

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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SOMEWHERE UNDER THE RAINBOW

BY BOB WILKIN

THREE THINGS GOD CANNOT DO

BY KENNY HODGES

A RELIGION OF GRATITUDE & GRACE

BY S.C. LAZAR

AND MORE

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We hope you like the magazine's new look. It is thanks to our new Director of Publications. Shawn Lazar is from Montreal and has experience in both newspapers and magazines. He is a strong Free Grace proponent and is a candidate for a Ph.D. (all but final acceptance of his dissertation) at the Free University of Amsterdam. He and his wife, Abby, are expecting their first child this November.

In this issue you will find some new items: four articles on current events of interest to Free Grace folks. The Southern Baptist Convention came out with a new 10-point statement on salvation. We briefly evaluate it. Florida Bible College is restarting in the Fall of 2013. We give details concerning this historic Free Grace school. The 2012 *Together for the Gospel Conference*, aimed at young Calvinist pastors, had an interesting message on salvation by self sacrifice. We critique it. Alan Chambers of Exodus International is under attack for saying that even homosexuals, if "truly saved," are eternally secure. We report on this timely story.

There is also an article on Genesis 9 and the significance of the rainbow in our lives today. And there is a fascinating article entitled "Three Things God Cannot Do." Pastor Kenny Hodges examines John 3:16 in a new and refreshing way. Finally there is an article by Shawn on the importance of gratitude in our Christian lives.

New changes to the magazine are yet coming. Sign up your family and friends for free subscriptions (U.S. addresses only) by emailing ges@faithalone.org.

Warmly,



GRACE IN FOCUS

Volume 27, Number 5

© 2012, by Grace Evangelical Society

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Grace in Focus is a free, bimonthly magazine about the gospel, assurance, and related issues. For your free subscription sign up on our website or send your name and address to 4851 S I-35 E, Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210. If you would like to make a donation to offset the costs of printing and postage, it would be greatly appreciated.

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Somewhere Under the Rainbow

GENESIS 9:1-17

BY BOB WILKIN

INTRODUCTION

The rainbow is an amazing thing, even for unbelievers. But it should have much more significance for the believer in Jesus Christ.

I realize, of course, that the rainbow as a symbol has been hijacked in our day and it now has lost its God-intended meaning for many people. Well, for those of us who believe and know the Bible, we are not distracted. We know the true meaning of the rainbow.

We all today are *somewhere under the rainbow*. As believers we ought to live in light of what the rainbow represents.

The rainbow reminds us of the flood and God's hatred of sin. It reminds us that God will not destroy the earth in the same way again. There will never again be a universal flood.

We should live in light of the truth of the rainbow. This is an exciting section of Scripture as Noah, his sons, and their wives exit the ark to start over.

THE RE-COMMISSION (GENESIS 9:1)

The new Adam (Noah) gets the same command the original Adam received: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28; 9:1).

This suggests that God will ultimately fulfill His original design for man. However, as we shall see, there are now changes.

God's purpose for man is that we would be productive, growing, expanding, creating.

God created us in His image. Theologians have varying opinions on what the image of God is. It seems that at least part of the image of God in

us is creativity. He has made us to be creative and productive. That is where we find fulfillment in life.

Of course, as believers we find fulfillment in being creative and productive *for Him*, which is what the mandate to Noah certainly suggests.

ANIMALS WILL NOW FEAR MAN (GENESIS 9:2)

God told Adam and Eve that they would have *dominion* over the animals (Gen 1:26, 28). Here (Gen 9:2) God says that the animals will *fear* humans.

Many commentators suggest this is another way of saying the same thing. I wonder.

It seems that the change in wording might be significant, especially considering the next verse. Possibly before

continued on p. 4

the flood the animals were submissive to humans, but were not afraid of them. After the flood the animals fear humans, but are not necessarily submissive. There are many wild animals today, like lions and tigers and bears (oh, my!) that are far from submissive to humans. While they surely have fear of humans, they sometimes hurt and even kill us.

I doubt that a single human was hurt or killed by an animal before the flood (other than the spiritual attack of the snake in the Garden of Eden). The Bible certainly gives no indication of that. But after the flood we learn of humans being hurt and killed by animals.

ANIMALS ARE NOW A SOURCE OF FOOD FOR MEN (GENESIS 9:3-4)

Dispensationalism is the view that God has given humans different commands at different stages of human history.

Clearly there was a Dispensational change from when men were kicked out of the garden. Clearly there was a new change when Noah and his family got out of the ark. Later there would be a change when the Law of Moses was put in place. And later again a change would occur when the Church of Jesus Christ was born.

The statement that “every moving thing that lives shall be food for you” (Gen 9:3) is new. Before the flood there was no such statement nor was there any indication before the flood that humans ate meat. Possibly they did,

but no statement like this was given to Adam and Eve in the garden or after they were expelled from the garden.

It is highly likely that prior to the flood humans were vegetarians and that after the flood they became omnivores, eating both plants and animals.

God does give a prohibition in regards to the eating of animals: we were not to eat flesh with its blood.

GOD’S IMAGE IS IN ALL HUMANS.

This later became part of the Law of Moses as well. Thus humans were not to drink blood or to eat meat that was covered in blood. This meant that we had to drain the blood from animals before preparing the meat.

There is possibly an allusion to the blood of Jesus Christ here. The life of any animal, including humans, is in its blood. Thus the death of animals and the shedding of their blood likely alluded to the fact that one day the Messiah would willingly shed His blood for all of mankind (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2).

