

GRACE IN FOCUS

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JULY / AUGUST 2021

Money *Can* Buy Love? (Matthew 6:21)



PLUS WHY IS FAITH CONFUSING? / CHRIST AND SUFFERING / HOW RARE ARE VIRTUOUS WOMEN? /
GES OVERSEAS / ROMANS 11 / PSALM 37 / THOU SHALT EAT! / CONFLICTING TRUTH? / AND MORE!



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FROM THE EDITOR

What does ministry look like in a post-Covid world?

First, we are not yet in a post-Covid world. The President hopes to celebrate our independence from Covid-19 in a ceremony at the White House on July 4. But will we be independent?

Today I saw my doctor as a follow-up about five weeks after I came down with Covid. He told me that I should have immunity for six months. He said that the vaccines give you immunity for one year. “You mean we will need to get covid vaccines every year?” I asked. “Yes. That is what it is looking like the guidelines will be.”

Second, if and when the Covid restrictions are behind us, I think we will still have to deal with the fact that many people will continue to feel the need to wear masks and to get you to wear masks too.

Sharon and I rejoice as mask requirements are diminishing. But we have friends who view lessening the use of masks as a terrible injustice.

In terms of in-person ministry, I think we will all need to be sensitive to fellow believers who have strong convictions about everyone wearing masks.


The biggest issue in ministry post-Covid is likely to be finances. The government has given out trillions of dollars. Our economy lost trillions more. Inflation may rise and impact us all. If so, ministry finances may be challenged.



Ministry After Covid?

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

We do not know what the future will bring. But we know who holds the future. He will give us the strength and the resources we need to continue to serve Him, whatever may happen in the next few years.

Thank you for your prayers and gifts. Together, we are making a difference. 

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rob Wilkin".



Why Is Faith in Christ Confusing for Many?

BY BOB WILKIN

Hundreds of people send us questions about what it means to believe in Jesus. We answer these questions often in our blogs, podcasts, and videos.

John 3:16 says that “whoever believes in Him” will not perish but has everlasting life. Yet the simple words *whoever believes in Him* are incomprehensible to many.

In *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye sings about *tradition*. “And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: Tradition!...Because of our traditions, we’ve kept our balance for many, many years.”

One of the traditions passed down with orthodox Judaism is works salvation. Those who persevere in faith and good works are the ones who will make it into Messiah’s kingdom.

The same tradition was adopted by most within Christianity. It is not simply Roman Catholics who believe that only those who persevere in faith and good works will make it into the Messiah’s kingdom. Orthodox people believe that too. So do most Protestants and Evangelicals.

The reason people struggle with understanding what it means to believe in Jesus is that they

reject the idea that one is born again or justified simply by believing in Jesus.

Let me explain.

Most people within Christianity think that to gain what they call *final salvation*, one must persevere in faith and good works until the end of his life. Therefore, whatever Jesus meant by “whoever believes in Him” in John 3:16, He could not have meant that the eternal destiny of the one who simply believes in Jesus is secure forever from that point onward.¹ Ongoing faith and works are required. That is a pillar of their tradition.

When someone asks what it means to believe, I like to point out that this is a softball question. If I asked you, “Do you believe that Joe Biden is President of the United States?” you would not struggle over the meaning of my question. The evidence is overwhelming that Joe Biden is President.

If I ask you, “Do you believe that all who believe in Jesus will never perish and currently have everlasting life that cannot be lost?” you should not struggle over the meaning of my question. Does Jesus guarantee everlasting life and no condemnation to whoever simply comes to faith

in Him? Or does He require a lifetime of faith and good works?

John 3:16 fails to mention good works. It does *not* say, “whoever *behaves* in Him.” It does not say anything about the need to persevere in faith either. The Lord simply says that when you find someone who believes in Him, you’ve found someone who has everlasting life and will never perish.

I’ve found that it helps some people if we point out that we are believing in Jesus for Him to give us something very specific. He promises everlasting life and no condemnation to those who believe in Him. Many find it helpful if we put it this way: *whoever believes in Jesus for everlasting life has that life and is now secure forever.*

You cannot be born again without believing in Jesus for your eternal destiny. In the NT that is typically called *everlasting life*. But it is also called salvation, justification, never hungering, never thirsting, never perishing, and never dying [spiritually]. The point is simple. We are born again when we believe that by faith in Jesus we have a secure relationship with Jesus that will never end.

Some people don’t like having the word *believe* twice in the statement I just gave. They object that that is faith in faith. Well, of course it is faith in faith, because of what Jesus promised about faith. It is not faith in *any faith*. It is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who guarantees the believer’s eternal destiny.

Note how this is evident in John 11:25-27:

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (emphasis added).

Notice the words highlighted. Jesus makes two promises concerning the one who “believes in Me”: he will be raised from the dead (v 25) and he will never die spiritually (v 26a). Then He asks Martha if she believes this.


She says she does, and she explains why. She knows that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,

and as such, He guarantees the eternal destiny of all who believe in Him.

What do most people *within Christianity* understand Jesus to mean when He says, “He who believes in Me”? They understand that He means commitment, surrender, turning from sins, obedience to His commands, and following Him. And they do not understand everlasting life to be something someone gets the moment he commits, surrenders, turns, and begins to obey and follow. Instead, they take believing in Jesus to refer to lifelong commitment, surrender, turning, obeying, and following. Consequently, they go through life wondering if they will end up in Jesus’ kingdom or in the lake of fire.

That is not what the Lord Jesus was talking about in John 3:16. Most people flatly reject what Jesus says. Keep in mind, they do not think that they are rejecting what He is saying. They think that they are correctly interpreting what He meant since the idea that everlasting life could be secure the moment one simply believes in Jesus for it is incomprehensible to them.

But it should not be.

We are ambassadors for Christ. We bring the faith-alone message. Remember to use the KISS method: Keep It Simple, Saint. And when you get a question about what it means to believe in Jesus, rejoice in the opportunity to make the issue crystal clear. 



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 45 years, Sharon.

1. Jesus taught that salvation is final the very moment we believe in Him for it (John 3:16-18). We do not wait a lifetime to see if we will get some future final salvation. We are certain from the moment of faith that we already have final salvation. The only way we can lose such assurance is if we stop believing the promise, which is possible (Gal 5:4). But while assurance can be lost, everlasting life cannot be lost.

Help Promote the Promise

The scope of GES's mission is expanding. Now, more than ever, we are reaching the world with the message of God's free grace and Jesus' promise of everlasting life. Your support has been crucial in helping us produce:

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- Daily blogs in English
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- *Grace in Focus* magazine six times a year
- Weekly YouTube videos
- Regional and national conferences
- Books
- Overseas teaching and training of pastors and students

If you decide in your heart to give (cf. 2 Cor 9:7), you can donate monthly at www.faithalone.org.



Money *Can* Buy Love? (Matthew 6:21)

By Ken Yates

We have all heard the saying that money cannot buy love. I think the basic meaning of the phrase is that if we try to gain the affections of another person, we cannot do it by showering that person with gifts or money. The other person will simply use you. He or she will act like he loves you but really all he is doing is looking for more financial benefits for himself.

There is, of course, a lot of truth in that statement. But there is another way of looking at it. There is a way in which money can indeed buy love. Perhaps we cannot make another person love us with money, but we can use money to produce love in ourselves.

Let me give an example. When I was a teenager, I started following the University of Kentucky basketball team. When I first heard about the team, I didn't know a single thing about them. The team was unknown to me. I couldn't name a single player.

However, as time went on, I spent money following them. I would buy their merchandise. I would buy tickets to see them play. I would make the financial investment to travel to other cities

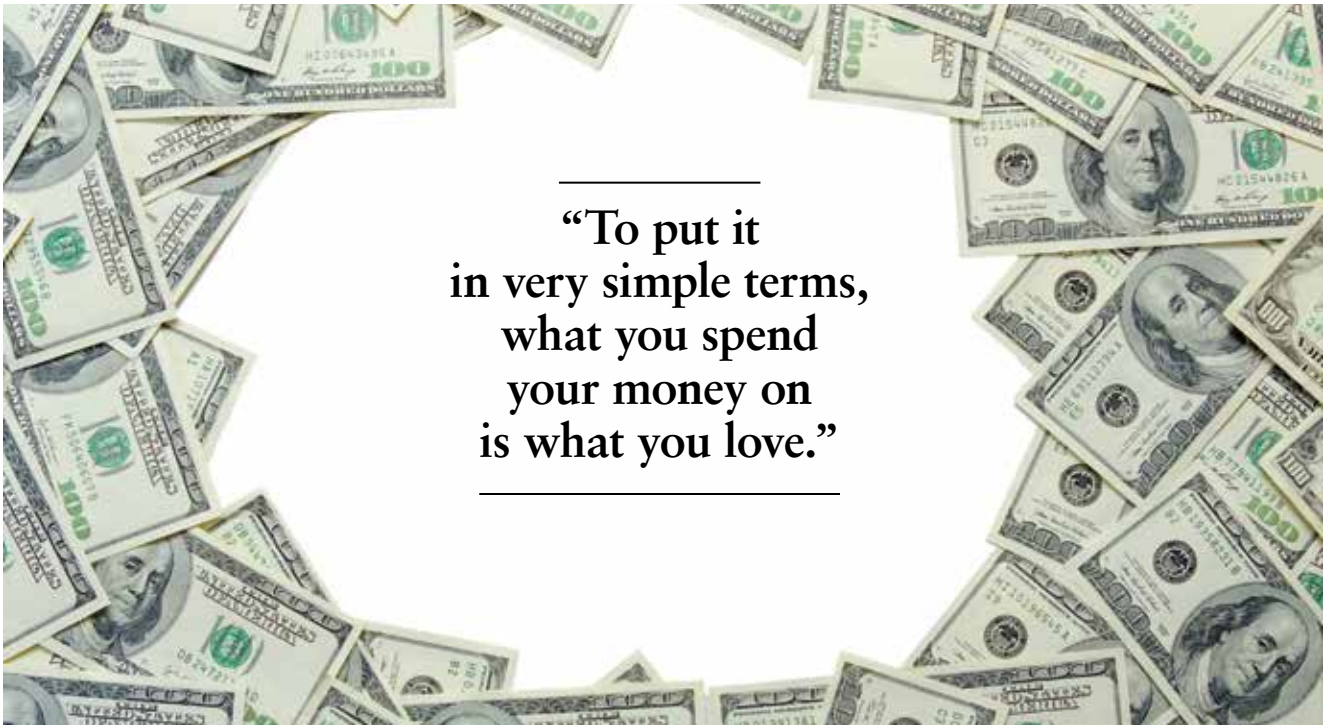
for games. I would also spend the time needed to do all of these things.

