Besides loved ones brought back from the dead and angels suddenly appearing—or worse yet, wrestling you all night—imagine how these experiences must have felt:

Your dad takes you on a hike and then ties you up and holds a knife at your throat to make you his sacrifice to God.

The ruler of Egypt threatens you severely and then sends all the guards out of the room while he sobs uncontrollably. He beckons you near and speaks in your own language, “I am Joseph, your brother.”²

What about God’s “special effects” at Mount Sinai, meant to put the “fear of God” into His people.

David and his warriors at Ziklag, exhausted from weeping over losing everyone they loved and everything they owned.³

Nathan points at you and declares, “You are the man.”

In one horrible day, “the greatest man in all the East” loses everything except his bitter wife and four messengers.

Elijah wins the contest against 450 bleeding prophets of Baal when his simple prayer brings fire from God to burn up even the rocks, water, and dirt.

Elisha witnesses the rapture of Elijah—so astonished he keeps saying, “My father, my father—the chariots and horsemen of Israel.”

The Aramean army has their eyes opened to realize they are captured by their enemy king, who is asking if he should kill them. “No, feed them,” Elisha replies.

Jonah realizes he didn’t drown but probably wishes he had.

In the NT, we can imagine how startled Zechariah was to be the one God spoke to after 400 years of divine silence.

The angel telling Mary, “The Lord is with you,” when God had never said that to a woman before. Pretty intense.

Mary of Magdala talking with the gardener, when He suddenly says her name and she realizes Jesus died but is not dead.⁴

The two Emmaus disciples getting a crash course in Christology from a Stranger and feeling their hearts burn with the thrill of it.

And then we have Peter. He hears the rooster. Jesus makes eye contact with him. He remembers that Jesus had warned or informed him that he would deny Him three times that evening. Peter runs away and weeps bitterly (Luke 22:61).

What Bible event stirs your emotions? Better yet, what have been your intense spiritual experiences? The amazing ecstasy that makes you shout, “Guess what God did!” Or the colossal failure that crushes you with overwhelming regret and remorse.

My brother-in-law, Pastor Dan Hornok said, “Did Peter remember what else Jesus had said? ‘Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat, but *I have prayed for you*, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers’” (Luke 22:31-32 NIV, emphasis added).

Dan went on to say that Jesus did not pray that Peter would resist Satan and not deny Christ. “Jesus prayed that Peter would realize that denying a relationship does not have to destroy the relationship.”


ENCOURAGED BY PRAYER

How often during hardships have you been encouraged by someone praying for you? In the fall, my husband and I suffered with the coronavirus. Before Ken felt sick, our entire family was infected at his 75th birthday party. They had mild cases, but Ken and I were down for a month. Friends and relatives told us they were praying. We took extra zinc, vitamins C and D, and everything else recommended to us.

One Saturday I was worried and depressed over how bad I felt. Our son Nathan brought an inhaler to me, and before he left, he said, “Stand up, Mom.” Wrapping me in a hug, he prayed into my ear. I was comforted.

A week later, when we were still not improving, I called a young friend in California. She had lived with us a few years ago, and I discerned she had the gift of faith. I said, “Jill, will you please pray for us over the phone?” She was glad to.

The next morning as we watched church on TV, Ken in the recliner and I on the sofa, he said, “I think I might have turned a corner.” I felt the same way. Sure enough, we improved every day after that. I’m convinced the main reason we completely recovered from COVID-19 was God’s people praying for us.

Consider your tough times and intense moments—both victories and failures. Recall what Jesus said to Peter and know we have that reality too, based on John 17:20 and Rom 8:34. Then put yourself into that children’s song I mentioned at the beginning: *I wonder how it felt to know that Jesus prays for me?* Doesn’t that give you goosebumps? 



Marcia Hornok writes from Salt Lake City where her husband pastored Midvalley Bible Church for 39 years. For a free digital copy of Marcia’s illustrated book of 40 brief evangelistic analogies, which you can print and distribute, email her at marcia.hornok@gmail.com (also available in KJV).

1. Attributed to Gloria and Bill Gaither.
2. Someone has conjectured that he sent the Egyptians out of the room so he could show his brothers his circumcision to prove his identity.
3. See “The View from Ziklag,” *Grace in Focus* (Sept/Oct 2019).
4. Thinking of this occasion, C Austin Miles wrote the beloved hymn, “In the Garden,” not as a Christian’s experience with Jesus today, but as Mary’s experience nearly 2000 years ago.