THE SACREDNESS OF HUMAN LIFE (GENESIS 9:5-7)

Prior to the flood, murder was clearly wrong, but there was no established penalty for it. God did not take Cain’s life after he killed Abel, for example.

Now, after the flood, a law is set in place. If a man willfully and intentionally takes the life of another, then his life will be forfeited when he is caught and found guilty. This later became part of the Law of Moses.

Note that the reason why murdering a human is wrong is because humans are made “in the image of God.”

Note too that this refers to humans after the fall and after the flood. Adam and Eve were made in the image of God. Even after they fell, their descendants remained in the image of God. That image was marred, but not lost.

God’s image is in all humans, not simply those who have everlasting life.

People who are against the death penalty think it is hypocritical of people to be against abortion and yet in favor of the death penalty. Yet they do not see the obvious: both relate to the preciousness of human life. God says human life is so precious that one who murders someone who is in the image of God forfeits his own life.

Clearly there is a deterrent built into the death penalty. In the first place, the one put to death will not be free to murder anyone else. In the second place, men may be hindered from murder if they know that the death penalty awaits them if they are discovered.

After the flood it is possible that Noah and his sons would think that God thought of



human life as cheap and expendable. They just saw billions of humans and animals die. (I realize that most think that only a few *million* people died in the flood. However, given a thousand years with no wars and people living over 900 years and with each couple having well over a century of child-bearing years, likely there were well over a billion people and over a billion animals that died in the flood.) God is here affirming that human life is precious to Him (compare 2 Pet 3:9-12). And He is about to show them that He will never again destroy the earth with a universal flood.

THE RAINBOW IS A SIGN THAT THERE WILL NOT BE ANOTHER UNIVERSAL FLOOD (GENESIS 9:8-17)

Evidently there were no rainbows before the flood.

In any case, from this day forward the rainbow would be a sign in the clouds that God would never again destroy the world by universal flood.

Do you think of this promise when you see a rainbow? I do at times. But at times I forget. The beauty of the rainbow can make us enjoy it just for itself, not for what it stands for. But we should remember what it signifies.

And we should remember that this promise is linked with the promise that after the Millennium God will destroy the world and the entire universe with fire.

Look at 2 Pet 3:10-13. After the return of Christ—and here Peter skips the entire Millennium since he is looking at the very big picture, the Lord will wipe out every trace of sin in the universe. Everything “will be burned up” (v 10). We are to live with expectation of this coming day (vv 11-12). We look forward to a “new heavens and

a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (v 13). Won’t that be great?

And that is also something we can recall when we see a rainbow. There will only be one other worldwide destruction. The first was by flood. The second will be by fire.

THE WORLD IS NOT GOING TO BE DESTROYED BY ANYTHING MAN DOES

People in the ecology movement are scared that humans are destroying the planet. They come up with movies to express their views and all kinds of laws and taxes to save us from destroying ourselves and our planet.

We certainly should be good caretakers of the planet God gave us. But we should remember that God promises that we will not destroy ourselves or our planet. He will not allow it. The world will continue, no matter what people do or do not do, until the Lord returns and overthrows wickedness and establishes His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years. Only after that will the heavens and earth be destroyed and a new heavens and earth be put in place.

APPLICATIONS OF THE MEANING OF THE RAINBOW

When we see a rainbow, we should think not only of the promise not to destroy the earth by flood again, but also of the promise of the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. A number of other applications come to mind:

1. God hates sin.
2. God highly prizes human life.
3. Every single human has the image of God within him.
4. We were made to be fruitful, to multiply, to fill the earth,

and to bring glory to God by what we do with the earth.

5. The rainbow is a call to holy living in view of Jesus’ soon return.

CONCLUSION

We face death daily. None of us knows how long we will live. Many times each year we learn of the death of people close to us or close to our friends. Yet all the deaths we learn of in a lifetime are few in comparison to the deaths that Noah and his family witnessed. Except for eight people, the entire human race—probably over a billion people at that time—was destroyed. The only survivors were the humans in the ark.


When they exited the ark, they built a new world.

The sign of the rainbow was a promise of peace and of continuation to them and it is to us as well.

Ultimately living in light of the rainbow is living in light of Jesus’ soon return. Soon He will establish His righteous kingdom.

Before He does, before the Millennium starts, every Church Age believer will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ to determine our eternal rewards (2 Cor 5:9-10; 1 John 2:28). Wouldn’t it be great to hear Him say to you, “Well done, good servant” (Luke 19:17)? His praise and approval would mean so much.

We know we have everlasting life because we believe the Lord Jesus who said, “He who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47). Because of that gift, we should long to please Him. We should crave His approval.

The rainbow reminds us that He is coming again and that He has a plan for history. Ultimately, man will not mess up His plan. God is in control of history. May we always keep in mind the message of the rainbow. 

THREE THINGS GOD CANNOT DO

FROM JOHN 3:16

BY KENNY HODGES

PASTOR, EMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH, STARKVILLE, MS

A college professor once asked, "Are there any Christians in the class?" A few hands hesitantly went up. The professor continued, "I have a question for you. Can God do *anything*?" Several heads nodded. "Well then, if God can do *anything*, can He make a rock so big He can't pick it up?" This, of course, is a trick question. The truth is that God *can* do anything that *He wants*, but there *are* things He cannot do. He can never do anything that is contrary to His character or attributes. God cannot sin. He could never be unjust. He could never cease to be omnipotent. A rock too big for the omnipotent God to pick up is a logical impossibility.