All of these things caused me to fall in love with Kentucky basketball. Even though it was dumb, and nobody on the team even knew who I was, I could tell you the name of the players. I could tell you stories about them. I knew which ones were drafted into the NBA. When it was game day, I would count the hours until the start of the game. When the season was over, I would experience sadness knowing I wouldn't get to watch them play for about six months. But the sadness would be lessened by the fact that I could follow who the team was recruiting for next year. I must admit it is embarrassing even to admit these things!

No doubt, a major reason I loved Kentucky basketball is because of the money and time I spent on it. I was in an unhealthy relationship. But fortunately, we are now divorced.

In the last couple of years, I have really soured on sports of all kinds. The political correctness and racial divisions promoted by sports have turned me off to them.

This is true for my previous love of Kentucky basketball. I did not watch a single game last



**“To put it
in very simple terms,
what you spend
your money on
is what you love.”**

year. I couldn't tell you who is on the team or whom they are recruiting. I wouldn't care if they canceled the season or even if they never played another game. This is after over 40 years of marriage!


At the same time, I don't spend a dime on them. I told my family members not to buy any more Kentucky t-shirts or any other merchandise. I certainly won't buy any tickets or travel to any games. I also don't spend a minute of time watching them on TV or wondering how they will do in the upcoming tournament.

In other words, there was a direct correlation between the money I spent on them and my love for Kentucky basketball. Certainly, it is true that if you want to love something, invest in it.

The Lord said the same thing. In Matt 6:21, He said that where you treasure is, your heart will be as well. To put it in very simple terms, what you spend your money on is what you love. Of course, we could say that you spend your money on what you already love. We love something first, then we spend our money on it. The Lord's point may be, in part, that if you love the world to come, you will spend your money in a way that reflects that.

A Calvinist would say this love is automatic. He would say that all believers love the kingdom

to come. As a result, all believers also spend their money and time on the kingdom as well. Of course, Free Grace people know that is nonsense. All believers do not automatically love the Lord or His kingdom, and all believers do not invest in that kingdom.

But I think there is another way to look at this. Suppose we are having a difficult time loving the world to come. Suppose we find ourselves prone to focusing on the things of this world. Couldn't the words of the Lord be a practical cure for this? Invest your time and resources in things related to His coming kingdom. What you will find is that you will come to love the appearing of that kingdom more and more. Your heart will follow where you invest. I may not be able to buy the love of others. But it can help change what I love. In that sense, money can buy love. 



Ken Yates speaks for GES all around the world. His latest book is Hebrews: Partners with Christ.



Romans II

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

By Zane Hodges

NATIONAL ISRAEL HAS BEEN BLINDED (11:1-10)

11:1. Paul asks whether God is through with Israel: **God hasn't cast away His people, has He?** And Paul emphatically denies it: **Far from it!**

This question is relevant even today. Over the centuries of Christian history, right up to the present day, many have claimed in one way or another that Israel's special relationship to God is over. This is often softened into the concept of a new Israel which the largely Gentile Church supposedly fulfills (Replacement Theology). But Paul knows nothing of this.

For Paul, an Israelite was an **Israelite**. He is therefore living proof that God has not rejected His ancient people.

11:2. The question of v1a is emphatically answered by the words, **God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew**. Paul himself is proof of this (1b).

Israel is a nation that God **foreknew**. This is not a reference to predestination. Instead, Paul has in mind the promises made to Abraham (Rom 4:19-22; 9:6). God promised the birth of the nation long before the nation existed. He would never cast them away.

Elijah lived in a day of deep apostasy in Israel. First Kings 19:9-18 shows that he was profoundly displeased and interceded **against Israel**. Elijah is exasperated with Israel and his statements imply

that they deserve nothing further from divine benevolence.

11:3-4. Elijah complains to God about Israel. **What does the divine response say to him?** Only a word from God puts an end to Elijah's intercession against Israel.

Elijah's complaint against Israel is serious indeed. It involves nothing less than the rejection of God's messengers ("they have killed Your prophets"), the rejection of the worship of Yahweh ("they have...torn down Your altars"), and the relentless pursuit of the Lord's one remaining messenger ("I myself am left alone and they seek my life").

God's response informs Elijah that, "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bent a knee to Baal." In Elijah's perception the entire nation had given way to Baal worship. But that was not the case. Paul will now apply this OT narrative to the contemporary situation of Israel.

11:5. As in Elijah's day, God had graciously chosen **at the present time** to preserve for Himself **a remnant** of Israel. Many Jews in Paul's day were believers.

The words **according to His choice** is not a reference to election before time. The simplest and most obvious meaning of the phrase in question is something like "the choice God has made in grace." Just as in Elijah's day God had "kept for" Himself those who had "not bowed the knee

to Baal,” so also in Paul’s day God had *kept for Himself* those who had responded to His grace in Christ.

Here then Paul is concerned with the fact that grace is the basis upon which God has chosen the remnant of Israel *at the present time*.

11:6. God’s remnant in Israel was formed quite apart from meritorious works of any kind (it is **no longer by works**). Since God’s selection of the Jewish remnant was conditioned on **grace**, there could be no intermingling of that with the works of the law or with works of any kind at all. If works were added as a condition for God’s acceptance of a man, grace would be unmerited favor **no longer**.

This applies today. The simple fact remains that if we are eternally saved by grace, it can have nothing to do with works. Otherwise, as Paul insists, **grace is no longer grace**.

God’s “choice” of a Jewish remnant involved those Israelites who received His grace in Christ.

11:7-8. But the majority in Israel (**the rest**) have **been hardened**. This situation exists because Israel is still seeking acceptance before God by the works of the law.

By contrast, **the chosen group has obtained** it, that is, they have obtained the righteousness of God by faith.

The emphasis of these verses, however, is upon the fact that *the rest have been hardened*. And this reality is now attested from Scripture (**just as it is written**), beginning with a citation from Isa 29:10. God is responsible for the “spirit of stupor” that has blinded Israel’s eyes and stopped their ears so that they do not believe the gospel.

11:9-10. The testimony of Isaiah is now reinforced by the testimony of David in Ps 69:22-23. The poetic language of the Psalm refers to “their table” (i.e., Israel’s provisions and blessings). Their very blessings have “become a snare and a trap...for them.” What was intended for their

benefit has instead become “something to trip over” and a form of “retribution” to them. Their very sense of privilege and blessing (an undoubted source of Jewish pride) had lured them into a feeling of “worthiness” that motivated them to vainly seek righteousness by means of the law (10:3; 11:7).

The words, “Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,” reinforce the citation from Isa 29:10a (in v 9) which states that *God has given them a spirit of stupor*. Israel as a whole has

fallen into a blinding spiritual stupor.

The last line of the cited text presents Israel as bearing a heavy burden (“and make their back bend down always”). Israel is the object of the wrath of God that has fallen upon them in their unbelief (cf. 9:22, 29, 32-33).

NATIONAL ISRAEL WILL BE RESTORED (11:11-32)

11:11. The question: “**They haven’t stumbled just to fall, have they?**” expects a negative answer. God intends

that **their offense** in rejecting the gospel should become the occasion **for the Gentiles** to receive **deliverance**. Even this mercy to the Gentiles is not for the Gentiles’ sake alone, but rather is intended **to stir [Israel] to jealousy** so that they too can obtain mercy.

The *deliverance* here is the same as 1:16. God wants the Jews to experience the same rescue from divine wrath which many Gentiles are now experiencing.

11:12. Paul immediately points out that **the world** has benefited from the **transgression** and **loss** of Israel. But if that is so, **how much more** would it benefit the world if Israel were to be restored to a harmonious relationship with God?

Thus, the transgression and loss that are at present so apparent in Israel have given God occasion for **the enriching of the world**. The

“Since God’s selection of the Jewish remnant was conditioned on grace, there could be no intermingling of that with the works of the law or with works of any kind at all.”

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results of this enrichment are even more apparent after nearly 2000 years of human history.

It follows that the reversal of these effects will have an even greater impact for good upon the Gentiles themselves. The full realization of Israel's destiny (**their fullness**) is therefore much to be desired.

11:13-14. Paul, since he was indeed **an Apostle to the Gentiles**, attempts to maximize this ministry (**I glorify my service**) precisely for the reason that he desires the deliverance of his fellow Jews (**if somehow I might...deliver some of them**). The Gentiles should not be under the illusion that he has focused on his Gentile **service** simply because he has washed his hands of the rebellious Jewish nation. On the contrary, his very ministry to Gentiles has the same intent as that of God Himself.

Paul's Gentile labors are accordingly directed to the stirring of Israel's jealousy. The expression *I glorify* refers to the fact that Paul puts this service on highly visible display. His success in Gentile evangelism, wherever he went, was intended to arouse a holy jealousy among his fellow Jews so that at least he might *deliver some of them*.

11:15-16. God has definitively *not* repudiated Israel, but He *has* cast them to one side, which has led to **the reconciling of the world**. *Reconciliation* refers to the same truth he has already referred to in 5:10-11. The believer has "peace with God" (5:1). But for Paul that reconciling work was accomplished for all mankind, thus making possible the reconciliation of each person when he turns to Jesus Christ in faith (cf. 2 Cor 5:19-20).

But if such a superlative benefit accrues to *the world* through throwing Israel aside, how could one describe the potential benefit of Israel being received back into God's gracious favor? The

restoration of Israel would be like **life from the dead**.

In the end times, when Israel is back in its favored position, the entire world will experience a transformation for the better.

The believing remnant should be construed as a kind of **first fruits** which prefigure the future transformation of the entire **batch of dough**, that is, of the entire nation.

