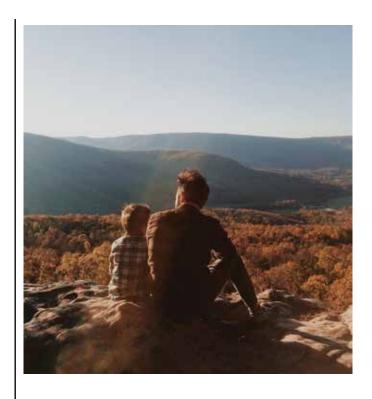


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# **GRACE IN FOCUS**

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# FROM THE EDITOR

he last week has been very odd. We can go years without snow or ice in the Dallas area. We can go decades without having temperatures below 10 degrees Fahrenheit. In the last week we've had snow and what for us are low temperatures. For various reasons electric companies have instituted rolling blackouts around the state. Mark, Bethany, and Shawn were all victims of that. The power would suddenly go off, and then one to two hours later, it would come back on for an hour or so. Then off again.

Two of our neighbors had pipes burst.

On Tuesday, Shawn and I came into the office and there was no water in the building, though we had power. Mark, Bethany, and Shawn, and I are all here today, Thursday, and we are the only people in our building or parking lot. Nearly everything is closed, including gyms, most restaurants, most gas stations, schools, day care, and even some grocery stores.

However, we have it easy compared to much of the country. Pastor Bill Lee in Wisconsin reported that he was thrilled when after 3 days of temperatures below zero, the temperature actually got into single digits. Imagine the daytime *high* below zero!

However, praise God that while there may not be power in our houses, there is always power in Jesus' promise of everlasting life.

What a privilege it is to be able to share the messages of life and life more abundant with people via our magazine, blogs, podcasts and radio, YouTube videos, books, and conferences.

As I write this, Ken and Kathryn are boarding a plane for Frankfurt today and Nairobi tomorrow. They will be speaking for ten days in Kenya.



Power in the Promise

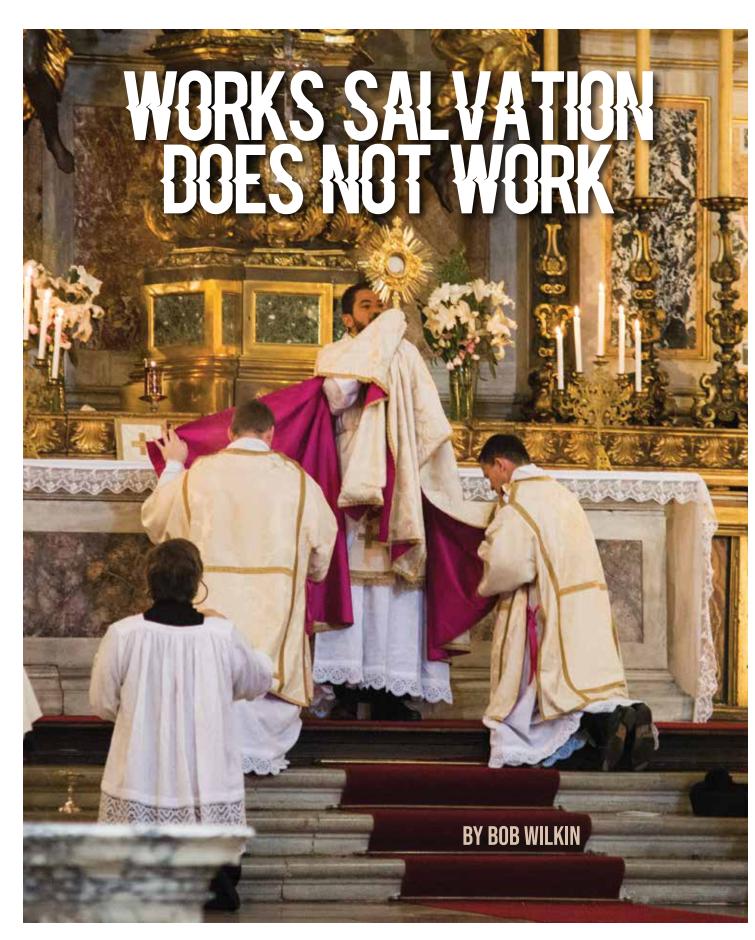
Robert N. Wilkin, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Isn't that appropriate. Ken Yates in Ken-ya. What are the odds?

Many of you support this ministry with your prayers and gifts. We are so thankful for your partnership. People criticize us for promoting what they call *easy believism*. We wonder, though. If it is so easy to believe this, then why do so few believe the faith-alone message?

In this magazine you will find articles on everything from works salvation to Joseph to sonship in Romans to the Lord's Supper. May these articles warm you up in these very cold days.

Sof Will.



"Many, if not most, Evangelicals believe in works salvation. The message of most Calvinists and Arminians is essentially the same message as Roman Catholics."

he Reformers argued that the message of Rome would not save. Most Protestants argued that way until the middle of the twentieth century. Billy Graham started putting Roman Catholics on the podium with him. The result was that around 1955 Fundamentalists rejected the message and ministry of Billy Graham. Even though Evangelicals did not believe that Roman Catholics were born again, they did not separate from Billy Graham. But over time that changed. Today many Evangelicals think that Roman Catholics are born again.

### EARLY EXPERIENCES WITH WORKS SALVATION

I came to faith in the fall of 1972 through the ministry of Cru (then Campus Crusade for Christ). This was the height of what was called the Jesus movement.

After two years as a student leader with Cru, I joined the staff and served four years in college ministry. Aside from a few dozen or so atheists, agnostics, and people from other religions, nearly every one of the people I evangelized one-on-one (around 1,000) believed in works salvation.

Evangelism Explosion was big at that time. It had started in 1962. I, and many Cru staff, loved the EE question, "If you were to die tonight and God asked, 'Why should I let you into My heaven,' what would you say?" Most people would point to their works, like the people in

Matt 7:21-23. We would then explain that we cannot be saved by our works.

We would often circle back to that question after sharing Christ with the person. If the person indicated he now believed in Christ for his salvation, we'd ask, "Let's say you live a godly life for 20 years and then you become a drug addict and die of an overdose before you can repent. Where would you go?" If he said, "I'd go to hell," then we would again show him verses that say that once a person believes in Jesus for his eternal salvation, then he is secure forever.

# **EVANGELICALS ACCEPT WORKS SALVATION**

Today the situation has changed a lot. Now many, if not most, Evangelicals believe in works salvation. The message of most Calvinists and Arminians is essentially the same message as Roman Catholics. They all believe that in order to obtain what they call *final salvation*, one must repent of his sins, surrender, commit, obey, and persevere in faith and good works.

Even in Free Grace circles, there are some who believe that although works salvation is a flawed message, it is nonetheless a saving message because it proclaims that Jesus is God and that He died on the cross for our sins and rose bodily from the dead. If we believe that, we are born again even if we believe we must turn from our sins, be baptized, and persevere until



death in faith and obedience in order to escape condemnation.

### YOU CAN'T BE SAVED BY A FALSE GOSPEL

The Bible explicitly says that works salvation does not work. There are many verses which say that people cannot be born again by believing in a faith-plus-works message.

In Galatians Paul was writing against false teachers whom we call *Judaizers*. These men were saying that faith in Christ was insufficient for justification. Instead, in addition to believing in Jesus, the Judaizers said that one must follow the Law of Moses faithfully, including the requirements of circumcision for all males (cf. Gal 5:2-6). Paul indicated that the Judaizers were proclaiming a false gospel and he anathematized them (Gal 1:6-9).

Works salvation was explicitly rejected at the Jerusalem Council as well. Judaizers were claiming that one had to keep the Law of Moses to be saved (Acts 15:1). The Council said that is a false message, that one is born again by faith in Christ, apart from works (cf. Acts 15:7-11).

The same rejection of works salvation is found in the teaching of the Lord Jesus. The Lord was asked, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28). Notice that they ask about *works*. *Plural*. They are thinking in terms of God's commands. The Jewish people often for this very reason asked about the greatest

commandments. The Lord's answer is simple and profound: "This is the work [singular] of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). The Father sent the Son to proclaim the promise of everlasting life to the believer (cf. John 5:24). The only "work" anyone can do to be born again is to believe in Jesus, the One whom the Father sent. The Lord went on to make this crystal clear: "He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). He added, "he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47). The only action a person can take to be born again is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That same idea is found in the Lord's remarks in John 5:39-40: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me [=believe in Me, see John 6:35] that you may have life." Life is not found by trying to keep God's commands, even if that work is combined with believing some sound doctrine. One is born again by faith alone, or he is not yet born again at all.

In no uncertain terms, Paul said in Rom 4:4-5 that a person can only be justified by faith in Christ, apart from works: "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness..."

Works salvation does not work.

# ANYONE CAN BELIEVE AND BE SAVED

The promise of life is the promise that the moment a person believes in Jesus for everlasting life, he has that life and can never lose it. No matter what. That means that there are born again people who today believe in works salvation.