I was blessed to hear Pastor Bob McDonald from Emmanuel Baptist Church share a method of evangelizing that uses the idea of God not being able to do certain things. I have found this to be an excellent approach. In the course of conversation with someone I ask if he or she knows that there are three things God cannot do. Using John 3:16 I point out:

1 GOD COULD NOT LOVE YOU ANY MORE THAN HE DOES.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." God's love, demonstrated in giving His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins is the supreme example of love. John, in his first epistle, says, "In this is love, not

that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). God loved the world so much that He provided the perfect sacrifice for our sins. The blood of Jesus satisfied or propitiated God's wrath for all time.

2 GOD COULD NOT HAVE MADE YOUR RESPONSE ANY EASIER.

"...that whoever believes in Him..."


Notice that God does not say, "whoever behaves." The truth is, because Jesus paid it all, there is nothing that we can do to help God out. As a matter of fact, to think we have to do anything in addition to Jesus' sacrifice is to elevate our works to the same level as Jesus' death on the cross. In essence we are telling God that Jesus did not do enough and that we must help Him. Verses like Eph 2:8-9 and Titus 3:11 make it clear that we are saved by faith alone and not by works. Jesus said, "He that believes in Me has everlasting life." It could not be any simpler.

3 GOD COULD NOT GIVE YOU A GREATER GIFT.

"...should not perish, but have everlasting life." When we believe in Jesus, God gives us eternal life. In

John 4, Jesus made an amazing statement to a Samaritan woman, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10). Jesus goes on to say, "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 4:14). A single drink results in eternal life. In other words, simple faith in Jesus Christ results in a person being born again. They pass from death to life. God is the One who chose the adjective *eternal* to describe the life that He gives. Everlasting or eternal life is contrasted with perishing. Later in John 10:28 Jesus says, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." What a wonderful gift, knowing that our eternal destiny is settled and secure forever because of Jesus!

So you see, there are three things in John 3:16 that God cannot do: He cannot love you anymore than He does, He cannot make it any easier for you to receive His love, and He cannot give you a greater gift—eternal life!

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. 

Is Salvation Probationary?

Part II

BY WILLARD MAXWELL ALDRICH

[Editor's Note: Originally published in 1934 in the journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*, this article was written by then Th.M. student Willard Aldrich. He later went on to get his Th.D. and to be president of Multnomah Bible College (1943-1978). He died in 2009. Part I appeared in the May/June 2012 issue of this magazine.]

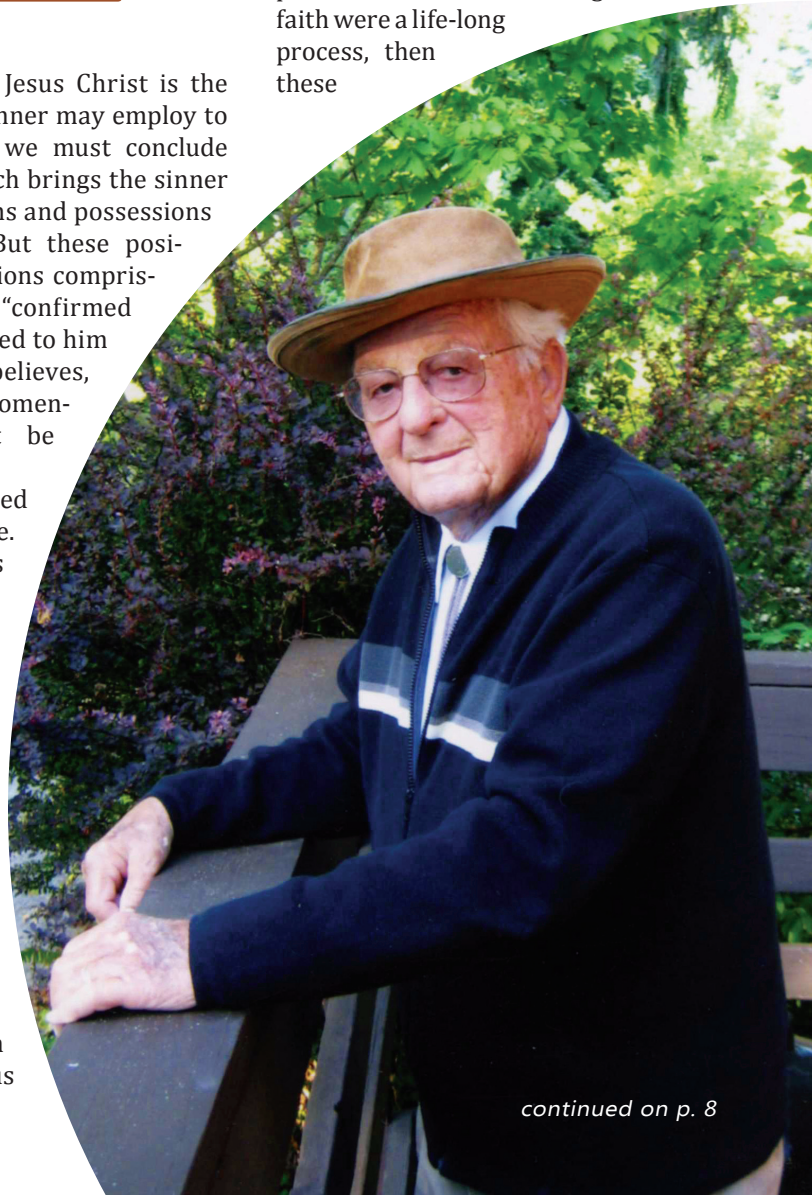
We have seen that the Scriptures point out by means of various figures and expressions that the believer has many positions and possessions by virtue of his relation to Christ. I have mentioned but a few of them. Dr. Chafer lists some thirty-three of such. These are attributed to the believer as his during this life, and they are positions and possessions of an absolute or unchangeable nature, as perfect upon the moment of receipt as when the believer is an old saint going to his reward. In the language we have adopted thus far, they speak of a "confirmed state."