Israel's **root** is **holy** with the result that **the branches** that have sprung from it are likewise

holy. By the term *root* it is natural to understand a reference to Abraham who is physically the source of the entire nation. So despite the catastrophic fall of the nation, the *branches* sprung from the Abrahamic root remain holy to God.

11:17-18. The view that Israel's present status was permanent could easily lead to what amounted to prideful Gentile exultation that in this new situation the Gentiles themselves were God's favored people. Paul's warning is that they should by no means **exult over the branches**.

They were merely branches taken from a **wild olive tree** and **grafted in among** the original branches after many of those **branches were broken off**.

It is natural to think of Paul's reference here to **the root** as a reference to Abraham from whom the entire nation had sprung. The uncultivated *olive tree* is accordingly the Gentile world.

If the Gentiles had been *grafted in*, it was not at all the case that they brought inherent value to **the olive tree** to which they were now spiritually connected. They had simply **become a sharer** in the spiritual advantages that flowed from *the root* into the tree. Humility was thus in order for Gentile believers.

The Gentiles who believe have received the blessing of Abraham (justification by faith; Gal

“Israel’s root is holy with the result that the branches that have sprung from it are likewise holy. By the term *root* it is natural to understand a reference to Abraham who is physically the source of the entire nation.”



3:6-14). Yet the richness Paul mentions goes well beyond this fundamental blessing. It suggests all the ensuing benefits that come from being placed in close connection to God's ongoing purposes with His ancient people.

11:19-21. Paul admits that the Jews were **broken off** so that the Gentiles could **be grafted in**. But it is not a legitimate ground for pride since the issue is not "merit" (i.e., works), but rather an issue of unbelief and faith. What **the natural branches** lost in their unbelief, the Gentiles gained **by faith**. But it was not simply that they *gained it by faith*, but instead that they now **stand by faith**. They can only retain their position on the olive tree if they maintain their faith.

This, of course, has nothing to do with the issue of individual perseverance in the faith, or with anyone's individual eternal destiny. This is a collective personification of the Gentiles that intends to describe their present privileges as the product of their believing response to the gospel.

Accordingly, he cautions, **Don't be haughty, but be afraid**. Very simply put, should the Gentile

world cease to be a responsive instrument for the gospel, God could return His focus to Israel.

11:22-23. God's **kindness** was the source of the Gentiles' present privilege, while those whom God originally favored with His kindness (i.e., the Jews) had now tasted His **severity**. The loss of the former (*kindness*) resulting in the latter (*severity*) could easily be repeated for the Gentiles. God's kindness should not be taken for granted.

The kindness that the Gentiles currently enjoy is conditional: **if you remain in that kindness**. If the Gentiles do not continue to be responsive to the truth of the gospel, they can be removed from the olive tree: **Otherwise you too will be cut off**. This means that the Gentiles *collectively* will forfeit their privileged place in the ongoing purposes of God and will cease to be the primary instrument for the spread of the gospel.

But if the Gentiles are *cut off*, the restoration of Jewish privilege can also take place, provided that they (the Jews) **do not remain in unbelief**.

The issue hinges on whether the Jews continue their massive rejection of the gospel message. However, *if they do not*, the Jewish nation **shall be grafted in**, precisely because God is fully able to put them back where they were in the first place.

These words are a prophecy. It is only a matter of time before this prophecy catches up with Gentile self-satisfaction and pride.

11:24. God had grafted the Gentiles **into a good olive tree** and that was an act **contrary to nature**. It defied natural wisdom. The engrafting that the Gentiles had experienced was even more likely to happen to the **natural branches**, since that would be **according to nature**. The present Gentile situation is not destined to last (v 25).

The setting aside of Israel is temporary and her final deliverance from divine wrath is certain. Thus, the position of the Gentiles on the olive tree of the divine purpose and program is temporary.

11:25. Paul does not want the Christian readers **to be uninformed** about God's intentions. The truth Paul has been discussing can be called a **mystery**. The incorporation of converted Gentiles into the olive tree itself, elevating them to the same privileged status as the remaining natural branches, was a situation not explicitly revealed in the OT. But this new situation will only last **until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in**. At that time the **partial hardening** will be lifted.

The evangelistic movement into the Gentile world in Paul's day had a specific goal: a *complete harvest* which must be brought in. After that, God will turn once again to His purposes for Israel.

11:26-27. Paul introduces OT citations (Isa 59: 20-21; 27:9) with the declaration, **And thus all Israel shall be delivered**. This is a deliverance from God's wrath (1:16, 18; 5:9). The words **"The Deliverer...shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob"** also connects this with the temporal wrath of God (1:18).

Since Paul has described unbelieving Israel as "vessels of wrath" (9:22), Israel's full deliverance from wrath requires that *"the Deliverer"* (Jesus Christ) should *"turn away ungodliness from Jacob."* That is to say, after believing in their

hearts for justification (Rom 10:10a), Israel must also "appeal to Him", "confessing" Him as Lord with their mouths (Rom 10:10b-13). When the nation as a whole does this, it will be delivered.

But this triumphant spiritual revival will take place only when *the Deliverer* comes **"from Zion"** at His Second Advent (Zech 12:10).

In the quoted material the statements that (1) **"the Deliverer...shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob,"** and (2) **"when I take away their sins"** are parallel statements. The deliverance in view is not simply justification by faith, though that of course is essential (10:9-10), but instead it is freedom from sin's dominion over Israel's conduct.

11:28-29. The bottom line for Paul is that God is not through with His ancient people. Even though they are currently at enmity with God (i.e., they are His **enemies**) on account of their rejection of **the gospel**, they remain His chosen people. Thus, they are still beloved because of God's commitment to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **God's choice** of this nation lay in His promises to these men and thus Israel remains in special divine regard **for the fathers'** [i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's] **sake**. His choice of them remains unchanged precisely because **the gracious gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable**.

The word *eklogēn* (*choice*) here concerns God's definitive decision to accomplish His purposes in the world through the descendants of the patriarchs. This choice does not refer to eternal salvation from hell.

God's "call" of Israel into a special relationship with Himself will not be forfeited, any more than any of the "gifts" bestowed by that calling (9:4-5).

11:30-31. The privileges of the Gentiles mean that they **have received mercy**. Paul now reminds the believing Gentiles that **you too at one time disobeyed God**. Now this is true of Israel. The formerly disobedient Gentiles *now have received mercy by means of Israel's disobedience*.

The Jews who had *now disobeyed* could and would benefit from God's mercy to the Gentiles. Their present disobedience would be ended if they responded properly to what God was

doing. That is to say, **that by means of your** [the Gentiles'] **mercy, they** [Israel] **too might receive mercy.**

More than 1,950 years have elapsed since Paul wrote Rom 11:28-32. If we are inclined to posit the “failure” of God’s effort to “stir” Israel “to jealousy,” we are being premature. God has measureless patience. His work among the Gentiles for some 2,000 years will yet achieve its goal in arousing a “holy jealousy” in Israel which will eventually lead to national repentance at the Second Advent.

11:32. God’s dealings with Jew and Gentile alike means that all have become potential objects of mercy as a result of their disobedience. Mercy will overtake Israel just as surely as it has overtaken the Gentiles.

The verb here rendered **enclosed** (or, *caught*) signals that God has now put everyone on the same level, namely, a status of disobedience before Him. What God has done is to “catch” **all men** in His “net” so that their only way out is by means of the divine mercy found in Jesus Christ.

God’s purpose has mercy as its ultimate objective. Mankind has been “caught” in its **disobedience** so that God **might have mercy on all.**

GOD’S WISDOM IS UNKNOWABLY PROFOUND (11:33-36)

The seeming tragedy of Israel’s disobedience to the gospel is in reality a triumph of divine wisdom. The tragedy is real, but God designs mercy as its ultimate goal.

11:33. God, Paul declares, has measureless **depths of wisdom.** This wisdom can rise so far above the tragedy and evil of human disobedience and unbelief. It was previously a “mystery” (v 25), utterly unknowable apart from being revealed to men.


The expression **His judgments** is appropriately chosen, since the present state of Israel is the result of God’s judgment, by which “partial hardening” has taken place (11:25). But this very judgment is **unsearchable** since its surprising outcome will ultimately be the restoration of the nation God has judged (11:26-27). The ways of God—His paths—are **untraceable** because no

one could have foreseen where God “was going” with His judgment.

11:34-35. Following his praise to God in v 33, Paul at once adds a final, climactic reference to the OT (Isa 40:13; Job 41:11).

The two quotations combined summarize Paul’s thought quite well. God’s dealings with Israel partake of the divine inscrutability. The “mystery” of Israel’s hardening (v 25) was God’s secret (“Who indeed has known the mind of the Lord?”) and was in no way a result of human “counsel” or “advice” (“Or who has been His counselor?”). At the same time, God’s plans for Israel do not flow from any merit on Israel’s part, as though they had given Him something He needed to repay (“Or who has given first to Him, so that it shall be paid back to him?”). All is the result of His mercy.

11:36. This doxology continues to express Paul’s awe at the unfathomable “depth” of God’s wisdom (v 33). But it also adds a new thought. The force of Paul’s words is that God is the divine Source of everything (**all things are from Him**) as He is also the medium through which everything is realized (*all things are...through Him*) and that finally everything is done with a view to His own interests (*all things are...for Him*).

God’s amazing “paths” (v 33) with Israel and the nations are according to His matchless wisdom. 



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

Christ Our Pattern in Suffering

By Cyprian Antwi Awuah

SUFFERING IS REAL

Christian suffering is real. It is one of those tools that God uses to facilitate the believer's spiritual growth. Concerning suffering, Peter was explicit when he wrote:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps (1 Pet 2:21).

The question is how is Jesus' suffering connected to our daily sufferings?

CHRIST AS OUR PATTERN

Suppose the believer's suffering is not due to mission work or to explicitly serving the Lord in some area of ministry. Is his suffering also suffering for Christ?

How are one's complicated health issues connected to Christ's suffering? Can the believer's suffering from cancer, spinal injury, hand or leg amputation, heart failure, kidney problems, eye problems, loss of a child or loss of a partner be related to Christ's suffering?