I am convinced that many Roman Catholics are born again. The reason is simple. If anyone ever believed in Jesus for the free gift of everlasting life, then his salvation is secure forever. Many Roman Catholics had a time in their lives when they believed the faith-alone message. It may have been when they attended a meeting like Young Life or Fellowship of Christian Athletes in high school. It could have been when they met with someone from the Navigators or Campus Crusade for Christ in college. It could have been a discussion with a friend at work. The fact that a Roman Catholic believes in works salvation today does not mean that he never believed in Christ for everlasting life.

The same is true with works salvation Eastern Orthodox and Protestants. Many of them are born again in spite of the fact that they do not believe the promise of life at this time. But they did at some point in the past.

For years I said that only 5% to 10% of professing Christians today may be born again. I even wrote that in some GES articles. One day I was challenged on that statement by my friend, Bob Swift. He was a brilliant guy who is now with the Lord. He came to my office and said something like this:

"You cannot say that only a small percentage of professing Christians are born again. You have no way of knowing that. True, only a small percentage of people in Christendom currently believes the faith-alone message. But you have no way of knowing what percentage of those people believed in the free gift of everlasting life in the past and then fell away. Nor do you know what percentage will come to believe in the free gift in the future. The percentage could be 30%, 40%, 50% or more. We have no way of knowing. You need to drop that 5% to 10% figure."

Talk about convicting.

I could immediately see that what Bob said was right.

Since I had come to faith in 1972, I believed the once-saved-always-saved message. But I had not taken that into account when I estimated what percentage of professing Christians were saved.

Since that conversation with Bob Swift, I have stopped giving a figure on what percentage of professing Christians are born again. I realize I have no way of knowing that.

However, it is one thing to say that there are people who are still born again in spite of the fact that they now believe in works salvation. It is quite another to say that people who have never believed in the promise of everlasting life are born again because their works salvation beliefs are saving beliefs.

## **BELIEVE JESUS' PROMISE**

Works salvation is a message that is rejected by the Word of God. Works salvation does not work.

John 3:16 is clear. To be born again one must believe that what Jesus promises is true. That is, one must believe that whoever believes in Him will not perish but has everlasting life. That same message appears over one hundred times in the Bible. See my book *Faith Alone in One Hundred Verses* for a discussion of some of those verses.

GIF



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 44 years, Sharon.

# Son<sup>99</sup> in Romans

# By Ken Yates

he word "son" occurs 12 times in the Book of Romans (1:3, 4, 9; 5:10; 8:3, 14, 19, 29, 32; 9:9, 26, 27). Seven of those times it refers to Jesus as the Son of God. Once it refers to Isaac as the son of Abraham. Once it refers to the Jews as the sons of Israel, and another time to Gentiles being called the sons of God. These account for 10 of the 12 occurrences of the word in the book.

The other two times the word occurs has caused some confusion among interpreters. In Rom 8:14, Paul writes, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." In this verse, when the apostle refers to the sons of God, many assume he is talking about all believers. After all, it is maintained, all believers are sons of God.

The problem, however, is that it does not say that all believers are sons of God. It says that all those who are *led by the Spirit* can claim that title. If we conclude that Paul means to say that all Christians are sons of God, then we must also conclude that all Christians are led by the Spirit.

But this is obviously not correct. Our experience bears this out. There are many believers who are not led by the Spirit. We know many

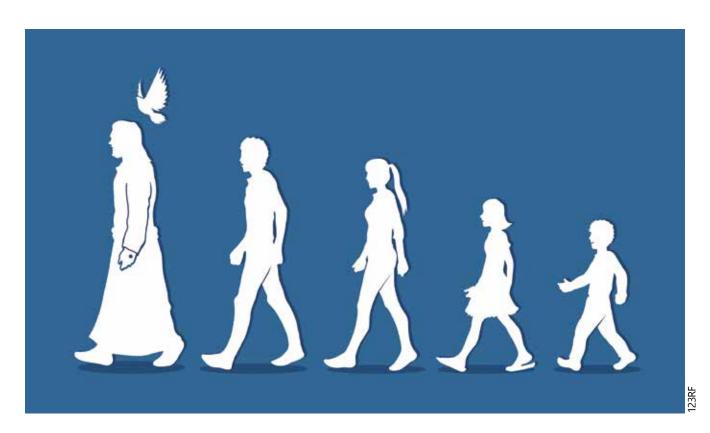
such believers, and we can look at our own lives and see times when we were not led by the Holy Spirit.

Paul makes it clear what being led by the Spirit means. It means living our lives by the power of the Spirit and not in the power of our own flesh. This has been the whole point of Romans 6–8. Paul also makes it clear that believers have a choice. We can live by our flesh, in our own power, or we can live by the power of the Spirit. In fact, Paul says this in the verses immediately before verse 14 (vv. 12-13). Walking by or being led by the Spirit is anything but automatic!

Another interesting verse in this discussion is found just two verses later. In Rom 8:16, Paul says that believers are the *children* of God. He uses a different word. The word for "son" is *huios*, while the word for "child" is *teknon*. All believers are children of God but, in Romans, only those believers who live by the power of the Spirit are sons of God (however, in Gal 4:1-7 Paul uses "sons" in a positional sense).

Many believe that Paul just used two different words to refer to the same thing. In this line of thinking, being a child of God and being a son of God are the same thing. But that misses Paul's





point. He means exactly what he says. If you have believed in Jesus for eternal life, you are a child of God. After believing, if you then walk by the Spirit, you will also be a son of God. When you walk by the Spirit, you live a life that reflects who you are. As a "son," you reflect the character of your heavenly Father.

Very simply, a child is an immature offspring of the Father. A son is one who grows up and is mature. Suppose a man named Bill is the father of a newborn child. That baby, by its actions, does not reflect who his father is. But as that baby grows, he can adopt many of the mannerisms and thoughts of Bill. If he does, it can become clear to others that Bill is his father. Others will look at that mature child and say, "You can tell that is Bill's son."

This is what Paul means. When a person is a believer, the Spirit of God dwells in him. If he walks by the Spirit, the Spirit will produce the qualities of the Father in that believer. He can then be called the "son" of God.

The last time the word "son" occurs in Romans bears this out as well. In Rom 8:19, Paul says that all of creation "eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." This, of course, is talking

about when Christ returns and establishes His kingdom. On that day, all believers will have glorified bodies and sin will be no more. On that day, all believers will live in perfect righteousness and reflect the holy character of their Father.

If you have believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life, you have that life and it can never be lost. You have been born from above from your Father (John 3:7) and are His child. But you can grow in the life He has given you. You can, by the power of the Spirit, become a mature son of God. To the degree that you do so, the life that you live here and now can reflect how you will live forever when *the* Son returns.



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 9

# A Concise Commentary

From The Grace New Testament Commentary (Revised Edition)

By Zane Hodges

# INTRODUCTION: PAUL'S GRIEF FOR ISRAEL (9:1-5)

9:1-2. Paul strongly asserts that he is telling the truth about his concern for the spiritual state of Israel. He forcefully adds, I am not lying, and my conscience bears witness with me in the Holy Spirit.

Paul's attitude toward Israel is based on what the Scriptures reveal about that nation's relationship to God. His feelings are his own but are also mediated to him by the Spirit through the Scriptures.

He has profound sadness over the state of Israel. His emotional reaction is one of both grief and pain in his heart. They are said to be great and unceasing. His feelings for Israel are neither shallow nor intermittent.

**9:3.** The verb in **I...could wish** can mean "I almost wish." The word **accursed** does not suggest eternal condemnation. Physical death, perhaps by execution, is the worst that the word implies (Acts 23:14).

It is likely that this deeply Christ-like man might at times almost have wished that he could undergo death for his brothers, his fellow-countrymen according to the flesh, just as Jesus had done for him. But, of course, no such possibility was available to him. Paul is speaking here out of very deep emotions.

**9:4-5.** Paul's grief for Israel is also based upon Israel's relationship with God. They are Israelites, which denotes special divine favor (Gen 32:28).

Paul lists six blessings that they have received: Adoption as sons (Exod 4:22-23); the glory; the covenants; the legislation; the sacred service; and the promises. God had called them His son, revealed His glory to them, made covenants with them (Deut 5:3; 19:1), gave them stipulations through the Law of Moses, gave them a Godordained system of worship, and gave them many promises, including the promise of the coming Messiah.

By specifically stating to whom belong the fathers Paul indicates that the nation benefited from being the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But above all other things—and climactically—it must be said that this is the nation from whom came Christ according to the flesh. That the nation of Israel produced "the Savior of the world" (see John 4:22, 42) is indeed the very pinnacle of divine privilege. This Christ was also the One who is God over all, blessed forever.

# **GOD'S GRACE IS SELECTIVELY CHANNELED (9:6-13)**

**9:6.** No one should suppose that anything has failed which the word of God had promised or foretold. As Paul will carefully show, Israel's future is firmly guaranteed by that word, and

nothing that has happened in the current behavior of Israel alters this ultimate reality.

**Israel does not consist of all those who are** related to it by being a part of the nation. For Paul, it is one thing to be an Israelite in the natural sense of that word, and another thing to be an Israelite spiritually.