However, if saving faith is a probationary process, then the results of it can at best be but in a state of probation and terms which describe that state as being "confirmed" would be wholly misapplied, but such a description is exactly what we have found in the Word of God. The believer is represented as being, not becoming, a Son of God; justified, not becoming justified; made meet, not becoming fit for the presence of God, etc. Whatever means were employed to produce these effects must have been complete and adequate, and, since the Scriptures plainly state about 150 times that

faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only means the sinner may employ to obtain salvation, we must conclude that the faith which brings the sinner into these positions and possessions is saving faith. But these positions and possessions comprising the believer's "confirmed state" are attributed to him the moment he believes, therefore the momentary faith must be saving faith.

We have reasoned from effect to cause. These positions and possessions are the effects of which faith is the cause. We might think of it in these terms. The report of a rifle shot is heard, and immediately we know that the trigger has been pulled and caused the hammer to descend upon the cartridge thus

effecting the firing of the gun and producing the report. Because the report was heard, we know that the trigger has been pulled. Now, we may conceive of pulling the trigger as a process if we choose. If so, we note that the report is not heard until the process is completed. Likewise, if saving faith were a life-long process, then these



continued on p. 8

positions and possessions, the result of it, could not be attributed to the person until the process had ended, with his death. But the Bible applies them to a man the moment he believes, thus proving that saving faith is an act of faith and not a probationary process.

There are many passages of Scripture to substantiate this position. Perhaps John 3:14-15, might be called the classic proof-text. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." This reference to Moses lifting up the serpent of brass for the healing of the snakebitten people gives us the famous Gospel message of "life for a look." The background of the story is familiar. The people had murmured against God and poisonous snakes were sent among them in judgment. As a provision for their healing the Lord said to Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent and put it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, *when* he looketh upon it, shall live." The Apostle John employs this story to show that even as a look at the up-lifted serpent saved the people in Moses' day, even so now whosoever will look at the crucified Son of God in faith shall be saved instantly. Some may object that the present tense of the verb is used in the John passage and that it demands a continuance of the believing to retain eternal life. That does not follow, for the present may be used here to denote the continual offer of salvation. "Whosoever believeth" at any time may have eternal life. So also John 1:12, 5:24.

There are three passages wherein the act of "eating or drinking" is given as the only condition of obtaining eternal life. The first is found in Gen 3:22, which reads, "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." Without attempting to understand the mystery of this passage, let us note the simple condition

advanced for the obtaining of life eternal—to put forth the hand, take, eat and live forever. The impression which this verse gives is that the moment the fruit of the tree of life touched the lips of Adam he then would come into the possession of eternal life. It would not depend upon his continued eating, but upon the initial act of taking and eating. Further, it would seem that the eating *once* included in it a provision for continued eating if that were necessary.

**SAVING FAITH
IS AN ACT,
INSTANTANEOUS
AND EFFECTIVE,
AND NOT A
PROBATIONARY
PROCESS.**

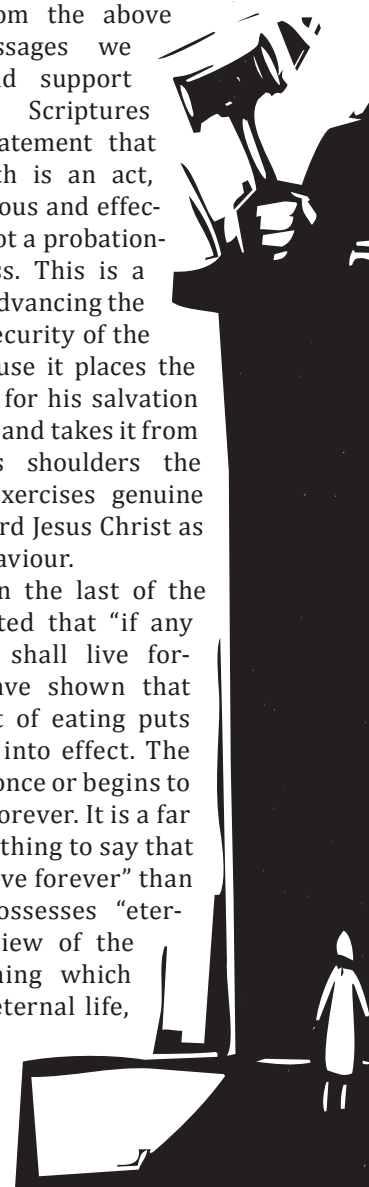
The second passage is found in John 4:14, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Jesus was addressing a woman who was accustomed to come day after day to the well to draw water, and he had just said to her, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again," evidently meaning that whosoever came one day and took a drink would have to come back again and drink. Then he parallels taking a drink from the natural well and from the water which he offers, but contrasts the results. The one taking a drink from the well thirsts again, but the water that Jesus will give will itself be a well of water springing up in the individual unto eternal life. This most conclusively shows that it is the one act of "drinking," or exercising faith, which gives to the believer eternal life—a fountain

springing up from within which sustains the believer.