We know that Christ's suffering was unique. But since we are to share His suffering, and His suffering is an example for us to follow, there must be an application to be drawn from Peter's list of things that Christ did not do when He suffered. For example:

who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Pet 2:23).

Peter is not talking about the similarity of *what* Christ suffered to what we suffer—whether being flogged, spat upon, or nailed to the cross. Those experiences are not a pattern that will occur to each believer. Instead, Peter addresses the issue of our *response* to suffering. He is saying that *how* Christ responded to His suffering is our pattern to follow. God looks at *how* things are done, not just *whether* they are done. Our learning the application is important to God. Before God can be glorified by that, the right thing must be done in the right way in the plan of God.

HOW TO RELATE YOUR SUFFERING TO CHRIST'S SUFFERING

Now that we know we will not necessarily suffer the exact things as Christ, what do we make of any suffering that comes to us? Should we also consider health problems, financial challenges, marriage problems, or loss of job as suffering for Christ?

Where do we draw the line between deserved and undeserved suffering?

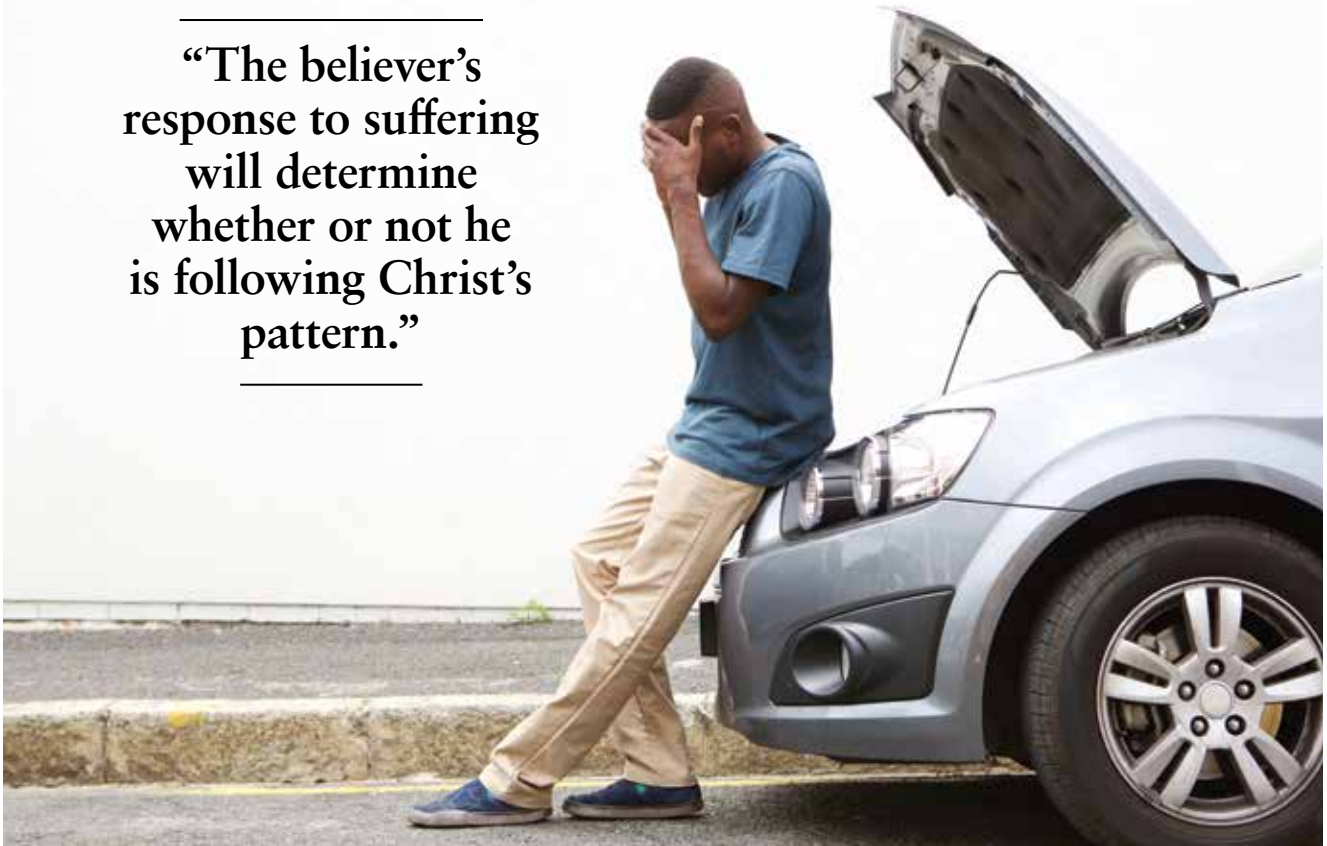
Christ suffered undeservedly. Therefore, our sufferings should be undeserved, too.

However, since the believer is here on earth for a purpose, he should respond to his suffering as something from the Lord, i.e., something that happens for a purpose, by the Lord's decision, just like Christ's suffering. That is the only way the believer can make a connection between his daily sufferings and suffering for Christ. The believer's response to suffering will determine whether or not he is following Christ's pattern.

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO SUFFERING

When we do not have the kind of food we desire, how do we respond? Should we respond like the Exodus generation who complained about not getting cucumber, onion, and garlic and suffered serious consequences (Num 11:5)?

**“The believer’s
response to suffering
will determine
whether or not he
is following Christ’s
pattern.”**



When we do not have the kind of health that we desire, how do we respond? Will we also keep complaining about suffering poor health?

What about a faulty air conditioner?

Or lack of funds to fix our car?

Do you think you are here on earth for your own mission? And if you agree that someone brought you here, do you think He does not care anything about your life?

Of course, He cares.

Though God does not necessarily cause these sufferings to happen to us, when they do happen, He uses them as a tool to shape us so that we could be like Christ in character. God expects the believer to have this knowledge to properly interpret his sufferings in this life.

Scripture never teaches anywhere that we should enquire from people who call themselves prophets (but are not!) concerning the reasons why we are suffering. Instead, He wants us to endure it by faith in such promises such as: “all

things work together for good for those who love God” ...(Rom 8:28); “Vengeance is mine, I will repay... (Rom 12:19).”

He also promised that He would not allow us to be tried (i.e., suffer) beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13).

Shalom! 



*Cyprian Antwi Awuah is a pastor
and is Director of BGBI Ghana.*



The 2021 Conference had a great turnout!



Ken and Kathryn's Ministries in April

April was a busy month. For three weeks we taught the book of 1 Corinthians to a group of pastors in Nepal. The class met over Zoom two days a week while the other three days we had pre-recorded lectures. All together we had the group for 40 hours of lecture time. The discussions went well and included many topics including assurance and rewards. Nepal is a Hindu country and assurance is a struggle for many of the pastors. By the end of the three weeks, we received several



“thumbs up” from the students and the feedback was encouraging. We hope to go in person next year.

We also continued our regular Zoom classes during the month of April. Kathryn leaves for Zambia May 5th to teach at a Bible College outside of Lusaka.

GES Annual Conference Coppell, TX, April 26-28

Because of Covid-19, this conference was only six months after the last annual conference. In October we had 110 during Covid. This April we had around 160. Everyone was very enthusiastic about the fellowship and the teaching.

The Book of Genesis proved to be a very popular topic.

We voted on next year's conference theme. It will



Bob Bryant preached "circles" around everyone else...



...and Ken was friendly (finally!).



One of the best parts is seeing old friends...



...then going out to eat together.

be on Last Days Judgments. We will consider the Bema, the Great White Throne Judgment, the Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats, the outer darkness, the overcomers of Revelation 2-3, the Parable of the Minas, and much more.



Mark, Bethany, and the books.

You can watch most of the conference messages at the Grace Evangelical Society YouTube channel. Special thanks to Don Reiher for filming and to Danny Webster for capturing the audio.



Thanks for coming everyone!

How Do We Deal with Conflicting Truth Claims?

By Chuck Deveau

In our postmodern world, the concept of *truth* is subjective. I can have my own truth, and others can have their own truth.

So, what happens when *my truth* conflicts or collides with *your truth*?

Theoretically, we are to accept both as true.

But in practice, we are to accept that which is politically correct as true.

Take, for example, the action most governments and political power brokers have taken to shut down all non-essential businesses to slow and hopefully stop the spread of Covid-19. Suppose you believe that all businesses are essential and that shutting down businesses has profound negative financial and health consequences. In that case, you are considered a hater who does not care for others. You are also labeled as one who denies the truth.

But what happened to the idea that each person is free to have his own truth?



The same double standard applies to LGBTQ, the social justice movement, election laws, border walls, and hundreds of other issues for which the only correct response is to advocate the politically correct view. Tolerance of the politically correct views is not enough. Now we must advocate those views.

FINDING THE OBJECTIVE STANDARD

Is there a standard to which we may look and appeal to solve this conflict and bring clarity and calmness to our lives and establish the consensual harmony most of us desire?

Is there an objective template for *truth* that we *all* can and should appeal to and which objectively overrides all the highly subjective and personally biased definitions of *truth*?

I am talking about objective truth that can serve as an umpire, perfectly calling “balls and strikes” for the benefit of all of fallen humanity in our quest for peace, serenity and personal fulfillment.

As a Biblicist, I would argue that Jesus Christ is, in His very essence and being, “the Truth.” In fact, that is precisely what He lays claim to be:

“I am the way, the truth [=not a truth or an opinion of truth], and the life. No man comes to the Father but through [by] Me (John 14:6, emphasis added).”

Thus, whatever He has spoken or said, as recorded for us in Scripture, reflects only absolute truth (cf. John 18:37-38). I am not merely talking



LIGHTSTOCK

about the red-letter verses in the Gospels. The entire Bible is the Word of truth.

Deeply inscribed on a marble wall in the lobby of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) headquarters in Washington, D.C., is John 8:32:

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

My understanding of the intent of this Biblical recitation was to incite all CIA agents, from top to bottom, to always tell the unvarnished truth to the agency and all government operatives so that all USA foreign policy decisions could be made based, solely, upon “truthful” intel.