Re-Defining Discipleship?

By Cody Wallace

DALLAS WILLARD ON DISCIPLESHIP

Dallas Willard wrote a section on “Discipleship” for the *Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*. In it, he gives a concise history of how Evangelicals separated salvation from discipleship.

For example, Willard claims that WWII was great for soul winning, but bad for discipleship. In fact, he denied that Evangelicals had a theology of discipleship at this time:

There has simply been no consistent general teaching or practice under the heading of discipleship among evangelicals of this period: none that would be recognizable as discipleship in terms of biblical teaching or of the Christian past (p. 236).

He points to the Navigators as a sub-group most associated with discipleship. However, he criticizes their idea of discipleship as training people to do evangelism: “in them the essential disconnection between post WWII evangelicalism and discipleship prevailed and still prevails today” (p. 237).

CORRECT BELIEF IS NOT ENOUGH

In Willard’s opinion, failing to call Christians to obedience as a part of salvation led to bad theology and a lack of disciples. Willard argues the WWII era theologians overly stressed “correct belief alone,” and separated salvation and discipleship, which in his view was never the case in Scripture (p. 237). He claims that Evangelical theologians became too focused on defeating threats from science, liberal theology, and hostile worldviews, and failed to encourage those being taught to step out of “nominal Christianity.”

As we have noted, Post-WW II evangelicalism does not naturally conduct its converts and adherents into a life of discipleship, nor



into pervasive Christlikeness of character—with the routine, easy obedience that it entails. What this most recent version of evangelicalism lacks is a theology of discipleship. Specifically, it lacks a clear teaching on how what happens at conversion continues on without break into an ever fuller life in the Kingdom of God (p. 245).

THE PROBLEM WITH WILLARD’S DEFINITION

One can agree with Willard that the post-WWII church focused too much on the evangelistic portion of the Great Commission “Go.” The word *go* in the Greek is *poreuthentes*, and it has a very complicated definition...it means *go*.

Believers are commanded to get up and move. And while you go, sharing the gospel is implied.

The problem with Willard’s definition of discipleship is his poor understanding of salvation. He believes that salvation requires obedience and sacrifice and that ultimately it can be costly. If that were true, then salvation would no longer be by grace, nor be a free gift (Eph 2:8-9).

Willard quotes Paul: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (in Phil 2:12). He claims that verse shows that salvation and discipleship are one: “this calling and reality was not thought by earlier evangelicals to be for a special group of people” (p. 240). Willard is claiming that a believer must work for and at salvation. Paul contradicts this statement in Galatians 3:

This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:2-5 NASB).

WHILE DISCIPLESHIP TAKES WORK, SALVATION IS A GIFT

Willard fails to see the difference between the free gift of eternal life and a choice to follow Jesus in discipleship.

Scripture speaks of individuals having salvation and rejecting discipleship.

John 8:31 says a group of Jews believed in Jesus, and He told them the next step was to be in His teaching (v 32).

In John 2:24, Jesus would not trust Himself to those that believed. That is, Jesus did not spend time developing them into disciples because He did not trust their hearts.

In the Epistles, Paul says the Corinthian church cannot be talked to as spiritual people (1 Cor 3:1), although he addresses them as brothers; he speaks of growing into maturity as a man and doing away with childish things (1 Cor 13:11).

Paul tells Titus the Cretans are wicked, lazy and not to be trusted, but rebukes them so they can grow in their faith, implying they were believers (Titus 1:12-13).

The writer of Hebrews says his readers should be teachers, meaning they should have excelled in discipleship to the point of being teachers (Heb 5:12-14). What that means is someone can accept the free gift of eternal life, while rejecting the cost of discipleship.

AGREEING VS FOLLOWING

In ancient times, there was a line between agreeing with a rabbi and following one.

The one that agrees could understand, trust, and believe a rabbi's teaching, but he did not have to commit to modeling his life after the rabbi.

And not every Jewish person became a scribe or Pharisee—that was only for the dedicated.