9:7-9. This can be seen in the experience of Abraham. Just because there is a physical descent from Abraham, that descent is not necessarily spiritual in character. Ishmael and Isaac are examples.

The quotation from Gen 21:12 shows what

Paul has in mind. The words, "Through Isaac shall the descendants be called your own," are part of a response by God to Abraham regarding Sarah's request that Ishmael and his mother, the bondwoman, should be expelled from Abraham's home (Gen 21:12). Isaac is designated the "true" seed of Abraham, leaving Ishmael with a physical link to him but no spiritual standing as the divinely designated line of descent.

Simply because people are Abraham's descendants does not mean that they are all his children. And by this he means, as he goes on to state in v 8, that it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God. To be truly children of Abraham, Paul implies, is to be the *children* of

By way of analogy, therefore, believing Israelites are children of God by faith in Christ, in contrast to unbelieving Israelites who are not. Instead, as mere physical descendants of Abraham, they are actually *children* of the flesh (Gal 3:7). Only believing Israelites have a spiritual sonship. These children of God are, like Isaac was, children of the promise. It is the *children* of the promise who are accounted as descendants of Abraham.

In the case of believers, however, the promise in question is no doubt the promise of the Abrahamic blessing (Gen 12:3), which is a gospel promise (Gal 3:8-9).

Isaac's selection over Ishmael establishes the divine channel for fulfilling God's purposes through Israel. God Himself chose this channel.

9:10. The pregnancy of Rebecca with the twins Esau and Jacob is the starting point of the new example.

It is significant that Paul stresses here that this pregnancy was by one man. In the example of Isaac and Ishmael, two different mothers were involved. In theory an opponent might argue that Isaac was chosen over Ishmael because of the differing status of the two mothers, but no such difference existed for Esau and Jacob. No Israelite

"Paul was certainly

not discussing whether

Esau and Jacob will

be in God's eternal

kingdom. Indeed, there

is no reason to believe

that either of them will

not be."

descended from Esau, though Isaac and Rebecca were his parents as well.

9:11-12. With Esau and born when God's word came thing good or bad. It was due accordance with His choice.

Jacob, behavior and character played no part in God's selection for the Messianic line. They had **not yet** been to Rebecca, so naturally neither of them had...done anyentirely to God's purpose in

This has nothing to do with their eternal destiny. Paul was certainly not discussing whether Esau and Jacob will be in God's eternal kingdom. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that either of them will not be. Instead, Paul is simply reemphasizing that God sovereignly chose the vehicle through which His purpose for Israel was to be realized. Natural, physical descent is not the basis for God's sovereign choice.

God's favor toward Jacob was not by works but by Him who calls. Jacob became the progenitor of the nation not because of works but because God called him to that role.

Paul leaves completely unaddressed the question of why God chose Jacob over Esau. It is illogical to deduce from this silence that there was nothing at all about Jacob that made him a suitable object of divine grace. In Jacob's and Esau's case, God's purpose in accordance with His choice dealt with their positions relative to one another in God's plan. Esau thus received a status inferior and

subservient to that of his younger brother, Jacob (Gen 27:36-37).

**9:13.** Paul's quotation of Mal 1:2-3 demonstrates that the status that **Jacob** obtained through the blessing of Isaac was borne out by subsequent events. It speaks of the inferior heritage of **Esau** in relation to Jacob as it concerns their lands.

God's treatment of Jacob's heritage as opposed to Esau's heritage was like the contrast between love and hate. God did not hate Esau as a person. Still less is this a reference to his eternal damnation. The descendants of Jacob had a special and superior destiny.

The Israelites of Paul's day could be divided between those who were simply descendants of Abraham and Isaac (like Ishmael and Esau were) and those whom God had "called" and "justified" apart from works.

SCRIPTURE VALIDATES GOD'S MERCY AND WRATH IN REFERENCE TO ISRAEL (9:14-29)

9:14-16. This discussion leads to a question: There isn't any unrighteousness with God, is there?

Far from it! Paul replies. God has prerogatives regarding such matters.

In Exod 33:19, God says "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." When it comes to mercy and compassion, God asserts His own prerogative to exercise these attributes toward the person, or persons, He Himself selects. Thus, if God acts in mercy and compassion toward Isaac or towards Jacob, there is no unrighteousness in doing so. Neither Ishmael nor Esau was deprived of anything he had a right to claim.

It is **God who** sovereignly bestows **mercy** *on whom* He will. God, not man, determines who receives His mercy. If we ask the question, "Whom does God choose to have mercy on

today?" the Pauline answer is transparent. God has chosen to have mercy upon believers, both Jew and Gentile (11:28-32).

Neither here nor elsewhere in Romans does Paul suggest that anyone is prevented from believing by means of some kind of negative predestination in eternity past. At the same time, Paul would not have agreed that faith occurs without divine intervention (cf. 2 Cor 4:4-6). But Paul never tries to "harmonize" these realities.

**9:17-18.** The right to show mercy involves also the right *not* to show mercy. But in the withholding of mercy, God is free to harden **whom He** 

wishes.

"If we ask the question,

'Whom does God

choose to have mercy

on today?' the Pauline

answer is transparent.

God has chosen to have

mercy upon believers,

both Jew and Gentile."

The Pharaoh in Exodus illustrates this principle. Once again, the issue is not that of being predestined to eternal damnation. The issue is far narrower than that. If God so chooses, He has a right to harden anyone He wishes.

God declares the reason for the hardening from His perspective: "that My name may be declared in all the earth." In short, Pharaoh was hard-

ened that God might be glorified.

In Exodus the hardening process is attributed to Pharaoh himself (Exod 8:15, 32). Had Pharaoh repented after only a few of the ten plagues, God's **power** would not have been fully demonstrated. But Paul's point is to simply insist that God had every right to do it.

Both points matter for Paul's argument. God in fact is presently having mercy on both Jews and Gentiles who believe (see 9:23-24; 11:30-32). But He has also hardened unbelieving Israel (11:25). Both are sovereign prerogatives that God exercises as He wishes. But the case of Pharaoh is instructive, since Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God hardened it. Paul would no doubt have said the same of Israel.

But Paul's development of this theme also shows that God will still have mercy on any individual Israelite who believes. Paul leaves undiscussed any particular factors that might distinguish believing and unbelieving Israelites,



either in his time or in ours. The attempts to penetrate the unrevealed counsels of God on this point are futile.

9:19-21. Someone might say, "Why does God still blame anyone? For who withstands His will?" If God hardens the human heart, how could anyone do anything differently, and therefore why would God blame him for what he does? But Paul does not consider this a worthy question.

The words, On the contrary, O man, who are you to answer back to God?, disallow the right of the questioner to raise this issue at all. This shows the extreme limitations on knowledge that man possesses. How can I, a mere human, possibly know in any case of hardening, the extent to which there is human culpability?

So, the objection Paul is dismissing is a conceptual mismatch. One could not imagine, says Paul, that the thing molded could say to its Molder... "Why have you made me this way?"

A potter, in fact, was well within his rights to take a lump from a **batch of clay** and make a beautiful vessel out of it. But equally he could draw from **the same** *batch* the clay needed for a vessel used in the labors of a household servant.

God is the eternal "Molder" and "Potter." In His infinite wisdom and skill, He fashions and forms human "clay" as it pleases Him to do.

A vessel for honor was proudly displayed to the guests in a household. A vessel for dishonor was used for ignominious tasks and so was kept out of sight in the kitchen area or in a closet.

To the vessel that reflects His glory, there is *honor*. To the one that serves as the dark backdrop for that glory, there is *dishonor*. Man has no standing at all to challenge this! Man cannot delegitimize God's prerogatives.

9:22. The Divine Potter has a right to demonstrate His wrath and make known His power if that is what He wishes to do. Wrath here recalls Rom 1:18. Israel in unbelief has become a focus for God's wrath.

As Paul's discussion of God's wrath in 1:18-32 shows, the term *wrath* is temporal. Unbelieving Israelites do not have to remain in unbelief.

In fact, God has been implicitly merciful to *the vessels of wrath*. This is seen in the fact that He **has borne** them **with great patience**. God has not fully judged the nation yet.

9:23-24. God's patience towards the vessels of wrath has lengthened the time for the

demonstration of His "wrath" and "power." But it has also afforded an opportunity for God to display Himself as well in terms of **the wealth of His glory**. This glory is nothing less than the richness of His mercy since that mercy has now been extended to Jews and Gentiles alike (v 24).

The recalcitrance of Israel which has called forth divine wrath has also been the catalyst for demonstrating how rich God is in mercy. Paul means by this that God's mercy has overleaped the boundaries of Israel itself and has gone out to the Gentile world.

The vessels of mercy that have been prepared in this way are identified as us whom in fact He has called. The idea is that this glory lies ahead, and God has been at work to get us ready for it. Those vessels consist not only of people from among the Jews, but also of people from among the Gentiles.

"God's mercy has overleaped the boundaries of Israel itself and has gone out to the Gentile world."

9:25-26. Paul now begins to enforce his point from OT proof texts. He has argued that God is dealing with unbelieving Israel through a wrath that is tempered by long patience with them, and this allowed Him to extend His mercy beyond the boundaries of Israel to Gentiles, who were not previously God's people at all. Hosea says this is true to God's character.