In the light of the last few years, how has this “truth” been working for them as well as for us as citizens of the USA and for those whose domestic security is critically dependent upon the accuracy/truth of this intel? Are we safe from falsehoods and politically motivated intelligence agents?

This quote on the walls of the CIA headquarters, folks, is from the heart and lips of God’s Son, Jesus Christ! Again, the same Jesus Who declares in John 14:6,

*“I am the way, **the truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.”*

Jesus says that He *is* the very embodiment, personification, and expression of “truth.” And this is immediately followed by a very crucial *truth* that is wrapped up in Him and His words: “...*no person comes to the Father but through Him.*” Absolute, divine truth is incarnate in the Person

of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and readily available for all mankind to embrace and believe.

It only takes one response of faith in Christ to receive His offer of the free gift of everlasting life and become eternally preserved and set free from the damnation of eternal hell (John 3:16). This will never change or be forfeited! This is the irrevocable, free gift of God!

But it is only those believers in Christ who continue to *abide* in Him and His Word who will experience all the life liberating properties of that life on a practical, daily level. This is what Jesus meant when He said to those who would “abide in Him and His Word”:

*“And you shall know the **truth** and the **truth** shall set you free.”*

ACCESS TO TRUTH

We are so blessed to have access to the One Who is the *Truth* and Whose spoken and recorded words constitute the Christian’s constitutional mandate which answers the question, “*What is the Truth?*” and its effectual, eternal impact upon the life and lifestyle of the believer who consistently, if not constantly, “continues in or abides in the Person and Words of Jesus Christ.”

So, what is truth? Truth is the Person of Jesus Christ and the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

But what about issues that the Bible does not discuss, like fossil fuels, cloning, in vitro fertilization, stem cell research, tech giants, term limits, lobbying, and so forth?

The Bible expounds principles that can help us better understand many subjects not specifically addressed in Scripture. In addition, God has given us the ability to do research and to analyze data.

Truth is what corresponds to reality. ■■■



Chuck Deveau is host of “The Things That Matter” radio broadcast and serves with Men Of Messiah in La Quinta, CA.

In What Sense Do Unbelievers Die in Their Sins? (John 8:24)

By Bob Wilkin

David from Mississippi writes: I see in *The Grace New Testament Commentary* where John 8:24 has been addressed. As it is stated in the Bible, Jesus took away the sin of the world—believers and unbelievers.

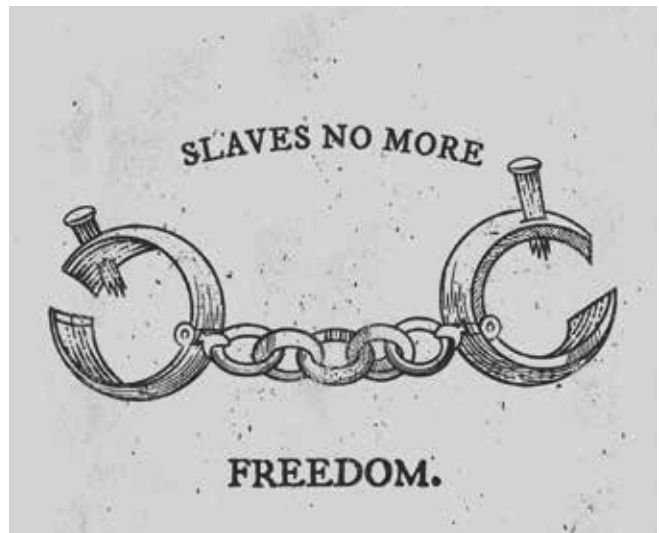
He thereby gave every person the chance to receive God's free gift of eternal life.

But we know not everyone will receive God's free gift of eternal life. But it is also seen that the unbelievers are not judged for their sins at the Great White Throne Judgment.

So my question is, when an unbeliever dies, will he/she for eternity be plagued with sinful thoughts?

If that is the case, could that be what determines, say, his/her level of/or place in the lake of fire? Say the deeper unbelievers are in the lake of fire, the more sin plagued their earthly lives. So they were forgiven of their sins, but their sins were never removed from them.

Most understand Jesus to be saying in John 8:24 that people's sins are not taken care of unless and until they believe that Jesus is the Messiah. However, as David notes, my view is that "you will die in your sins" refers to dying as a slave of sin. Note a few verses later in John 8:30-32 where the issue is abiding in Christ so as to avoid sin's bondage in experience. Once someone believes in Christ, he is no longer a slave of sin in his position (John 8:24; Rom 6:18).



John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2 make it clear that Jesus removed the sin barrier for all. No unbeliever will be cast into the lake of fire because of his sin. The issue is that he never believed in Christ for everlasting life and hence his name is not in the Book of Life (Rev 20:15).

Yes, unbelievers remain slaves of sin their entire lives and die in that condition. Evidently unbelievers will indeed be plagued by a desire to sin forever. As David suggests, that could be part of their suffering.

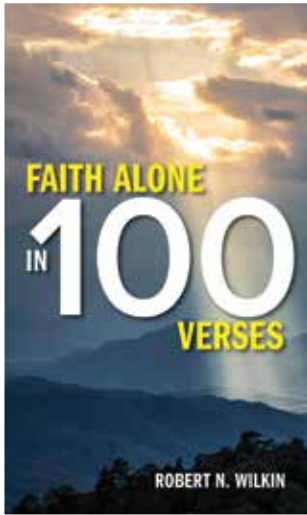
While we as believers are no longer slaves of sin in our position, we need to abide in Christ in order to experience freedom from sin's bondage (John 8:30-32; Rom 6:15-23). ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 45 years, Sharon.

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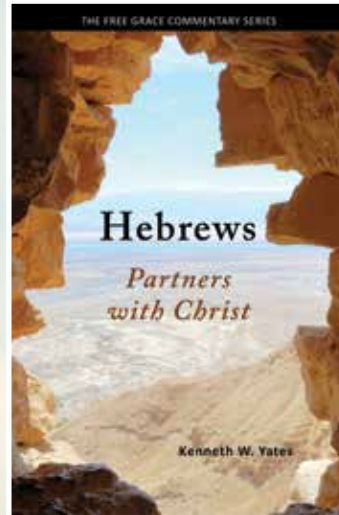
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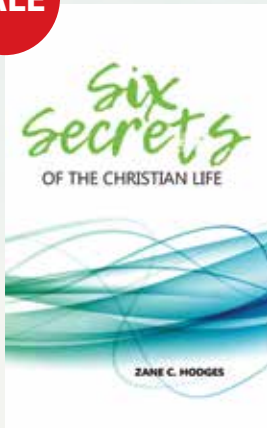
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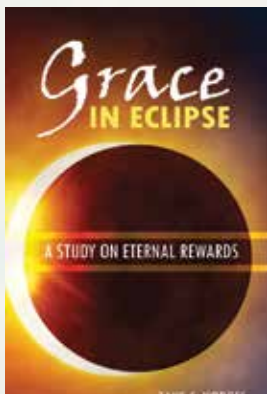


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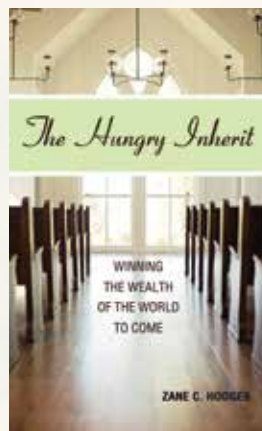


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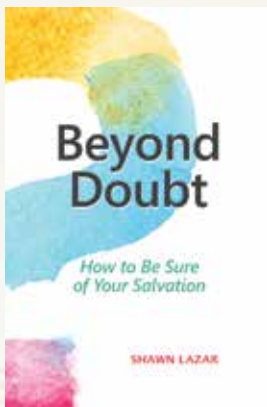


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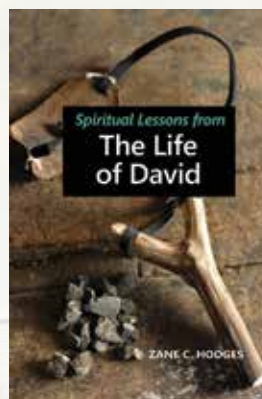


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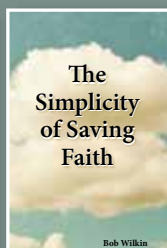
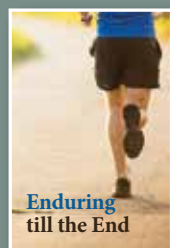


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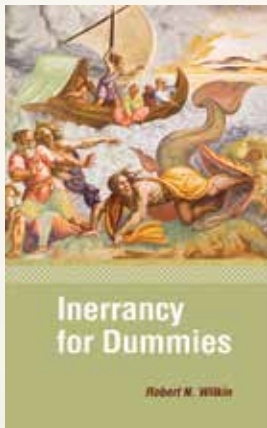
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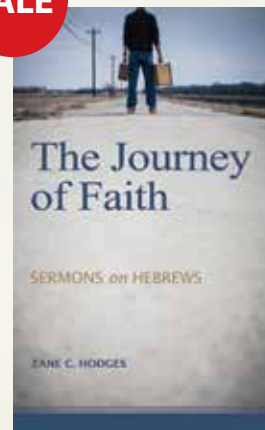
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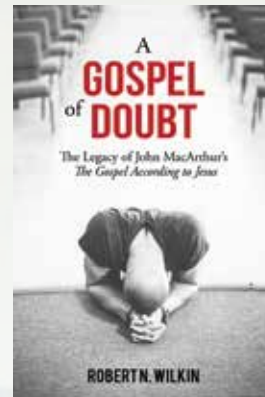


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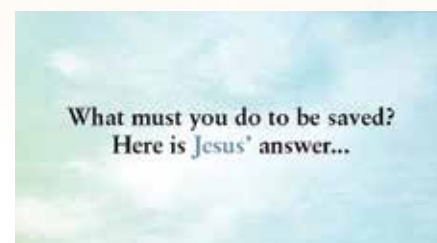