The third passage is John 6:51, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever." In the Greek this is a future, more-vivid, conditional sentence, "If any man will eat of this bread, he shall live forever," and a "conditional sentence may state what *is* or *will* be true on a particular occasion, or what is always true if the protasis is fulfilled" [*Elementary Greek*, Burgess and Bonner, p. 55]. Here we have stated "he shall live forever," that is, what will always be true; if the condition, "if any man shall eat," is fulfilled. A single act of eating fulfills the condition set forth in this statement, for the aorist tense, used generally of point action, is employed in the protasis.

Thus from the above three passages we have found support from the Scriptures for the statement that saving faith is an act, instantaneous and effective, and not a probationary process. This is a great step in advancing the proof of the security of the believer, because it places the responsibility for his salvation upon the Lord and takes it from the believer's shoulders the moment he exercises genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

We noted in the last of the passages quoted that "if any man eat, he shall live forever," and have shown that the initial act of eating puts the condition into effect. The one who eats once or begins to eat shall live forever. It is a far more forceful thing to say that a man "shall live forever" than to say he possesses "eternal life" in view of the current teaching which would make eternal life, the new birth, the place in



the family of God, a thing which can both be truly possessed and then lost again. The statement, "he shall live forever," is unconditional. It is a positive, unequivocal, blank statement with no strings tied to it. Therefore, if it is once affirmed of a man that he "shall live forever," and the man has met the Scriptural condition of exercising saving faith, then all the power and honor of God are behind the statement to see that he does live forever. There is no loop hole here for anyone to argue that "he shall live forever," only so long as he eats, i.e., exercises faith, for the passages above referred to do not make continuous eating or drinking the condition, and while I believe that the saved one will continue to believe, it will not be *in order to* become saved, *but because* he has been saved. There is no question that the one act of eating or drinking fulfills the condition set forth in these passages.

Now it is interesting to note that in the great discourse on the bread of life, in John 6, Jesus uses "eternal life" as an equivalent for the declaration, "shall live forever."

In verse 54 is the statement, "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood hath eternal life," and in verse 51 the same truth is worded, "If any man eat this bread, he shall live forever." The condition is the same in both cases, "If any man eat," so we are justified in concluding that the result

is also the same, hence, "hath eternal life" means that he "shall live forever." In other words when the words "eternal life" are on the lips of the Lord Jesus in John's Gospel they are equivalent to the more forceful statement, "shall live forever." To be able to substitute this positive declaration for the somewhat dubious phrase "eternal life" in the many offers of salvation in John's Gospel greatly strengthens the argument for the security of the believer. Eternal life is not of such a character that it continues to be eternal life whether in the possession of the individual or not. It is not like a sack of potatoes thrown upon the outstretched arms of the eager believer which continues to be potatoes whether he is able to sustain them or not. The potatoes are in no way vitally related to the person, but eternal life is not thus distinct from its possessor. It is some way mysteriously linked up with the new nature, the result of the new birth. It involves a new personality, and its very eternal character must guarantee the eternal life of the new nature with which it is inseparably linked.

Other passages of Scripture confirm the contention that eternal life is eternal in the believer, inseparably joined to him, thus guaranteeing his living forever. John 10:28 puts it this way, "And I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish." The Greek negative employed in this passage is a combination of two negatives (οὐ and μή) thus forming the strongest possible statement "they shall *never* perish." This leaves no room for the supposition that one having eternal life "could" give it back. However, in our experience it is not so much of a speculative "could" or "couldn't" but rather the gracious loving care of God which so guards us that we "wouldn't" if we "could." So also John 5:24, "He that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me hath eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life." **HGIF**

THE RESTART OF FLORIDA BIBLE COLLEGE

Florida Bible College has produced thousands of Free Grace advocates, including many hundreds of Free Grace pastors. In the early seventies it was the fastest growing Bible college in America. At its peak it had over 1,500 students and was continuing to grow rapidly.

The school went into decline in the mid to late seventies when the President of the school was found to have suffered a moral fall. The school dropped from over 1,500 at its peak to a few hundred when it moved to Kissimmee, FL in the mid-eighties. The school continued on with a small student body until it was closed in the late nineties.

The expected launch date of the new Florida Bible College is set for the fall of 2013. It is to meet in the facilities of Calvary Community Church in Tampa. Ralph "Yankee" Arnold is the Pastor of CCC and will be the President of the revived Florida Bible College.