The two quotations from Hosea present God's loving acceptance of those upon whom He shows mercy, since He acknowledges them as His people and as "sons of the living God." This acceptance is experienced by those among both the Jews and Gentiles (vv 23-24). In the very broadest sense, then, the divine action referred to by Hosea applies to all who experience new birth and who thereby become God's sons and are members of His eternal family. What Hosea applied to Israel refers to nothing less than the wealth of mercy that God bestows on all who are part of His true people.

9:27-28. In his second quotation, taken from Isa 10:22-23, Paul wishes to establish the

additional point that God's mercy to Israel takes the form of mercy to a greatly reduced segment of the whole nation.

In the Isaiah passage (see Isa 10:20-27) we see that in the Great Tribulation only a remnant of Israel will "be delivered" and survive to enter the kingdom. Jesus was speaking of these very calamities in His Olivet Discourse when He said, "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake [i.e., for Israel's sake] those days will be shortened" (Matt

24:22). Israel will survive though in greatly reduced numbers, precisely because of God's mercy and fidelity to them.

It is important to note that this future deliverance is from temporal divine wrath. The statement that "the remnant shall be delivered" ties the Isaiah text back to Rom 5:9-10 and 8:24, and, finally,

to the theme in Rom 1:16.

The reckoning that God would make with mankind "on the earth" would be brief. Isaiah sees the Lord "completing it and cutting it short in righteousness." God's righteous work of judgment will be swiftly completed. God's mercy would finally bring His wrath to its swift consummation.

9:29. Isaiah 1:9 drives home Paul's point. The destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is not an example of eternal damnation, but of devastating temporal judgment. Isaiah says that, but for God's mercy, Israel might be as completely wiped out as were these two notorious cities.

The OT (vv 25-29) has established that the God who sovereignly bestows mercy on whom He wishes (9:14-18) is acting now in a way consistent with Biblical revelation. As the Divine Potter, answerable to no one, He both postpones His ultimate judgment on the vessels of wrath while dealing mercifully with the vessels of mercy, both Jewish and Gentile (9:19-24).



# CONCLUSION: ISRAEL HAS STUMBLED OVER CHRIST (9:30-33)

Paul is now prepared to state the bottom line in his argument so far. Israel is the object of God's wrath, and the Gentiles of His mercy, because of Israel's rejection of Christ. He now summarizes the present situation.

**9:30-31.** Gentiles are among those who are now vessels of mercy (9:24). This leads to the startling result that the notoriously unrighteous Gentiles have **obtained righteousness**. God's mercy is such that this is true even though these Gentiles previously **were not pursuing righteousness** at all. This righteousness is not based on their conduct, since they were not even pursuing such a goal, but is bestowed on them based on faith.

The righteousness that is by faith, which has been obtained by Gentiles, is quite different in character from the kind pursued by Israel. The Jewish people are pursuing a form of righteousness. But it is not a faith-righteousness, but rather the law of righteousness. But this pursuit has failed (3:19-20), with the result that Israel has not attained to the *law of righteousness*. Though Israel pursued legal righteousness with zeal (see 10:2), they have not reached their goal.

9:32-33. The reason for Israel's failure to attain righteouness is because they were seeking it in the wrong way. It was by means of the works of the law rather than by faith.

In my translation the phrase "Stone of collision" replaces the traditional one of "stumbling" because it is too weak here. Obviously, Israel had collided violently with her promised Messiah,

Jesus Christ, with the result that He died a violent death at her hands.

But this collision was foretold by Isaiah the prophet. It comes from Isa 28:16 and includes the words about the believer not being ashamed. This concluding statement from Isa 28:16, "And everyone who believes in Him shall not be ashamed," is important to the following discussion found in Romans 10 and it is cited again in 10:11. Its use there suggests that Paul understood these words as a command (e.g., "you shall not kill") rather than as a statement (e.g., "you will not kill"). Its force, then, is that despite the rejection of Christ by Israel, for whom He is a Stone of collision, the believer in Jesus should never be ashamed of Him and of his identification with Him.



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

# Who Is Really in Charge?

By Allen Rea

# IS THE PRESIDENT IN CHARGE?

ragedy and disappointment can reveal how Biblically grounded we are. We must both think Biblically and live Biblically.

Many people were disappointed when President Trump was not reelected. They prayed and voted and prayed some more. Still, by the time you read this, Biden will be President of the United States, and Donald Trump will be the only president in history to be twice impeached and twice acquitted.

In my opinion, Biden's worldview and party platform are far from Biblical. And over the next four years, I expect that religious liberty and Christian values will be under attack.

However, whether President Biden knows it or not, *he is not really in charge*.

# REVELATION FROM REVELATION

The Book of Revelation is not a book to fear but to embrace.

In Revelation, we learn much about our Lord and His perfect plans for the future.

It is a book within our Bible that promises a special blessing just from reading, hearing, and keeping what it teaches (Rev 1:3).

In the initial greeting at the beginning of Revelation we find three titles of Christ (1:5): "the faithful witness, the firstborn from the

dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth."

The last title in this list answers the question of this article.

President Biden is no more ultimately in charge than President Trump was. Jesus Christ is the ruler over the kings of the earth. God has always and always will govern the ways of men.

# **KNOWING YOUR PLACE**

In the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar rejects this fact. So God taught him who was in charge by driving Nebuchadnezzar to live with beasts in the field where he ate grass like oxen and grew hair like eagles' feathers and nails like bird claws. This was done so that he would "know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (Daniel 4:32).

You see, regardless of who is president, Jesus is the coming King.

He is the ruler over every nation, not just America.

Of course, we should seek the good of the nation we live in (Jer 29:7; 1 Tim 2:1-7). And if the Lord should tarry His coming, then in four years, we will be blessed with the opportunity to vote for a new president.

But whatever happens, in four years, the Church will still be the Church that the gates of hell cannot overcome.

In four years, Jesus Christ will still be Lord. Now I want you to know that I live in constant anticipation of the Rapture. We may not be here in four years—or four months. But however long we are here, that does not change Who has the real authority.

As citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20), we better

know and embrace the truth that Christ is in charge.

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





The Board: Tony Taffar, Bernie Hunsucker, "Shoeless" Ken Yates, Brad Doskocil, and Shawn

# Winter GES Board Meeting Plano, TX January 29-30

ecember giving was up \$13,000 over last December, and it was our best December in the last five years! We are on pace to end the year near budget. Thank you for your partnership!

The Board approved a number of new ministries that we hope to get off the ground in the coming year.

First, the Board approved us starting a weekly video ministry. We plan to release one short 5 to 10-minute video each week, starting in March. We will be purchasing some excellent video cameras and other equipment needed for filming.

Second, we set a date for a Free Grace Bootcamp. The idea is to take a small group of students, pastors, elders, and other leaders and give them intense training in Bible and preaching.

Third, we are starting groundwork for a *Grace Old Testament Commentary*.

Fourth, the Board also approved weekly blogs in Filipino and Portuguese.

# Victor Street Bible Chapel Dallas, TX January 24

The people at Victor Street met in person for the first time in nearly a year! I (Bob) spoke on Mark 6:30-56: "Jesus Is Our Loving Shepherd Who Cares for Us." Jesus' feeding of the 5,000, walking on water, stilling the winds, and healing the multitudes show that He is the embodiment of Psalm 23. He is our Loving Shepherd who leads us to green pastures.

You can read a blog I wrote that covers part of the sermon.



**Gateway Baptist Church** 

# Lunch with Dr. Craig Glickman January 27

Shawn and Bob had lunch with Dr. Craig Glickman, former professor at DTS and friend to Zane Hodges. We caught up on things



and got his take on a number of important theological issues. He indicated that he might be able to speak at our April conference.

# Gateway Baptist Denton, TX January 31

Shawn spoke at Gateway on the subject of "Doing Ministry in the Moment." Drawing on Titus 3:1-11, Shawn argued that believers should be ready to do good works *as they arise*. That means being ready, in that moment, to do whatever good is required to help your neighbor. Those moments of ministry are not necessarily pre-planned by you, or noticed by the world, but are of eternal value to the Lord.

# Annual Conference April 26-28 Coppell (TX) Bible Fellowship

The theme this year is *Genesis: A Book of Beginnings*. The conference will run from noon on Monday until



**Bayside Community Church** 

5:00 on Wednesday. We decreased the regular price of the conference from \$85 to \$75, and we extended the \$10 early-bird discount until February 28. First-timers and scholarship recipients remain free.

# **Update on Ken and Kathryn**

On Jan 31, I (Ken) preached at Bayside Community Church in Tampa, FL: *What does it mean to be saved by the life of Christ?* (Rom 5:1-10) and *What does it mean to live without condemnation?* (Rom 8:1-6).