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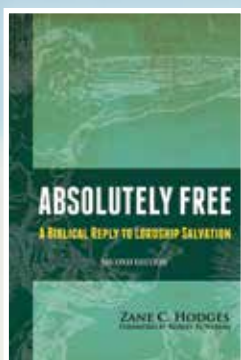
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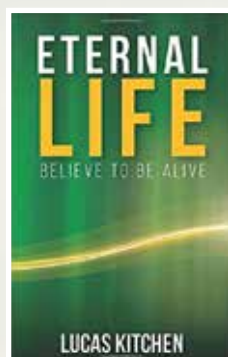


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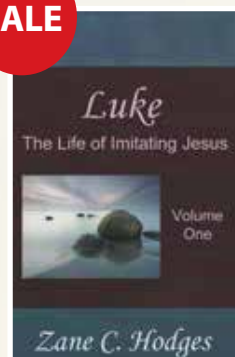
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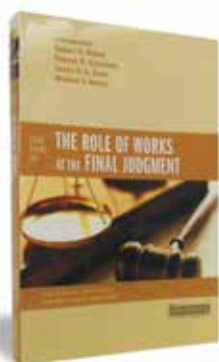


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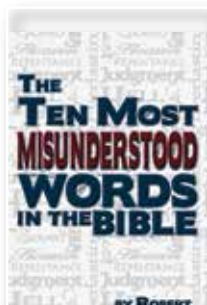


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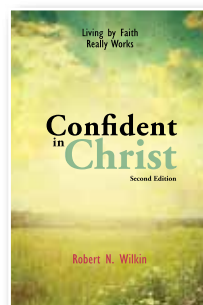


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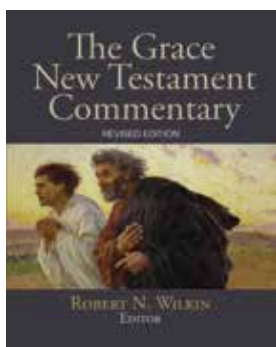


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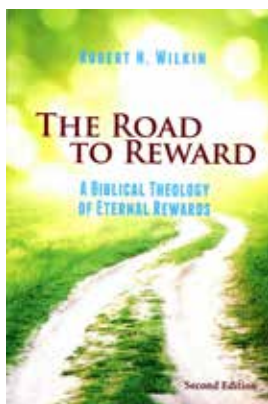
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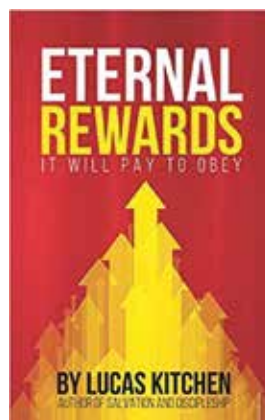
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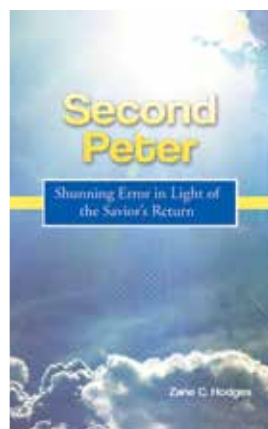
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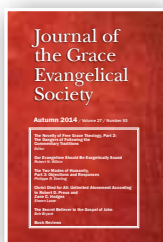
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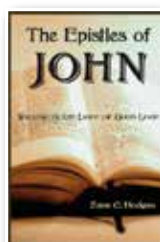
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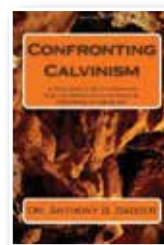


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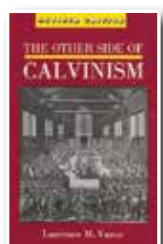


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Report on GES Overseas

By Kathryn Wright

Over the last year and a half, our overseas work has been limited by our inability to go in person. Thankfully, this past May, we were able to make our first international trip since Covid-19.

For two weeks, I had the privilege to teach at Ambassador International University (AIU), about two hours outside of Lusaka, Zambia. The school is focused on training future pastors and ministry leaders.

This was GES's fourth time to AIU in five years, and Lord willing, we will be back to teach four more courses next year.

For two weeks, I taught a "Progress of Redemption" course to a group of 27 students. During my time there, I was able to give each of my students a copy of *A Free Grace Primer*. I also donated a copy of *The Grace New Testament Commentary* and a few other Free Grace books to the school's library. It was a fruitful two weeks.

FIRST SUNDAY

My first weekend in Zambia, I attended chapel, which was held on campus. Two of our previous students spoke during the service.

The first was a student from our class in 2017. He has also been attending one of our courses over Zoom, which started in 2020. He spoke on Colossians chapter 3. He mentioned salvation by faith during his sermon, explaining that it was by believing in Jesus for eternal life. He also dealt



with the word *wrath*, and brought up the fact that in Rom 1:18, it is dealing with present-day wrath and not hell.

Another former student spoke next. One of his main points was that we have to understand that not all the promises given to Israel are for us today. He also read Isa 55:1-2 and connected it with Rev 22:17. He spoke about salvation as a free gift that could not be lost.

Seeing both of these previous students talking about salvation so clearly, after so much time apart from AIU, was especially encouraging.

CLASSROOM HIGHLIGHTS

AIU has been a recurring location for us to teach at for five years. A big part of this is due to the students. We have been blessed with great classes who have a deep desire to learn. The lectures usually revolve around an endless stream of questions, and this year was no different.

Class days followed the same pattern: I would lecture in the morning, break for lunch, then have a final hour of lecture in the afternoon, for a total of five hours.

The course was dealing with redemption from Genesis to Revelation, allowing me to bring up many Free Grace issues.

I spent a significant time on eternal security.

We had many discussions regarding the term *salvation* and how it is used throughout the Bible.

The overwhelming response was positive, and I am still receiving emails and messages with follow-up questions. The greatest highlight of our trips to Zambia has been the excitement from our students and their desire to learn. We have been very blessed.

SMALL-GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

In the evenings, I would also meet with a smaller group of students. That group discussion usually lasted 2-3 hours. These evening meetings were primarily Q/A. I touched on subjects like salvation, eternal security, rewards, and spiritual gifts. One evening I did a whole session on end times. It consisted of older students from our past trips and some students we have never taught.

Sadly, due to Covid, the sophomore class has not been taught by anyone at GES. However, many of the students we did teach have been discussing

Free Grace issues with the sophomores, and those that came to the evening group were solid on salvation being by grace through faith alone.

One of the best moments of the trip was in one of these meetings. I had a junior, whom I taught three years ago, ask one of the sophomores to explain when he was saved. The sophomore said he was saved when he believed in Jesus for eternal life. The junior had clearly been discussing the distinctions between salvation and discipleship with the others. I was able to give each of them a book as well. I gave some *Chosen to Serve* by Shawn Lazar and a few received Bob Wilkin's new book *Faith Alone in 100 Verses*. And I also was able to take *Absolutely Free* by Zane Hodges to a student who specifically asked for a copy before I left for Zambia. They are

hungry to learn, which is a refreshing response to the Free Grace message.

SECOND SUNDAY: (SEE PICTURES)

On the second Sunday, I went to a church off-campus and taught a Sunday school class with 70 people in attendance. I spoke on the Gospel of John, giving special attention to eternal security. I walked through John's "never" statements (i.e. John 4:14; 6:35; 8:51; 10:28; and 11:26).

Because I had a translator, I wanted something simple and repetitive, and by their response, I think it went over really well. One member

asked *when* do we receive eternal life, in the future or now? I went to John 6:47, and I wish I could have captured the look on their faces once they saw the present tense of that verse. Once the translator explained the verse, the whole group laughed and cheered.

They immediately understood that



Students with copies of the *A Free Grace Primer*

they received eternal life right now.

The church was small with a dirt floor, wood beams and a thatched roof. The "walls" were just a mesh green fabric, and the back of the church was completely exposed. It was a very humble church, but it was a blessing to attend and speak to the group. They said I could come back next year. Lord willing, Ken Yates will also be joining me and will be able to do the sermon. We have also been invited to speak at two other churches in the area. Next year will be busy, Lord willing!

FOLLOWING UP WITH PREVIOUS STUDENTS

These are just some of the highlights from the trip. I had countless conversations between classes and evening group meetings, and I was

amazed by how many of our previous students reached out and asked to meet with me to ask questions and discuss issues.

One student, in particular, said that the Free Grace message had changed his theology completely. His father is a pastor, and he's been funneling the material to him as well. He spoke about the Book of Hebrews. Before understanding grace, he was confused. But now that he understands eternal security and rewards, he can grasp the book's meaning.

It has been a joy to see these young men understand the message of grace and not only have one class, but several go on and mature in these truths. The Lord has been so good, and I am excited to see what He does next in Zambia.

PRAYER REQUESTS

First, pray for students as they face the cultural clash that the Free Grace message brings. One of the consistent things we have faced in Zambia is the issue of eternal security. Sadly, when we first meet them in

class, our students almost always hold to a loss of salvation. While we make strides in our classes, it is still a significant battle in their churches.

Another common teaching we see in Zambia is the prosperity gospel. Zambia is an impoverished country, and as a result, many pastors preach prosperity in this life by tithing. Many also inject into the Bible the Hindu concept of karma.

Prosperity teaching raises two issues: tithing is often connected to prosperity, so that people are told they will receive money by giving money, and tithing is connected to eternal security. In other words, if a person gives to his church, he shows that he is saved, and if he doesn't give, he is condemned to hell.

Once our students leave our classroom, they are automatically faced with opposition. So pray.


Second, a few weeks after leaving AIU, Covid sadly broke out on campus. Several staff members and students have tested positive. The school has had to return to online classes. Obviously, the Lord protected my time there and brought me safely home. No doubt this is impacting other teams who are planning to fly out this year to teach. We want to keep the staff, students, and other missionaries in our prayers, as we are all still dealing with the impact of Covid.

Third, Ken Yates and I are heading to Kenya in August for a pastors' conference. It will be our second attempt to go this year. We were

thwarted last time, due to Covid. Pray that it goes smoothly this time. Also, pray for the pastors who come. Pray that they will have the fair-mindedness of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) and that we will be clear in our teaching.

THANK YOU

None of this would be possible without the Lord and our supporters. I am beyond thankful to those who prayed for this trip,

gave books, supported, and encouraged us as we dealt with all the Covid craziness this year. I could not have done it without you all. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. 