See floridabiblecollege.com for more information. **HGIF**

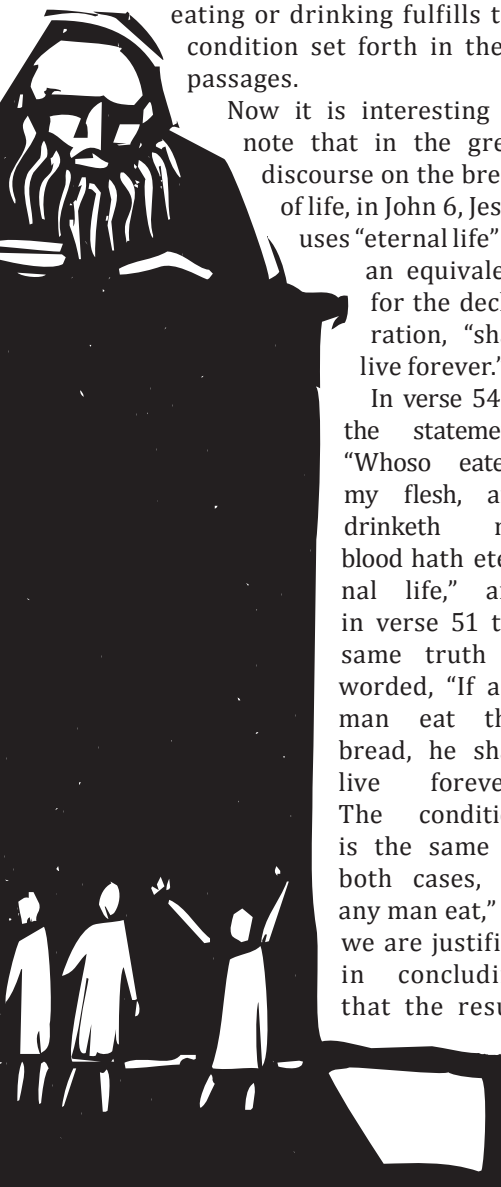
funnyman

Reader BF writes:

I thought you might appreciate this. It actually happened in one of my classes.

One day [as a joke] I read out loud 1 Cor 11:30 ("For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep") and told them this seemed to be how they were responding to my lectures.

Some time later a student came up to me to tell me he had found another verse that described my classes. It was Acts 19:32 ("Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together"). **HGIF**



A Religion of Gratitude & Grace

“BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:57)

BY S.C. LAZAR

Christianity is foremost a religion of gratitude. Or so says C. F. W. Walther, developing an insight from Luther:

Luther says that the Christian religion is—in a nutshell—a religion of gratitude. All the good that we Christians do is not done to merit something. We should not even know how to acquire merit. Everything has been given to us: our righteousness, our everlasting heritage, and our salvation. All that is left for us to do is to thank God (Law & Gospel, Thesis X).

Few feelings affect us more profoundly than gratitude. It has the power to shock us out of the complacency of the social presumptions that all too easily lead us to treat our neighbors as little more than means to our selfish ends. Gratitude restores within us, if only for a moment, a sense of reverence for the other, for ourselves, and for all of life.

WE ALL ARE GRATEFUL WHEN PEOPLE DO US FAVORS

Of course, it is common enough to appreciate the small favors people do for us. Social life is filled with little kindnesses that differentiate friendship from mere civility. But such courtesies are rarely selfless.

Many gifts are ultimately meant to be repaid. We give expecting to receive in return. And as Jacques Derrida has said, these are not *gifts* so much as *debts*, leading to an endless circle of giving and receiving tinged by the resentment of being obliged to give in return.

But when a gift is so extravagant that it defies repayment, and when it is made, not to put us in debt, but for our own good, then our appreciation ripens to gratitude. And in that moment of gratefulness, we experience a sense of transcendence that lifts us beyond the narrowly selfish concerns of our life, helping us take a wider view of its purpose, and we give thanks. For gratitude responds to goodness, and goodness speaks of spiritual realities unaccounted for by material existence. Gratitude gives us a taste of divine things.

HOW MUCH MORE POWERFUL SHOULD OUR GRATITUDE BE FOR THE FREE GIFT OF EVERLASTING LIFE

And if that is true of gratitude in general, how much greater is Christian gratitude, which is the consummation of all such feeling? It weaves together

all of our fleeting moments of thanksgiving and transfigures them, pointing to their true source in Christ. Christian gratitude has this effect because it is born out of the greatest sacrifice ever known, and the costliest gift ever given or received. It is born out of Christ's own atoning death, and His promise to freely give us everything, *including our everlasting heritage*, simply by believing Him for it. And so, Christ's gift speaks to the true purpose of our existence, which is not to wallow in the shameless hedonism of popular culture, but to live eternally *with, in, and for* God. Hence, the free gift of eternal life reshapes our earthly perspective in



light of eternity. By this gift, believers know that our true purpose lies not in the here and now, but in the soon to come. Christ's gift frees us from the cultural bondage of narratives that lament life's futility, and despair of the pointless indifference of, to quote Tennyson, a nature gone "red in tooth and claw." Gratitude refashions the believer's mind because it proclaims the true purpose for which we were created. We were not meant for the violent strivings of social Darwinism, still less for the banal happiness of "pitiable comfort" (to use Nietzsche's phrase) that so often exhausts our culture's highest aspirations. Rather, we were meant to rejoice in wonder for all eternity at the boundless love of God in Christ. And so, armed with the assurance of Christ's promise that having believed in Him we shall never perish (John 10:28), how can the believer not be animated by thanksgiving to God, grateful for all that He has done?

THE PLAGUE OF MONSTROUS UNCERTAINTY

Unfortunately, not everyone believes this. Many who preach in Christ's name vociferously


deny that eternal life is freely given, and insist instead that it must be earned by an aggregation of faith, grace, and good works. They teach their flock that God sent Christ to *help them* in their salvific endeavors, and that while God will mercifully forgive them if they stumble (via the unfailing panacea of sacramental confession and absolution), in the end, despite talk of grace, mercy, and love, the brutal reality is that such a gospel is one of human effort. These preachers do not deny that God's grace is equally available to all, but the difference between the saved and the lost, they say, is found in each person's synergistic efforts to faithfully cooperate with that grace. The damned fall short of God's glory because their labors were too feeble to attain it. According to such teachers, we are ultimately saved by our own works, rather than by faith in Christ's promise.