I stressed that in these passages Paul is speaking

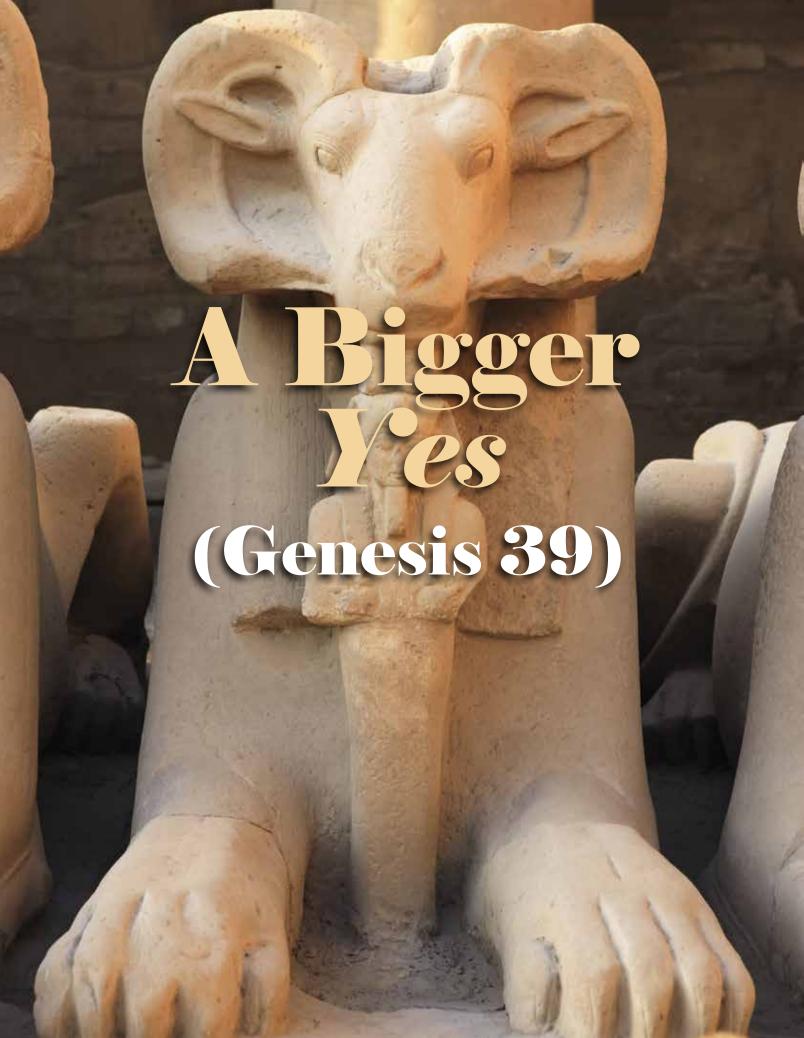
about Christian living and not on what a person must do to obtain eternal life. I received a number of positive comments on the messages. Special thanks go out to Don Rice for taking care of all the administrative concerns (who, by the way, is also from Kentucky) and Mike



Bodnar who hosted me for lunch. Just another great visit to Tampa all the way around.

Kathryn and I are scheduled to go to Kenya from Feb 18-28. Lord willing, we will be speaking at a pastors' and wives' conference, hosted by Catherine and Jimmy, who are strong proponents of Free Grace and run a school about an hour's drive from Nairobi. All of the teaching will be done in English. We will also give each pastor a copy of Bob's new book *Faith Alone in 100 Verses*. We are expecting 60 pastors.





"The oldest, shortest words
—"yes" and "no"—
are those which require the
most thought."
~Pythagoras

# By Dix Winston

ave you seen the Discover Card "No" commercial? It features Alicia Silverstone, Jack Black, John Candy, Mike Myers, and Matthew Perry screaming "No!" It promotes the Discover Card having *no* annual fee.

Why is it such a successful commercial? Could it be in today's culture the word *no* is rarely heard, especially from Hollywood celebrities?

But if we are honest, "normal" people have a difficulty with saying no, too. "No I will not hit the snooze button." "No, I will not eat a second Krispy Kreme." "No, I will not neglect my devotionals today."

Why is it so hard to say no to things we know we should not do?

Stephen Covey, in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, insightfully says, "You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage pleasantly, smilingly, and non-apologetically—to say no to other things. And the way you do that is *by having a bigger yes burning inside.*"

In Genesis 39, we see the power of a "bigger yes burning inside." It burns in the heart of a teenager named Joseph.

# IN EGYPT (GENESIS 39:1-6)

What we have here is a reverse exodus—you take the Jew out of the Promised Land *into* Egypt. How?

First, you place him in a very dysfunctional family with a loving father and hateful brothers.

Secondly, you give him two dreams indicating the family will bow down to him (Gen 37:1-11).

Third, you have the brothers sell him to a caravan of Midianites, who just happened to be on their way to Egypt.

Fourth, you use The Midianite Transfer Company to drop him off in Cairo, Egypt.

Fifth, and finally, you arrange for an Egyptian official to buy him out of the slave market.

It did not take long for Joseph to know he was not in Kansas/Canaan anymore. Every sensory receptor this young man possessed was overloaded by strange sounds, sights and smells. Kent Hughes sets the scene for us:

The long trek completed, Joseph descended to the storied Nile valley and the pyramids. Egypt's fifteenth dynasty was in full swing as the country prospered under its famous Hyksos rulers (*circa* 1720–1570 B.C.). Every morning the rising sun was greeted with the chanting of cultic hymns to awaken the gods from their slumber, after which the idols were ritually bathed and then sumptuously dressed

and breakfasted with morning offerings... Joseph was at the epicenter of the darkness, an aristocratic house where the rulers of the land came and went—a penthouse of Egyptian opulence and culture (Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, p. 461).

But Joseph was not alone—an Unseen Presence traveled with him and protected him on the way to Egypt (v 2), and would one day take the Jews back *out* of Egypt (cf. Exod 5:1-2).

As if to make a point of the Presence, the author notes the Lord was with Joseph from Potiphar's penthouse to the King's Prison House (vv 2-3 and 21-22).

Joseph was in the land of Egyptian gods, but he was with the God of Israel, whose covenant name is Yahweh. Joseph's father, grandfather, and great grandfather all knew that name. And soon enough, so would all of Egypt.

The Lord blessed Joseph's great-grandfather (Gen 12:1-3), and now He blessed Joseph with success and prosperity (vv 2-3). And do not miss that the blessing is also upon Potiphar, an Egyptian.

Potiphar must have asked Joseph about his background and his gods. Or Joseph might have engaged Potiphar in a conversation and told him about Yahweh. That's why he knew the source of Joseph's success and "saw the Lord [Yahweh] was with him and how the Lord (Yahweh) caused all that he did to prosper in his hand" (v 3). The promise given to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you" came upon Potiphar: "the Lord (Yahweh) blessed the Egyptian house on account of Joseph" (v 5).

Joseph was soon to be second-in-command of the Potiphar household (Gen 39:6), only answerable to Potiphar. He managed the house of Potiphar, including the other servants.

# IN TROUBLE (GENESIS 39:7-19)

As a result of God's blessing, Joseph became a bigger blip on Satan's radar. He saw Joseph as a clear and present danger in the "Seed War," a conflict that broke out in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15) where God prophesied enmity between the Seed of the woman and the seed of "Ha Nachash" (i.e., the serpent).

The future coming Seed of the woman (i.e., Jesus) would render a fatal head blow to the serpent, so Satan uses a woman to attack Joseph.

The Housewife of Cairo Hills is direct, blunt, and obscenely outspoken, "Lie with me!" This is not a suggestion, but a command, and she was used to slaves obeying her orders.

It would be a mistake to look upon this incident as simply the offer of sexual favors. It is not. As Paul told the Ephesians, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). Satan failed to destroy this young man in a pit, but perhaps he could destroy him in a fit of passion.

But this slave had a "bigger yes" burning inside of him. Joseph could not do "this great evil" against Potiphar or against God. He knew the time for a reasoned refusal was over, so he ran, leaving her clutching his robe (vv 12-13).

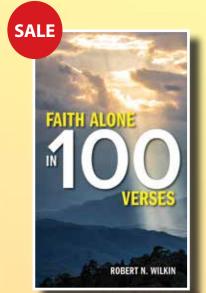
Today there is a common response to a political or personal failure—you must get ahead of the story and *create* the narrative rather than *respond* to the narrative. So she calls the men of the house and plants a false story, knowing it would spread. And since Joseph oversaw these men, they might have reason to resent him.

She told them Joseph was the aggressor. He tried to force himself upon her so she screamed, and he did what guilty people do and fled the scene of the crime. Having established the narrative and knowing it is her word against Joseph's, she had one more chore, i.e., dealing with Potiphar. She set the scene with Joseph's garments (v 16). She not only wants him to *hear* what happened, but to see it, too. It is one thing to hear of another's man sin against you, and another to see his clothing in your bedroom.

She told Poptiphar that it was Joseph. The one he brought into this house. It was because of his lack of discernment that this happened. She sought to shame her husband, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," (Gen 39:19). In effect, she says, "You brought this evil into our house. I expect you to do something. Your wife has been embarrassed and disgraced by your slave."