Believers in Jesus can fall in the same categories. You can agree with His teaching on the law, believe that His word is true, and believe in Him for eternal life (1 Tim 1:16), but that does not mean you have made the decision to drop all and follow Him in discipleship. “[T]he premiere experience for the Christian is to embrace both salvation and discipleship as two critical aspects of a saved and abundant life.” (Kitchen, *Salvation and Discipleship*, p. 25).

Discipleship is not a co-condition with faith to have eternal life, and your success or failure as a disciple does not alter the fact of your salvation. Salvation and discipleship are distinct. Jesus both offers salvation freely (Rev 22:17) and wants all believers to grow in Him through a commitment of discipleship. To put it simply, “Salvation is free, but discipleship is costly” (Bing, *Grace*, 71).

In Jesus' time rabbis and Pharisees called their decision to follow a rabbi being *yoked* to them, meaning they would try to live under the burden of their specific interpretation of the Law.

Likewise, Jesus described His own teaching as a *yoke* that was easy and light (Matt 11:30). The yoke was His instruction to His disciples of what it takes to follow Him and live by His lifestyle. When Jesus says “‘follow’ Jesus refers to becoming a disciple.” (Bing, *Grace*, 75). The flaw in Willard's view is a failure to see Jesus' command in Matthew 28 is to “*make* disciples.”

DISCIPLES ARE MADE

Believers are converted, but disciples are made. The Greek word for “make disciples,” *mathēteusate*, means to create or make a learner. “A disciple is someone who is saved and in a learning or growing posture in relationship to Jesus...a Christian is someone who believes in Jesus Christ as Son of God who died for sins, rose again, and guarantees salvation” (Bing, *Grace*, pp. 3-4). The mature are being called to guide, direct and instruct individuals. They are called to help change people into followers who live God's Word.

Jesus' approach kept the ingrain method of a rabbi teaching all He knew of Scripture,

application, practice, and interaction with both man and God. Jesus formed disciples, instilled application and life into those that followed Him, and that is how the Church should *make disciples*.

THINK LIKE AN ANCIENT

Jesus was a rabbi to His followers and they were His disciples. This system of mentorship was common in ancient cultures. Men such as Socrates, Philo, and Herodotus trained their groups of students to apply their theories and philosophies to life. Bill Hull notes, “Plato, Socrates, and Herodotus all used disciple to mean ‘learner’ or ‘one who is a diligent student’...philosophers generally understood that the disciple’s life involved apprenticeship, a relationship of submission, and a life of demanding training” (Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, pp. 53-54). Scripture mentions other groups of disciples, i.e., Jesus’ twelve disciples, John the Baptist’s disciples, and the Pharisees’ disciples (John 1:35; 3:25; Luke 5:33; 7:19). Paul, when he was known as Saul of Tarsus, was being discipled by Gamaliel, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34; 22:3). The Talmud and Mishnah also mention how rabbis followed this style of training. Discipleship was not the creation of Jesus, though He used it to create a movement.

Discipleship was not just the practice of Jesus or of the Jewish people; it was a widespread practice of teachers to learn how to model life (Matt 16:24-27). The beginning of Christian discipleship was born with the Jewish Rabbi/Messiah/God in flesh calling a group of twelve to follow and giving them a command to become multipliers. The importance of the command to make more learners was not lost on His eleven remaining followers. Historical accounts show Peter and John discipled Clement of Rome (*The Complete Book*, pp. 53-54). John is believed to have discipled Ignatius, Polycarp, Clement, and Papias, who in turn had disciples of their own (*The Complete Book*, pp., 78-79).

Paul was also busy in discipling the next generation of followers. Acts and Paul’s Epistles record him mentoring Silas, Luke, John-Mark, Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus, among others.


Yet, even though Paul, and any other follower of Jesus, was in the role of a rabbi or mentor, his goal was not to create more Pauls, as was the goal of the Pharisees and rabbis, but to point them back to Jesus (1 Cor 11:1). Jesus called His disciples to create other disciples of *Him*, not themselves. Paul’s disciples would influence and grow the churches he planted (Acts 17:14; 1 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:5). The command to make disciples was not broken. The disciples carried the teachings of Christ and passed them on to faithful men who would continue sharing (2 Tim 2:2). Since the early days of the Hebrews, discipleship was a style of life that was demanding and not for all. Though all enjoyed the local rabbis teaching, only a few chose to sit at his feet and model his teaching and lifestyle. This is what readers should keep in mind as they see *teacher*, *rabbi*, and *disciple* in the NT.