This idea of salvation radically changes the nature of gratitude. For wherever salvation is thought of as a human accomplishment, people will be grateful to God (assuming they are grateful at all) not for His free gift of eternal life, but for the bare opportunity to save themselves. But such so-called gratitude is nothing more than pride masquerading as piety. While it may eulogize the goodness of God, in reality, it belittles Him and mocks Christ. It makes God a miser by obscuring His superabundant generosity. And it mocks Christ by denying the finality of His work, and the freeness of His gift. Perhaps it's possible for someone to be genuinely



grateful for the bare opportunity to earn eternity, and some may even live in the hope of accomplishing such a feat. But every soul aware of its own sins will quickly find that kind of gratitude overcome by the monstrous uncertainty that arises whenever a sinner is faced with the monumental task of scaling the gates of paradise by the sweat of their brow. Such gratitude is a pale imitation of that which attends believing in Christ's promise of eternal life.

CERTAINLY GRATEFUL

What the world's gurus, elders, and priests seek to gain through labor, the Lord Jesus Christ gives away freely to whoever believes His promise: "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). No condition is attached to this promise, save belief. And for good reason. No human effort is worthy of the gift. No merit could earn it. No labor could repay it. Even faith itself is only instrumental. And so, God offers eternity without price, to those who have nothing to give in exchange. God's generosity reveals our own spiritual pauperism. For the greatness of the gift reveals the destitution of the recipient. We are sinners entirely dependent on "the exceeding riches of His grace" (Eph 2:7), who, having been given everything, have nothing left to do but to thank and praise God in Christ with our hearts, our minds, and our lives. And for that too, we are grateful. 



The Proposed New Southern Baptist Convention Statement on Salvation

BY BOB WILKIN

Christianity Today had an online article about the June 2012 SBC meetings in New Orleans (www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/juneweb-only/baptists-calvinism-heresy.html). The introduction to the proposed statement indicates that it would distance the SBC from 5-point Calvinism.

Five point Calvinism holds the following doctrines not held by most Southern Baptists: (1) Christ only died for a small percentage of humanity; (2) the vast majority of people have no possibility of gaining everlasting life since Jesus did not die for them; (3) some have been predestined to everlasting life; (4) most have been predestined to eternal condemnation; (5) regeneration precedes faith; (6) faith is the gift of God.

The proposed new statement has ten affirmations and ten denials. I will merely cite from the affirmations. Seven of the ten affirmations are friendly to the Free Grace position:

Article one: We affirm that the Gospel is the good news that God has made a way of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for any person. This is in keeping with God's desire for every person to be saved.

Article two: We affirm that, because of the fall of Adam, every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin and that every person who is capable of moral action will sin. Each person's sin alone brings the wrath of a holy God, broken fellowship with Him, ever-worsening selfishness and destructiveness, death, and condemnation to an eternity in hell.

Article three: We affirm that the penal substitution of Christ

is the only available and effective sacrifice for the sins of every person.

Article four: We affirm that grace is God's generous decision to provide salvation for any person by taking all of the initiative in providing atonement, in freely offering the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in uniting the believer to Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith.

Article seven: We affirm God's eternal knowledge of and sovereignty over every person's salvation or condemnation.

Article eight: We affirm that God, as an expression of His sovereignty, endows each person with actual free will (the ability to choose between two options), which must be exercised in accepting or rejecting God's gracious call to salvation by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

Article ten: We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned His church to preach the good news of salvation to all people to the ends of the earth. We affirm that the proclamation of the Gospel is God's means of bringing any person to salvation.

Two of the affirmations are potentially confusing, depending on how one defines repentance (and the statement does not define it):


Article five: We affirm that any person who responds to the Gospel with repentance and faith is born again through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is a new creation in Christ and enters, at the moment he believes, into eternal life.

Article six: We affirm that, in reference to salvation, election speaks of God's eternal, gracious, and certain plan in Christ to have a people who are His by repentance and faith.

One of the affirmations seems to promote a very mild form of the perseverance of the saints (note the italicized material):

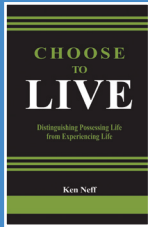
Article nine: We affirm that when a person responds in faith to the Gospel, God promises to complete the process of salvation in the believer into eternity. This process begins with justification, whereby the sinner is immediately acquitted of all sin and granted peace with God; *continues in sanctification, whereby the saved are progressively conformed to the image of Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit*; and concludes in glorification, whereby the saint enjoys life with Christ in heaven forever (italics added).

All in all the statement is one that I rejoice in. While I could not sign such a statement without reservation, I certainly do agree with its overall intent and content. This is clearly *not* a Lordship Salvation doctrinal statement. Nor is it one that is friendly to the Lordship Salvation position (with the possible exception of article nine).

There are three videos on the SBC Today website that are well worth viewing. I was fascinated personally as I watched all three and highly recommend you check them out. They discuss the statement and the issue of using a sinner's prayer, which the convention voted to continue to use (but with over 30% voting no). Interviews with Emir Caner, Eric Hankins, and Steve Gaines can be found at sbctoday.com/category/interviews. 