Setting up the church



Kathryn Wright teaches for GES both online and overseas.



How Rare Are Virtuous Women?

By Marcia Hornok

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Here's what to look for in a wife, but you probably won't find her. Most of us think that is what Prov 31:10 means when it says, "Who can find a virtuous woman, for her price is far above rubies?" (KJV). Then follows a list of nearly impossible virtues regarding character, industry, and achievements, with little mention of her temperament, energy potential, or opportunities. No wonder this Biblical poem is considered metaphorical or cultural or a worthy goal, but rather elusive, like sinlessness.

Does Prov 31:10 mean this ideal woman is rare and difficult to find?

In answer, consider first of all to whom the poem is addressed. Not to women, but to unmarried men, telling them what to seek in a wife. This focuses on guys as well as gals.

Second, note that the Hebrew word for *find* can mean more than to discover. In Proverbs it usually has a cause-effect context: *if you do this, you will find that*. Yes, it can mean to obtain, but also to attain (by seeking). We may even say *to deserve*. For example, people *find* favor and honor when they do what is necessary to *attain* them (Prov 3:3-4; 16:20; 21:21). Conversely, a man who commits adultery will *find* or *deserve* wounds and disgrace (Prov 6:33).

Third, before concluding that v 10 poses a dilemma, look at v 29, in which the husband says, "Many daughters have done virtuously." Why does that statement seem counter to v 10? I surmise it's because many Christian men have wives who fear the Lord (v 30), which means they are not all that rare, even though they are valuable—"far above rubies."

Why then was Ruth the only woman in the Bible who was called *virtuous* (Ruth 3:11)? I can't be sure, but perhaps most of the Bible women "did virtuously," and so it went without saying. Ruth may have been singled out to show that women of every ethnicity and background are included.

To sum up, we can view v 10 as a preview, not a predicament. A man who desires a virtuous wife, one who fears God, should also deserve such a valuable woman. Then she will be attracted to his qualities, as he is to hers.

WHAT IS VIRTUE?

The Hebrew word for *virtue* has a broad meaning that includes valor, courage, expertise, wealth, excellence, and strength—especially military strength. It seems to be a combination of physical and moral qualities and is used almost exclusively of men. Only five verses associate the

word with women—Prov 12:4; 31:10 and 29; Ruth 3:11 and 4:11.

What virtues or strengths characterize the Proverbs 31 woman? Seven lines refer to her sewing skills. Seeking wool and flax, she works with her hands in delight (v 13); she uses a distaff and spindle (v 19); she provides for the needy, possibly with clothing she has made (v 20); she clothes her family with scarlet or double cloth (v 21) and herself with linen and purple (v 22). She makes her own tapestries (v 22), as well as linen garments and sashes for the tradesmen (v 24).

Her ability to create goods from raw materials benefitted herself, her family, and people in need. As those skills developed over time, in her later years merchants wanted to buy her products. All this points to virtue as useful abilities or skills.¹ What about Ruth? Was her virtue picking barley?

Boaz told Ruth that all the people of the town considered her a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:11). He said this because he knew she had given up her previous life to care for her mother-in-law and to place herself under God's wings (Ruth 2:11-12). Ruth's virtue was taking care of Naomi while depending on God. Her endeavors as a caregiver benefitted her household of two, as well as the Bethlehem community (4:11-14). Eventually her line produced King David, and Messiah came through him, thus affecting the entire world. All because Ruth helped her mother-in-law, which was God's main purpose for her.


Consider other God-fearing Bible wives, such as Sarah, Leah, Rachel, Manoa's wife, Hannah, and Bathsheba. Their expertise simply involved the praiseworthy values of being a faithful wife and raising a son who served God.

WHAT IS YOUR VIRTUE?

This should encourage every Christian woman who lives to please God. Whether or not you are married, you have skills that can benefit your household—the people you live with, if any—and people who have needs you can meet. So answer these two questions: 1) What are you good at? 2) How does that endeavor help others? That's it! Virtue involves a pursuit(s) which you enjoy, but not merely for self-fulfillment. Sometimes we women fixate on a fun hobby, but if we cannot

use it in serving others, it is not virtuous. Virtue is not only what we do, but why we do it—for God's pleasure.

Your virtues may change as you age and will definitely evolve as you develop them during your lifetime. Virtue does not mean perfection. Nor is it one-size-fits-all. Don't think that Proverbs 31 exhorts women to make things from scratch or be busy every day or burn the candle² at both ends, so to speak. The emphasis is not on busyness but fruitfulness. The poem even refers to "the fruit of her hands"³ seven times, the number of completion.

The virtuous woman's capstone quality was not homemaking expertise—it was godly fear (v 30). When we live with God in mind while using our skills to serve others, we are virtuous. Loving God and loving people will fulfill the Proverbs 31 standards. Who then can find a virtuous woman? Just look in the mirror. 



Marcia and her husband Ken, a retired pastor, live in Salt Lake City, where they raised six children and now enjoy 12 grandchildren. For a free digital copy of an illustrated book of 40 Brief Evangelistic Analogies, email marcia.hornok@gmail.com.

1. For further explanation, see this author's article, "A No-Guilt Look at Proverbs 31," GIF May/June 2018.

2. Getting this idea from v 18 is a misapplication. The context of that verse involves "merchandise" (shopping!). Her lamp not going out means she has enough oil. By shopping wisely, she keeps necessities supplied.

3. Unfortunately, some English translations negate this phrase in v 16 and substitute "earnings" or "profits," which are not in the Hebrew text.

The Mailbag

By You

Thank you very much for your grace teaching magazine. Since Jesus paid it all, how foolish to think He needs help. We are nearing 90 years, but are hopeful we will be present to hear the Trumpet!" ~Tulsa, OK

"I love to support y'all so much. Thank you so much for putting all sorts of videos on YouTube. I like the GES conference videos. I can just learn and learn." ~Dekalb, MS

"We are finally retired and have sold all of our businesses. The Lord has been very good to us. We want to share some of His bounty with you. Thank you so much for your teaching through all that you do. As you say, 'Faith alone through Christ alone.'" ~Bismark, ND

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Top 5 Observations from Psalm 37

By Summer Stevens

I've been lingering in Psalm 37 lately. As I've done with other passages of Scripture, I initially found myself skipping over words or phrases if I felt they didn't apply to me or if they addressed things I don't struggle with. But God kept bringing me back, rereading and rereading, until (of course) I came to understand that every word is relevant to me now. So grab your Bible and follow along with me as I share my Top 5 Observations from Psalm 37.

1 There's a contrast in this psalm between the righteous and the evildoers. The "wicked" or "worker of iniquity" or "transgressor"—all terms used in this chapter—aren't words we often use. How often do we refer to our neighbors or unsaved co-workers as *evildoers*? Someone has to rise to high levels of horror before I think to describe him as evil. Nonetheless, when we look at the deeds and attitudes of those who do not love God, they *are* wicked—not only opposing God's standards, but also mocking those who do. The psalm opens with "Do not fret because of evildoers," and if I look at that broadly to include people with political or social power in our country who are using it for destructive or immoral purposes, all of a sudden, this whole chapter applies with much more clarity! Am I concerned with the sin in my country and around the world? Absolutely. But that's why the next point is so interesting.



2 Of the twenty imperatives, "do not fret" is used the most—three times in Psalm 37. *Fret* is a little word that we mostly discount. It seems like the baby sister of worry, something that you do if you're running five minutes late to a movie or when you're wondering if you made enough coleslaw for the company that's coming for dinner. But fret is a fascinating word: it can mean to feel worried or discontent, but it can also mean to gnaw into something, to cause corrosion, to become eaten or worn away, or to move in agitation. When we worry, it's like that, isn't it? We repeatedly turn it over in our minds, grasping for understanding, crafting responses in our minds but never settling the issue. All the while our peace is wearing away like the toes of St. Peter at the Vatican. The reason not to fret about the evildoers in the world is that they will not last: "For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb" (v 2).

3 So what, then, are we to do? The next verses are the most famous of the psalm, and for good reason: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart... Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him"

“We are to turn our focus away from all that’s wrong in the world and rest in God’s faithfulness, feed on it, and be constantly nourished and sustained by it.”


(vv 3, 4, 7a). We are to turn our focus away from all that’s wrong in the world and rest in God’s faithfulness, feed on it, and be constantly nourished and sustained by it. It’s not always easy to close our computer or news app and choose to trust God. Do we really believe God will give us the desires of our hearts if we delight in Him? For most of us, if we’re honest, He would need to change our hearts first. And I think that’s precisely the point. It’s a beautiful cycle—the more we trust Him, the more good we will do, the more we dwell in and hang out in His faithfulness, the more delighted we will be with God. And in that delight, His presence will be the object of our desire.

4 The concept that’s repeated the most in Psalm 37 is one of inheritance. Six different times David talks about inheriting the land or the earth (vv 9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 34), sometimes with an emphasis on the eternality of the inheritance: “The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever” (v 29). Inheritance of the land is an interesting thing—Israel maintained that the land was theirs because God said it was. David fought bloody battles over land, and there is still bloodshed today over the same ground. His message seems to be: don’t give up, keep doing what is right, keep waiting, and God will reward you in this life or the next. If it seems like an impossible task in the face of evil, read on.

5 By now, you may have picked up on my last observation—there are some interesting parallels between Psalm 37 and the beatitudes. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 that blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who desire righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness.

Consider these similarities from Psalm 37: But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (v 11); The wicked...cast down the poor and needy...but the Lord upholds the righteous (vv 14, 17); A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked (v 16); the righteous shows mercy and gives (v 21); For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth (v 22); Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; For the future of that man is peace (v 37).

I do not fully understand the beatitudes or how to apply them, but it’s interesting to consider them in light of David’s psalm about righteousness in spite of wickedness in the world.

This is a rich psalm—there is so much to discover and so much about God to learn from its verses. I’ve only just uncovered some of its mysteries. Share some of your insights with me at therealsummer@hotmail.com 



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Thou Shalt Eat!

By Shawn Lazar

INTRODUCTION

After you believe in Jesus for everlasting life, on what spiritual activities should you focus? What does the Bible say?