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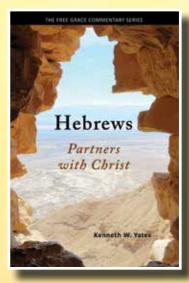


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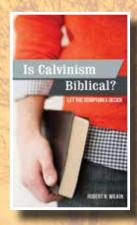


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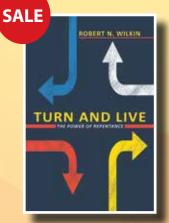


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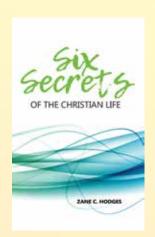


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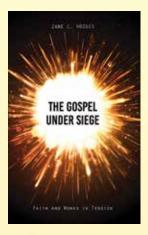


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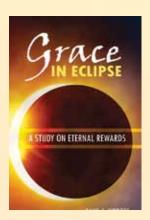


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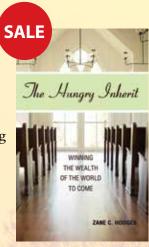


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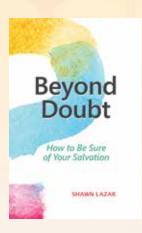


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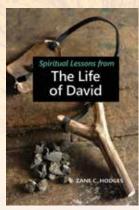


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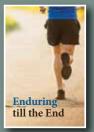


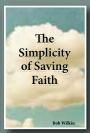
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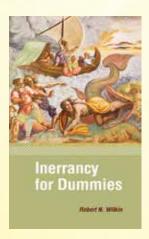




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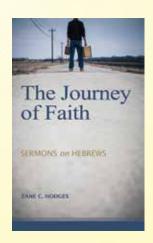


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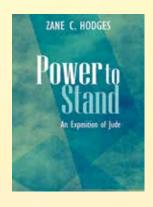


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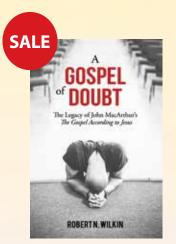


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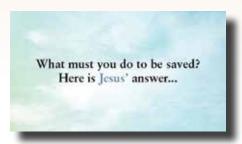
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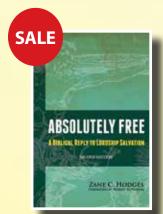
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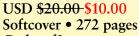
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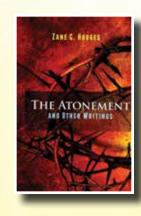
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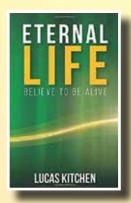


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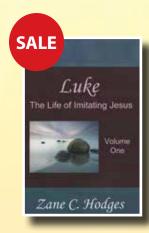


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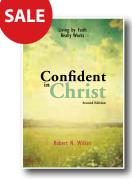


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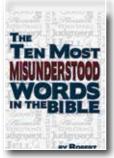


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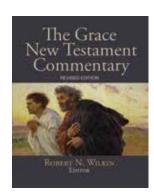


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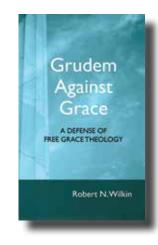


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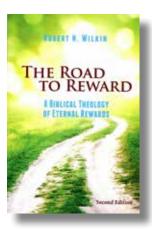


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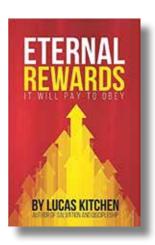


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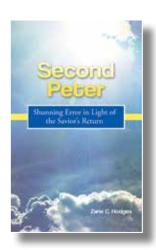


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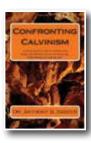


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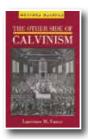


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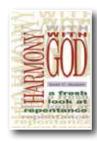


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# IN JAIL (GENESIS 39:20-23)

Potiphar took Joseph and put him in jail. In Egypt, there were no Miranda rights, defense attorneys, or "Can I hear your side of the story?" It was off to jail you go.

Having served the captain of the bodyguard, Joseph had no doubt heard of this prison and of the stories of what happened to foreigners who threatened ranking Egyptian officials—they threw away the key.

No doubt the evil one was doing a dance. His goal was to prevent Joseph from fulfilling his dreams, and now Joseph was out of circulation. He never thought Joseph would ever see the light of day. He took Joseph out—or so he thought.

But standing in the wings, there was the Unseen Presence who traveled with Joseph to Egypt. "The Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer" (v 21). Once again God has duped the devil. He guided and directed Joseph's every move from Canaan to Egypt. He used a doting dad, a costly robe, the jealousy of brothers, a Midianite caravan, a slave market in Egypt, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard, and a conniving and unfaithful woman, the silence of Potiphar's household, and now the chief jailer in Pharaoh's prison.

This jailer, sensing or having heard of Joseph's supervisory talents, did not put him in solitary, but put him in charge. This supervisory role allowed God to add two more pieces of his plan. Now that Joseph is in charge (vv 21-22), He will soon place two high ranking officials—the baker and cupbearer—into Joseph's charge (Genesis 40:1-4).

If you were to interview Jacob, do you think he would say Yahweh is with his son?

No, he at this point thought he was dead. How about the bothers, would they say Yahweh was with Joseph? Surely not, or he would not have been bought by Midianite merchants.

What about those Midianites in the caravan? If they talked among themselves, would they see the hand of God on this Israelite walking in the sand behind them? Or would they think, surely this is an unjust and evil man. Why would his brothers want to take his life and then sell him to us?

Although Potiphar saw the God of Israel prosper and bless Joseph, was He rethinking it now? Certainly Potiphar's wife would talk of the Hebrew who thought his God would deliver him from her hand.

And what about the servants Joseph managed in Potiphar's house? They still had a job and he was doing time.

What kind of God would allow a follower to be falsely accused and unjustly imprisoned? Certainly, his God was fickle, forsaking His one follower in all of Egypt.

But they did not know the God of Israel or understand that He "remembers His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations," (Ps 105:8). They did not see in their pantheon of gods one who shows *chesed* or loyal love.

While all thought Joseph abandoned, he knew differently. The God who led him into Egypt would lead him out of jail, and all his dreams would come true. Inside this cruel, dark, dank dungeon was a man with a heart, burning with a bigger yes!



Dix Winston is Senior Pastor of Crosspoint Community Church in Centennial, CO.

# The Mailbag

# By You

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"I just wanted to thank you so much for your short YouTube teachings and the longer ones; also the book *A Gospel of Doubt* has been so helpful to me. Past Lordship Salvation teaching left me very anxious about my salvation, but thanks mainly to the above I am now secure in my salvation." ~email

"I cannot tell you what your email articles have meant to me since subscribing to GES a few months back...Each time I open your articles, I learn something new. I thank the Father for both of you and the work you do. Currently making my way through A Gospel of Doubt and it is lifechanging. I can't express to you how much this book has helped me and my parents. All the best to you both." ~email

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"Bob, thank you for your careful work, study, and application of the Word of God to life, to publications, and to the airways! We pray God's richest blessings on GES and the staff God has brought to you. Blessings and good health to you and Sharon." Bartlesville, OK~.

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## God's Heart for Muslims

### By Peter Darvoz

### HATING PEOPLE WHOM GOD LOVES

I was talking to a friend I met in college. Now, more than a decade later, he had become a successful businessman and was active in the local government of a thriving east Texas city.

I was shocked by what he said.

I had called him because I was raising financial support to work with a Christian ministry that trains believers and churches to reach Muslims with the love of Christ. My friend had grown up as a missionary kid in Latin America, and I went into the phone call thinking he would likely want to support my ministry. But my friend's heart was far from God's, even though he was an active leader in the adult and family ministry at his church.

Regrettably, my friend's heart towards Muslims is not uncommon, even among believers. Many Western Christians' attitudes and beliefs about Muslims are shaped more by media stereotypes and generalizations than by God's love for all people as clearly expressed in the Bible (cf. John 3:16).

I grew up in south Texas, where there were either few Muslims, or I was unaware of them.

When I went away to college, I met some Muslims in my classes, but did not get to know them because we were in different social circles.

It was not until I got to know some personally (which happened to be on a mission trip in a Muslim-majority country) that I realized how

ungodly my attitude toward Muslims had been. Now, God was transforming my heart through real-life interactions with Muslims. I was beginning to see them as fellow humans, made in the image of God, worthy of respect and love, just like every person—no matter his or her race or background.

Years later, when I moved to Central Asia as part of a church planting team, a young Muslim man in my new neighborhood told me, "You need me and I need you. You need me to help you understand us." My relationship with him became one of God's greatest blessings to me during the years I lived there.

Sadly, many Christians never experience the blessing of getting to know a Muslim personally. And even if they are not hostile toward Muslims, many remain apathetic or ignorant of Muslims and their spiritual needs.

### MISSIONS MUST INCLUDE MUSLIMS

I have attended churches where the leadership regularly talked about reaching the world for Christ, taking the gospel to the nations, participating in the Great Commission, and planting churches around the world.

Amen! These are great things!

I have asked some of these leaders, "What is your plan for reaching Muslims?"

I usually get a blank stare or an answer such as "God has not called us to that," or "It's too costly," or even "Sure, Muslims can come to our church!"