IN ANSWER TO WILLARD

How should we respond to Dallas Willard’s understanding of discipleship?

Let us start by saying he is right that many Christians have lost their way concerning discipleship.

How should discipleship work?

Spiritually mature believers should guide the immature in application, understanding, and lifestyle. Living Jesus’ word is costly; just try living the Sermon on the Mount and see how difficult and painful that is. But things that take effort are worth it because they make us more like Him (Matt 10:25). The mature cannot force the walk of discipleship on baby or rebellious believers; that is why discipling takes great patience (2 Tim 4:2). Everyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life (John 6:47), but not every believer becomes a disciple. Instead, be wise disciple makers find the faithful, able and teachable (2 Tim 2:2), and then you can say, “follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). 



Cody Wallace is senior pastor of Southwest Community Church in Miami, FL. He is married to Meg and they have three children.

Top 5 Words for the Weary

By Summer Stevens

As we usher in another year and the world continues to spiral even farther into an orbit of suspicion, fear, and strife, I find myself echoing Habakkuk's cry. "How long, O Lord...?" How long will You allow this to continue? How long will fear dominate the day? How long will anger be the most common denominator? How long will all of these restrictions last? Every trip to the grocery store leaves me with an odd feeling in the pit of my stomach that something has gone very, very wrong with the world.

Habakkuk didn't like the state of his world, either. Violence was the rule; the good guys always lost, and God seemed to sit idly by and "hold his tongue" (1:13). If you are feeling weary, wondering where God is, and what you are supposed to do, let me encourage you with these five words from the Book of Habakkuk.

Watch. "Look among the nations and watch—be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you" (1:5). This is a fascinating passage. Habakkuk is lamenting the evil in the world, and God responds by saying, *just you wait!* I'm getting a people ready who are "terrible and dreadful" and "more fierce than evening wolves" (1:7-8). I don't know about you, but if I cried out to God about the evil in the world, I would be mighty surprised if He responded, "Summer, wait until you see the train wreck of terror and destruction I'm preparing to take care



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of all the evil you're worried about." We don't often pray for, or even expect, these kinds of answers from God, but the main point here is, God is at work. He is not silent. He has not forgotten. Even amid incomprehensible chaos, God has not lost control. He is not causing the evil, but it isn't a surprise to Him, and He can use it for His purposes. So, dear friends, watch. Watch for God's movement, even in unlikely places.

Faith. In God's second response to Habakkuk, He urges patience for the hearer, to wait for the vision. Then God contrasts the two types of hearers: "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith" (2:4). We are called to be faithful in times of trial; it demonstrates our belief in God's sovereignty and power. As Christians, we are called to be the just, the ones who live according to his faith. We are to wear the lens of faith every day as it colors every conversation, every thought, and every action. This is a choice and a challenging one! We can believe that Jesus has saved us and yet not live daily "by faith." Instead, there are many Christians today who are living by fear or by resentment. Ultimately, if we are not living by faith, we are living by another measure. God calls that pride.

Though. Chapter 3 concludes with a beautiful picture and affirmation of Habakkuk's faith. He has questioned God honestly and humbly, and God responded. Three times Habakkuk describes

CONTINUED ON P. 44



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scarcity, beginning with the word *though*: “*though* the fig tree may not blossom...*though* the labor of the olive tree may fail...*though* the flock may be cut off from the fold...” (v. 17). I appreciate these verses because our faith is not on the basis of all going well. In fact, our faith is tested when life isn’t going well, when everything we try seems to fail and there simply is nothing else left but God, and we cling to Him because we *know* Him and love Him. Some things are legitimately really hard now. David said it best in Psalm 23, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...” The world is uncertain. But that’s okay. When comforts and even needs are stripped away, the true source of our faith is revealed.

Yet. Verse 18 is when hope cracks through the despair, when the sun shines after a storm, and when the hero emerges alive and well from the collapsed and burning building. *Though* we are hungry and desperate and utterly destitute, “**Yet** I will rejoice in the Lord.” Yet. Even still. Although. Nevertheless. Even when all seems lost and I’m a fool for believing. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. Brothers and sisters, how I long for that kind of heart, don’t you? I don’t know what your “thoughts” are, but if you are weary and looking for relief, I can guarantee I know what your “yet” is. Because it is the “yet” of all believers. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. The verse continues, “I will joy in the God of my salvation.” It is only, *only* in God that we can withstand the

heartaches of our present circumstances, and through rejoicing, through worship, we can endure.