It's easy to pick on Catholics and Orthodox for their unbiblical focus on man-made rituals and traditions such as monks, masses, feasts, fasts, and devotion to the immaculate heart of Mary.

But what about our practices? Do Evangelicals and Fundamentalists have man-made traditions, too? And are those traditions distracting you from the activities that God has emphasized in the NT?

That's a question weighing on my mind as I seek to follow Christ and teach my family to do the same.

For example, I've spent an enormous amount of time, energy, and money on *seminary*. And that's Biblical, right? After all, you'll remember how, at the end of Acts 2, the disciples founded Jerusalem Theological Seminary and commanded that only graduates with a three-year MDiv or better could then serve as leaders in the churches.

Remember that passage?

Oh wait, that's *not* in the Bible?

The truth is, Jesus and the disciples never founded a seminary, attended one, or commanded one to be built. No one even thought to start anything like a seminary until over a thousand years later. So, where did I get the idea to focus on that? Where did I get the idea that it was worth all that time and money and is pleasing to God?

Not from the Bible.

Could seminarians and seminaries be as extra-biblical as monks and monasteries?

Think of the other spiritual activities Christians devote their time and energy to: promoting revivals, Sunday school, church building programs, Christian rock concerts, and winning theological debates on social media. None of those activities are forbidden or morally wrong, but should they be your *focus*?

God has given you the freedom to serve Him in many different ways, but every action has an opportunity cost. Choosing one action means losing the value of the action you could have taken. Since you only have so much time to serve God in this life, shouldn't you emphasize doing the things God has emphasized?

And what might those be?

As I've been re-reading the Bible in light of that concern, here's one such activity that stands out: *eating*.

The NT says nothing about seminary, but it has lots to say about eating.

Here are ten connections between eating and Christian living.

1. EATING AND FELLOWSHIP

"One of the simplest and the oldest acts of fellowship in the world is that of eating together," William Barclay said (Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 59).

When you read the Gospels, you'll find that Jesus spent much of His time eating with a wide range of people. Religious leaders even faulted Jesus for eating with "tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:16), and they spread the rumor that He was too gluttonous to be a genuine prophet (Matt 11:19). Apparently, Jesus ate out a lot!

The first Christians also emphasized eating together, which they did daily:

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers...So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart (Acts 2:42, 46).

Doctrine, prayer, and eating!

In the life of the early church, those three went together—and on a *daily* basis.

2. THE CHURCH MET TO EAT

Presumably, the early Christians met together as individuals. But even when they met specifically as the church, it was not simply to socialize. They came together to eat the Lord's Supper:

Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you (1 Cor 11:20-22).

Paul criticized the Corinthians for their abuses at the Lord's Supper, but that's why they nominally met together to eat. And notice how many "elements" the Lord's Supper has:

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took **bread**; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the **cup** after **supper**, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes (1 Cor 11:23-26, emphasis added).*

You are familiar with the bread and the cup (i.e., wine), but notice that Paul says they "took the cup *after supper*" (v 25, emphasis added). Theissen notes what people often overlooked: "The formula presumes that there is a meal *between* the word over the bread and that spoken over the cup" (Theissen, *Social Setting*, p. 152). A meal! In other words, Paul described the Lord's Supper as having three elements: bread, supper, then cup. It was not a ritualized bit of juice and cracker but a *deipnon*—a full evening meal.

Eating together provided the framework for worshipping together.

3. EATING DECIDED WHERE THE CHURCH MET

Unlike later Christians, the first believers did not focus on building sacred spaces such as synagogues, churches, or temples. Where, then, did they meet?

We know that early believers sometimes met in rented rooms (Mark 14:15; Acts 1:13), but mostly they met in homes:

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house (1 Cor 16:19).

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house (Col 4:15).



to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house (Philem 1:2).

Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ (Rom 16:5).

Why would they meet in homes? Well, where do you normally cook and eat supper? At home. So if your corporate worship centered on eating supper, where would you meet? At home!

4. EATING AND DOING MINISTRY

Eating together was also central to doing Christian ministry. As we saw, Jesus often ate with disciples and inquirers. But He was not idle during those times. He used the dinner table to teach. “Jesus is the prime example of someone who reached people through the door of hospitality” (Strauch, *Hospitality*, p. 22).

You see that throughout Jesus’ ministry, such as when Jesus ate with some Pharisees, and a sinful woman came to anoint His feet, which became an occasion to talk about love and forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50). Or when He ate at Martha and Mary’s house, He taught about spiritual priorities (Luke 10:38-42).

If you listed all the meals that Jesus had with other people, you could come up with a list of topics for potential discipleship conversations.

5. EATING AND SUPPORTING MINISTRY

Eating is not just a way for Christians to *do* ministry, but also a way to *support* ministry. Early Christian teachers were itinerant, i.e., they travelled from place to place. That meant they were dependent upon hospitality to do ministry.

For example, when Jesus sent out the seventy, He told them not to bring their own provisions, but to stay at the first house that welcomed them (and presumably fed them, Matt 10:11).

And later, when John wrote his third epistle, he praised Gaius for supporting traveling teachers:

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brothers and sisters, and especially when they are strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well (3 John 1:5-6).

Likewise, you can support ministry by showing hospitality to traveling teachers, missionaries, youth groups, and other workers.

6. EATING CAN CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVANGELISM

When was the last time you invited an unbeliever to church? Maybe never. It can be awkward to invite someone to a contemporary church service. Believers are reluctant to make

the invitation, and unbelievers are reluctant to accept.

But what about inviting someone over for a meal? Is that awkward? Not at all.

So what if the church meeting occurred in a home, centered around sharing a common meal? Wouldn't inviting new people to church be normal? "For the early Christians, the home was the most natural setting for proclaiming Christ to their families, neighbors, and friends" (Strauch, *Hospitality*, p. 22).

Notice that Paul assumed unbelievers would be present during the meeting of the church:

For otherwise, if you bless God in the spirit only, how will the one who occupies the place of the outsider know to say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you are saying? (1 Cor 14:16 NASB).

Therefore if the whole church gathers together and all the people speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are insane? (1 Cor 14:23 NASB).

7. EATING AND ALMS TO THE POOR

Christians are commanded to help the poor. For example, Jesus called his disciples to invite the poor for supper:

"But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind" (Luke 14:13).

In the ancient world, most people were poor. But how can we help?

Modern churches are usually not set up to feed the poor. Our Sunday morning lecture-centered worship service has no practical application to helping the poor. So, instead, churches sub-contract that duty to soup kitchens and food banks. But is that what God intended?

By contrast, if believers gathered around a common meal, wouldn't feeding the poor flow naturally from the act of worshipping together?

That seems to have been the case. In Jerusalem, at least, when the believers met daily to eat, they quickly started feeding the widows, though problems developed in the equal distribution of the food:

Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint developed on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food (Acts 6:1 NASB).

Obviously, in contrast to modern practice, providing food to the poor was considered an important job for the church. In fact, it was precisely those concerns that gave rise to two church leadership positions.

8. EATING AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP

When a church is looking for a new pastor/teacher/elder, the top two questions people usually ask are: can he teach? And has he been divorced?

But Paul lists several more qualifications for an overseer, three of which involve eating. For example:

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching, not overindulging in wine, not a bully, but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money...(1 Tim 3:1-3 NASB).

Notice that, besides his teaching ability and marital status, the candidate must also be *temperate, hospitable* and should not *overindulge in wine*. Why emphasize those things? In a modern worship service, that might not make sense. But think about those qualifications in light of a meeting where Christians ate together in a private home and where, in the past, there had been problems in the equal distribution of food, where the poor were left out and where others got drunk (cf. 1 Cor 11:21).

Likewise, the role of *deacons* takes on clearer meaning if you picture a house church meeting where believers have gathered together to eat a full supper. The original proto-deacons were chosen to "wait on tables" and make sure all the widows were fed equally (cf. Acts 6:2). Actually, one definition of the word *deacon* is someone who waits on tables. That position does not make sense in a modern church. But it makes perfect

sense in the setting of a NT church meeting where thirty to fifty people gathered at least once a week to eat supper. What kind of help would you need then? Wouldn't you need people to set up the meal, serve it, and then clean up afterwards? And that's what the deacons and deaconesses did. As Jewett notes, "the eucharistic liturgy was combined with diaconal service, understood as serving meals in celebration with the faith community" (Jewett, "Tenement Churches," p. 32).

9. EATING AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Churches rarely exercise church discipline today. In part, they can't obey NT regulations about church discipline, because modern Christians do not meet together the way the NT church met. For example, if Christians met in homes to eat a meal together, then these commands to exercise discipline make much more sense:

But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person (1 Cor 5:11).

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him (2 John 1:10).

How do you exercise church discipline? By excluding people from eating the supper or otherwise enjoying your hospitality.

10. EATING AND ESCHATOLOGY

Eating was not only important to Christian practice, but to Christian beliefs about the future. As Jewett said, "Such meals were marked by eschatological joy at the presence of a new age and of a Master who had triumphed over the principalities and powers" (Jewett, *Romans*, p. 66). For example, notice the connection that Paul draws between the Lord's Supper and the Second Coming:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor 11:26; cf. Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18).

How long will the Church celebrate the Lord's Supper? Until He comes. For Paul, the Lord's Supper is not only a reminder of what He did, but also of what He will do, i.e., return.

A Biblical image for life in the Messianic age was sitting at a grand banquet with the heroes of the faith:

"And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 8:11).

"They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29).

CONCLUSION

What kind of spiritual practices does God want you to focus on?

Have I convinced you that God presents *eating together* as an important part of living the Christian life, both individually and as a church?

Of course, some people will object that times have changed and the way the NT practiced eating together is vastly different from how we do church today.

To quote Roland Allen: "All I can say is 'This is the way of Christ and His Apostles.' If any man answers, 'That is out of date,' or 'Times have changed'...I can only repeat 'This is the way of Christ and His Apostles,' and leave him to face that issue." (Allen, *Missionary Methods*, p. ii). ■



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. He is married to Abby. And if you ever take him out to eat, he takes his coffee black and will never say "no" to curry.

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