In other words, there seems to be a disconnect with believers and church leaders about how reaching Muslims is involved in "reaching the world."

Though there might be legitimate reasons for some not to focus on Muslims, here are some reasons why reaching Muslims should be a priority for many, if not most, churches:

- Nearly one out of four people in the world is Muslim
- Nearly one out of three unbelievers is Muslim
- Almost 50% of unreached people groups are Muslim
- 16 of the 20 largest, unengaged, unreached people groups are Muslim
- By 2050, the number of Muslims will likely equal the number of "Christians" in the world
- And yet, only about 10% of missionary resources go towards reaching Muslims

Why aren't churches investing greater resources to train and send more people to lovingly engage Muslims?

The news is even more depressing regarding Evangelicals. In 2017, *Christianity Today* reported that white Evangelicals were the least likely Americans to know a Muslim, with nearly 2/3 saying they did not know even one Muslim.

### THE GOOD NEWS

Despite many believers' and churches' ungodly hearts toward Muslims, God is doing amazing things. Thousands upon thousands of Muslims around the world are turning to Christ.

Muslims are having dreams about Jesus.

And as some Muslims flee the tragedies of war, oppression, and poverty in search of a better life, they often encounter the saving message of Jesus. They are seeking out churches and believers to tell them more.

Believers around the world are praying for God to raise up missionaries and church planters to Muslims.

In Iran, Bangladesh, Indonesia, China, Turkey, Greece, and numerous other places, Jesus is

building His church with Muslim-background believers.

### RE-ALIGNING OUR HEARTS WITH GOD'S HEART

Do you have apathy, anger, fear, or hostility towards Muslims? If so, I encourage you to stop and pray. Ask God to change your heart and align it with his.

Also, consider making *relationships with Muslims* a focal point in your personal life and in your church.

According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 86% of Muslims do not know a Christian personally.

Think about that.

Nearly 9 out of 10 Muslims in the world do not have a relationship with a Christian.

As believers in Jesus' promise of eternal life, we have the greatest news the world has to offer. My prayer is that God will bring more and more Free Grace people into genuine relationships with Muslims to share this life-giving news.

If you are a pastor or church leader, why not prioritize sending missionaries to and planting churches in the Muslim world? There is great need, and Muslims have largely been ignored by the church historically.

Will it be popular among church members to focus on loving Muslims? Probably not.

Will it be easy? Of course not.

Will it be costly? Certainly.

Will there be immediate "results"? Likely not.

Will God bless you in it? Absolutely!

### SUGGESTIONS FOR ADJUSTING ATTITUDES

Here are some suggestions for realigning our hearts with God's when it comes to Muslims:

*Pray for Muslims*. God is answering the prayers of his people who are interceding for Muslims to turn to Christ. Through the process of informed prayer for Muslims, many Christian hearts have been delivered from anger, apathy, and fear of Muslims.

Prioritize befriending Muslims. Resist the urge to become an "expert" or apologist on Islam (especially solely through books or media). Books can be helpful for acquiring knowledge

and perspective, but every Muslim is unique. Consider doing a free, short study, like Keith Swartley's "God's Heart for Muslims" to learn more about Islam and how to lovingly relate to Muslims.

*Visit Muslims*. If possible, visit a nearby mosque. Many mosques host open houses about once a year to answer questions non-Muslims may have and to get to know those in their community. Don't be a stranger. They often serve delicious food for the event! Do an internet search for mosques near you. Visit their websites or check out their Facebook pages. If no events are listed, call and talk to someone at the mosque. Listen and learn. Resist the urge to debate and feel free to share graciously and appropriately what you believe. Ask questions. For example, "How is it being a Muslim in America?" "Do you keep the fast at Ramadan?" If you don't know much about Muslims or Islam, don't worry! Most Muslims are open to discussing religion or spiritual things.

Invite Muslims. Should you invite a Muslim friend to church? This is likely not the best way to introduce Muslims to Jesus. If your church resembles a traditional Western church (e.g., preacher, crosses, band/choir, etc.), consider inviting a Muslim friend to your small group instead. Although visiting a Western church for a Muslim would be a fascinating cross-cultural experience, it would probably erect unnecessary cultural barriers that blur the message of Jesus and the Bible. A small group (that meets in a home), however, is more informal and gives you the opportunity to demonstrate love through hospitality, which most Muslims appreciate and value.

Support missions to Muslims. Consider financially supporting missionaries and church planting efforts among Muslims at home and abroad.

### LED TO REACH OUT

How might God be leading you to pray for, have compassion for, and graciously engage Muslims?

As I mentioned earlier, Muslims are having dreams about Jesus. But apparently, God is also using dreams in the lives of believers to reach Muslims. Such was the case with Jim.

A few years ago, Jim's college-age son asked if they could host an international student from Saudi Arabia. At first, Jim said, "My wife and I discussed where all the possibilities are in our house that he could conceal the bomb that we knew he would be making, so we declined."

However, his son persisted in asking. And Jim had a recurring dream of trying to explain Jesus to an Arab-looking man. He became convinced that God had plans for him in a realm outside of his comfort zone.

Jim ended up becoming friends with the imam at a nearby mosque, taking a trip to Muslimmajority areas in Africa, and getting to know more Muslims.

May our hearts be aligned with God's heart for all peoples...including Muslims.

Peter Darvoz grew up in Texas. He served on church planting teams to Muslims in Central Asia. Currently, he works with a ministry to equip and mobilize Christians to reach Muslims with the love of Christ.

# Review: The Cost of Cheap Grace

### By Shawn Willson

The Cost of Cheap Grace: Reclaiming the Value of Discipleship. By Bill Hull and Brandon Cook. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2019. 256 pp. Paper, \$17.99.

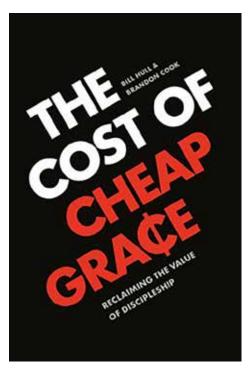
The Cost of Cheap Grace: Reclaiming the Value of Discipleship, by Bill Hull and Brandon Cook, was one that I found myself disagreeing with, and frustrated by, more than any other book I have read on the subject.

That is not to say the book was all bad. There were some good moments. I loved the authors' passion for promoting discipleship in the church. I wish there was more discipleship in every church in the world, especially my own. The church is to be about the business of making disciples as *The Cost of Cheap Grace* emphasizes throughout.

At the same time, from the title of the book to their interpretation of the Parable of the Four Soils at the conclusion of the book, I was banging my head in frustration over the views of the writers.

### COMBINING SALVATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

My issues with this book stem from one major problem: the authors' consistent need to combine salvation and discipleship into one process, with



the corresponding view that all who separate the two cheapen grace. They write, "Isn't it obvious that Jesus equated belief with action, that faith is following, and that faith is only real in obedience—otherwise, it is not faith at all?"

I'm sorry, but that is *not* obvious, because Jesus never equated belief with action.

When we study the example of Abraham, we see that to believe is to be convinced of God's promise (cf. Rom 4:21). Abraham believed God would provide him a son in his old age, and God counted this belief as righteousness (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:22). God didn't count Abraham's *obedience* as righteousness, but his *faith*.

I know that illustration is from Paul in Romans, but when Jesus presented the saving message throughout the Gospel of John, He presented faith the same way as Paul. Jesus told Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the Jews seeking to persecute him for healing on the Sabbath, the crowds who followed him after the feeding of the 5,000, Martha the sister of Lazarus, and the man born blind, to *believe* in Him for eternal life.

Jesus never followed the offer of eternal life with an asterisk, e.g., "If you don't become My disciple, it means you didn't really believe My offer for eternal life."

### **DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO JESUS**

Salvation and discipleship are two different subjects. While they are both eternally significant, they are different responses to Jesus. To mix them adds works to grace and, in my view, actually cheapens grace by putting a price on what should be the priceless gift of salvation.

The price Hull and Cook set on eternal life is a lifetime of discipleship. While that is a high price, it still falls woefully short of the value of the life offered by Christ.

### **NOTHING NEW**

I also found the authors to have a shockingly shallow view of church history. They kept attacking the American church as if we invented some new, never before seen deficiencies among the people of God with statements like the following: "This distinctly American plan of salvation has replaced the metanarrative of Scripture, from creation to consummation, with a new category of Christianity: a technical salvation, conversion event. It has also left in its wake millions of nominal Christians who can be counted but can't be counted on."

On the contrary, this is not a new problem. Medieval church history suffered from the dangers of nominal Christianity, too, when people were baptized into a church at birth because they were born in a specific region.

Yes, we have problems with nominal Christianity in America, just as they did in the early church. But in comparison to the medieval church, we have not fallen to past levels.

### **UNNECESSARY PARADOXES**

Their whole section on Biblical paradoxes was also tough to read because they made many simple truths out to be paradoxes when they aren't. "Indeed, in Scripture, faith and works are in tension, a paradox, a both/and held together by the saving work of Jesus on our behalf." I don't see any tension between faith and works in the Bible. They fit together simply and easily. We believe in the promises of God for eternal life based on the completed work of Christ. We work in order to maintain a healthy fellowship

with God and to earn rewards for eternity. They go together rather nicely. The new birth, which comes by faith, places us into the family. Works determine our fellowship and joy in the family.