Strength. I love that the passage doesn’t end there. Yes, there are troubles, and yes, we can have joy despite our circumstances, but God doesn’t stop there. “The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills” (v. 19). When we choose to rejoice in the Lord, He will give us the strength to do things that we didn’t have the desire or ability to do. We are not mustering that strength on our own; God Himself is our strength! Picture the feet of a tired and hungry and weary person, trudging along a path...now imagine the gait of a deer, unhindered and free, not even in a field, but on a hill no less! Talk about renewed energy and vigor! God offers that to us, His dear children, when we are weary. If this is you, take some time this month in the Book of Habakkuk, meditating on God’s character, His promises, and His heart for His people.



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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A winter-themed background with a snowy landscape, evergreen trees, and a soft blue sky. The page is divided into two columns by a vertical line, each containing ten horizontal lines for writing.

Eternal Security in John's Gospel

By Shawn Lazar

Does John's Gospel teach that Jesus promised everlasting life that can never be lost?

Does it teach eternal security?

Is the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" true?

The answers are yes, yes, and yes.

How do I know? Read each of the following verses:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but 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" (John 4:13-14).

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

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"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (John 6:39).

"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

Here are nine reasons why believers are eternally secure.

First, whoever believes *has everlasting life* (cf. John 3:16, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:47). How long is everlasting life? Everlasting. It is not temporary, but forever. If you could lose it, it would not be everlasting.

Second, whoever believes *will never perish* (John 3:16). If you could perish, as many Christians teach, then Jesus' promise would be false. It is only true because the believer is eternally secure.

Third, whoever believes *will never thirst* (John 4:10-14; 6:35). The Lord was comparing the "living water" He would give the Samaritan woman to drink with the well water she had



come to fetch. The well water would leave her thirsty again. But if she drank His living water, she would “never thirst” again, but it would “spring up into everlasting life” (v 14). If you could lose your salvation, then you would thirst again. But Jesus says that cannot happen. The believer who drinks once “will never thirst.”

Fourth, whoever believes *will not come into judgment* (John 5:24). Jesus is speaking about eternal salvation here. Why won’t the believer come into judgment? Because the moment you believe, you get eternal life, so your eternal destiny has already been decided. You are eternally secure.

Fifth, whoever believes *will never hunger* (John 6:35). Just as Jesus compared believing in Him to drinking living water, He also compared it to eating bread. If you eat the bread of life (i.e., believe in Him), you will never hunger again. If you could go hungry by losing your salvation, then this promise would not be true. If you had to keep on eating to stay full, this would not be true. But Jesus promises that the believer will never hunger ever again. It is forever.

Sixth, whoever believes *will never be lost* (John 6:39). Once Jesus has you, He will never lose you. (Even if, in this case, the direct application may be to corporate Israel).

Seventh, whoever believes *will never be cast out* (John 6:37). How many churches teach that you can be cast out if you aren’t good and faithful?

Well, that’s wrong. Jesus said it would never happen.


Eighth, whoever believes *will never be snatched away* (John 10:28). Once you are in Jesus’ hand, there’s no leaving it, falling from it, or slipping through His fingers. He won’t cast you out, and no one can snatch you away. You are secure.

Ninth, whoever believes *will never die* (John 11:25-26). Jesus was talking to Martha about spiritual death. Once you have everlasting life, you will never die spiritually. If you could die spiritually, then this promise would be false. But that will never happen. If you believe, you will never die.

Friend, do you see that the only salvation that Jesus gives is everlasting? Dwight Pentecost once said,

When God offers a man life, God offers a man only one kind of life, and that is eternal life. Eternal life is the life of God, and as God’s life could never be terminated by death, so the life of God, given to the child of God, could never be terminated (*Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*, p. 127).

Any other kind of salvation is not what Jesus promised.

But what about the warning passages in Scripture? They exist but be sure to read them in context. They cannot contradict Jesus’ promises. The truth is, there is much that a believer can lose if he or she disobeys, but everlasting life is not one of them. That life is not only for now but forever and ever. 



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

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