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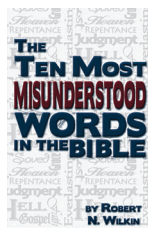
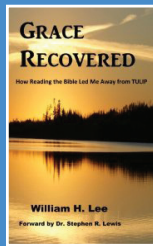
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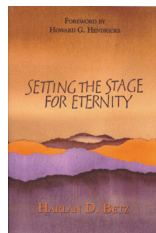
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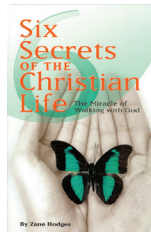
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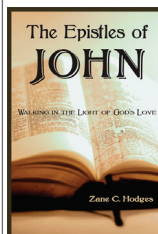
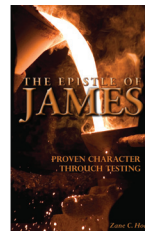
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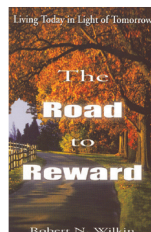
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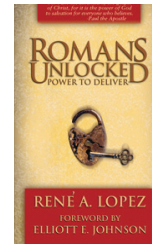
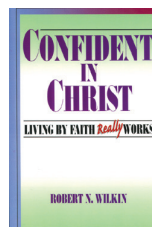
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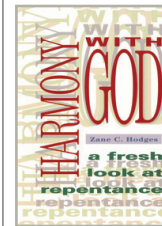
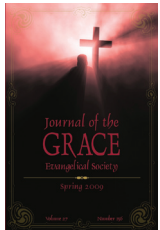
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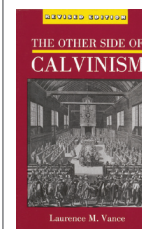
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DOWNWARD TRENDS

Salvation by Self-Sacrifice According to Pastor Mark Dever and the *Together for the Gospel Conference* 2012


Lillian Kwon, a *Christian Post* reporter, gave a fascinating snapshot of what Pastor Mark Dever said at the 2012 *Together for the Gospel Conference* (christianpost.com/news/false-conversions-are-the-suicide-of-the-church-pastor-warns-73132/). Dever, a well-known Calvinist and Southern Baptist, was speaking to 8,000 pastors and seminary students. His message concerned the danger of false conversions. Here is a direct quote of what he said:

"Well, if you want to get a lot of fake Christians in your church, just tell them that there is this free gift that entails no self-sacrifice and that trouble and cross-bearing are only for those super

saints who choose extra-large when they order their spiritual meal. The truth, however, is no cross, no crown. No cross, no crown. Jesus taught us that in this world you will have trouble. He told those who were considering following Him, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.'" (t4g.org/media/2012/04/false-conversions-the-suicide-of-the-church see time stamp: 50:35-51:10)

Dever was saying that it is wrong to tell people that everlasting life is a free gift that entails no self-sacrifice and no cross-bearing. Stated positively, he was implying that everlasting life requires self-sacrifice, self-denial, and

cross-bearing. If a person does not follow Christ on the path of suffering they will not spend eternity with Jesus.

One of the founders of the conference is Dr. Al Mohler, President of Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY. Mohler and Southern Seminary are well known in Southern Baptist circles as proponents of 5-point Calvinism. It is striking that these *New Calvinists* now feel free to speak of salvation by self-sacrifice. No longer do they say salvation is a free gift with no strings attached. They teach that self-sacrifice is a condition of the new birth. 

Alan Chambers of Exodus International

Homosexuality is a hot topic these days. While social media is filled with inflammatory comments being thrown in every direction, many Christians wrongly think that their only options are to compromise their views or tell the world that homosexuals are going to hell. But Alan Chambers of Exodus International is reaching out to homosexuals in love. Instead of unfruitful condemnation, he is seeking to help them out of a homosexual lifestyle so that they can enjoy life the way God intended.


What's more is he is taking a stand for the eternal security of homosexuals who believe in Christ. He told CBN News, "We agree acting on same-sex attraction is sin, it creates a barrier in someone's relationship with

Christ... However we do not differentiate between homosexual practice and other unrepentant sins. I, Alan, personally hold to a belief that once someone is truly saved such a relationship is irrevocable" (<http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2012/July/Faith-Leader-Exodus-Intl-Head-Deceiving-Gays/>).

Sadly Robert Gagnon, a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, is calling for Chambers's dismissal over this issue. Gagnon said, "...Alan's approach of providing assurances of salvation to those actively engaged in sexually immoral intercourse is a very different approach than Jesus' and Paul's warnings that immoral sexual behavior...can get one...thrown into hell" (<http://www.robagnon.net/articles/homosexAlanChambersAtlanticInterview.pdf>). His argument is

based upon confusion between eternal destiny and eternal reward.

Chambers's method isn't popular because grace just isn't popular. But we need to support Chambers and everyone else who stands up for truth and chooses to apply that truth toward real people with real problems. That's what Jesus did with the woman at the well (John 4), and with the woman caught in adultery (John 8), and with Peter when Jesus revealed that he would deny Him three times (John 13:38-14:1).

Free Grace is practical truth. It helps us keep a level head when serious love is called for. Armed with Free Grace truth, we can truly meet people where they are and love them away from sinful behavior and into a closer relationship with God. 

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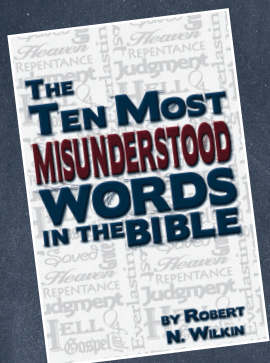
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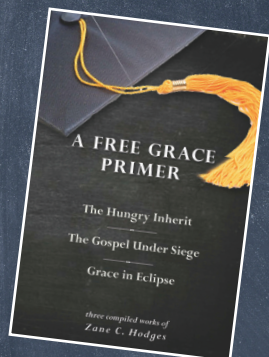
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