### **GRACE AND DISCIPLESHIP**

I applaud Hull and Cook's passion for disciple-ship. I think we need a strong, robust emphasis on discipleship in the church, and we should always be striving to help one another along the path to discipleship. However, this passion should never crush the message of salvation by grace through faith. You can hold fast to a saving message based on faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from works, and still call Christians to discipleship. Jesus did both. He freely offered eternal life (e.g., John 3:16) and also called people to sacrifice in the work of discipleship (e.g., Matt 16:24). But do not mix the two responses.

I can't in good conscience recommend *The Cost of Cheap Grace* in spite of the importance of discipleship and a need for increased discipleship today. I believe that a gospel of salvation by works, even when that work is discipleship to Christ, cheapens the priceless gospel of Jesus Christ. Eternal salvation can only be received by faith.



Shawn Willson is the pastor of Grace Community Bible Church. He lives in River Ridge, LA with his lovely wife Jennifer and their four loud children. You can see more of his reviews at Rev Reads on YouTube.

# Top 5 Habits of Hopeful People

### By Summer Stevens

Love to garden. At least, I love the idea of gardening. I love it when the long-awaited Baker Creek Seed catalog arrives in the mail, and I settle down on a cozy chair, dog-earing pages for exotic carrots and cauliflower that looks like broccoli. When it's gray and dreary in the early months of winter, I love to place my order and check my mailbox for the manila package containing a dozen or so tiny envelopes that hold promise for fresh garden salads and sauteed squash.

I start my seeds early. Tiny tomato plants sprout up from a handful of dirt no bigger than a dixie cup. Clusters of basil fill tiny peat pots. With the snow falling outside, I carefully label popsicle sticks and water my little friends every day with a spray bottle.

But then, spring sports start, the sun actually does finally come out, Easter plans have to be made, and my dear little sprouts get neglected. A few plants will make it through to harvest, but I never have managed a thriving harvest like I've dreamed.

You see, what I really love about gardening is hope. The hope that gets me through the winter, knowing that the cold days will come to an end, and the long summer days when my kids run barefoot through sprinklers will return.



For the Christian, our hope is in the return of Jesus and the anticipation of hearing the words "well done." Some people do a good job remembering this and live in light of it, while the rest of us struggle to daily keep our eyes on Jesus. We get caught up in the cares of the world. We forget that we live in a larger story. I asked hopeful people to share their secrets, and here are five habits that emerged.

- 1. Hopeful people don't overthink things. They're called unrealistic or simplistic or plain out ignorant. And what did Jesus say, again? "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a well-reasoned logical adult will by no means enter it." Oh wait, no, He didn't say that. A child. Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child. What does the faith of a child look like? It's simple, uncomplicated and trusting.
- 2. Hopeful people hang out with other hopeful people. Hope is contagious. So is discouragement. We can choose with whom we spend our time. Hopeful people find strength in community worship and sitting under solid Bible teaching. Just being a Christian doesn't mean you're a hopeful Christian. It is a discipline to train your mind



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(Rom 12:2) and take those spiraling thoughts captive (2 Cor 10:5), which is why it's important to walk alongside and learn from Christians who do. Hopeful people also have at least one person who regularly and fervently prays for the honest burdens on their heart.

- 3. Hopeful people rely on Scripture. Lots of Christians read Scripture, understand Scripture, even teach it, but hopeful people rely on Scripture to curb their thoughts and keep them focused on Jesus. When anxious or condemning thoughts surface, hopefuls have an arsenal of verses that remind them of God's promises, His faithfulness and their identity in Christ. Single topical verses are a great place to start, but for anxiety specifically, consider memorizing larger passages (Ps 139; Phil 4:4-8; Isa 43:1-7).
- 4. Hopeful people choose gratitude! Rather than dwelling on the negative, they purposefully remember how God has provided for them in the past, as an indication that He will provide in the future. Has God met relational needs? Financial concerns? Health issues? In times of doubt, hopeful people dwell on the character of God and can't help but talk about His goodness with others. They write it down in journals, put answered prayers on post-its in a jar or collect mementos to bring to mind how He has been

faithful in the past, and He will be faithful in the future (Deut 7:9).

5. Hopeful people believe God. "I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Ps 27:13-14). When the dark days come, hopeful people do not lose heart because their hope is firmly anchored in God's truth. They believe what He says—that He loves us and He is coming back for us. And in the meantime, He has work for us to do (Eph 2:10); all the hopeful people I know, as they eagerly await His return, are busy doing the work of the Lord!

If you struggle to find hope, this month, in preparation for Easter, choose just one of these habits and pray through the Scriptures and ask Jesus to fill you with hope as you wait for Him.



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.

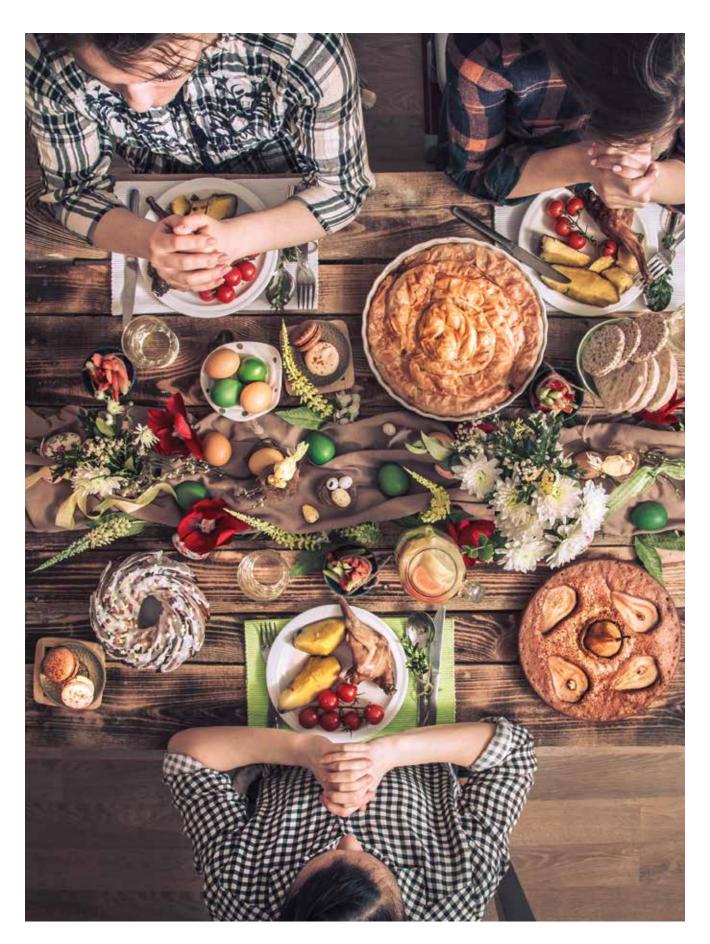
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## The Lord's Supper as It Was

### By Shawn Lazar

ere is the eminently readable William Barclay describing how the Lord's Supper was originally celebrated:

It is not in doubt that the Lord's Supper began as a family meal or a meal of friends in a private house...It was like the Jewish Passover which is a family festival and at which the father and the head of the household is the celebrant. There can be no two things more different than the celebration of the Lord's Supper in a Christian home in the first century and in a cathedral in the twentieth century. The things are so different that it is almost possible to say that they bear no relationship to each other whatsoever. The liturgical splendor of the twentieth century was in the first century not only unthought of; it was totally impossible (Barclay, The *Lord's Supper*, pp. 111-12).

### Obviously, it did not stay that way:

The Lord's Supper moved from being a real meal into being a symbolic meal...The idea of a tiny piece of bread and sip of wine bears no relation at all to the Lord's Supper as it originally was. It was not until the Synod of Hippo in AD 393 that the idea of fasting communion emerged. The Lord's Supper was originally a family meal in a household of friends (Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 112).

As I read the scholarly literature about how the Lord's Supper was originally celebrated, I am amazed at the consensus that the Supper was originally a full meal. Virtually all commentators agree—even Roman Catholic ones!

They also all agree that the celebration changed over time.

But so far, I haven't read very many of these commentators *evaluate* whether it *should* have changed. They just note the fact that it did and move on to the next point.

But hold on a second!

If Jesus gave us an ordinance, I want to follow His example faithfully, don't you?

So Barclay's claim raises several questions for me, such as: should it have changed from a meal to a symbolic meal? Who made that decision? On what authority?

If it should not have been changed, shouldn't we change it back?

I also wonder what we have lost by turning the Lord's Supper into a symbolic meal? How did that transform the very nature of Christians meeting together as the church?

And what might be gained by going back to celebrating the Supper together as a full meal? How might doing that impact fellowship, friendship, sharing, discipleship, unity, evangelism, and caring for the needy and hungry? Would the setting of a full meal help or hinder those things?

I'm hungry for answers!



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

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