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THE OVERCOMER / REASONS TO OBEY / RIBBONS AND MINTS / WHERE ALL MINISTER / AND MORE!

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FROM THE EDITOR

The coming of autumn is something I welcome with great joy. North Texas summers are hot, hot, hot. The fall, winter, and spring are great here. I should not complain about the heat too much, however; it has been a relatively mild summer by Dallas standards.

This past year has been an excellent one for our ministry. We had a record year in terms of donations. Our blogs and podcasts have garnered more and more fans. Our once a week mini-vids are getting lots of views on our YouTube channel. Ken and Kathryn have had a great impact overseas and are, as a matter of fact, in the air right this minute on their way to Kenya. I told Ken that he was destined to minister there since the country has the first five letters of his name (i.e., *Ken Yates*). It is a joy to see the Free Grace message spread.

Shawn and I are so pleased that many of the questions we answer on our podcast are from people outside of the U.S.

We are working on three exciting special projects right now:

1) A book on systematic theology by Ken Yates, Shawn Lazar, and me, entitled *Doctrine for Disciples* that we hope to release by May of next year.

2) New once-a-week 5-10-minute videos that we plan to film starting in October.

3) A five-year project to produce a one-volume commentary on the Old Testament that is to be in print by December of 2026, if the Lord tarries.


The promise of everlasting life is the greatest promise on earth. Eternal security is so much better than every type of security that man offers. God's security is 100% guaranteed. IRAs,



Be Fruitful This Fall

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

retirement funds, social security, even government stability are not guaranteed. We have the greatest message to share with those who are thirsty. Like our Lord, we offer living water freely to all (John 4:10-14; 6:35; Rev 22:17).

We hope you enjoy this issue of our magazine and that it bears much fruit for eternity. 





Why Do We Make It So Difficult to Be Saved?

BY BOB WILKIN

Hal and Wanda ask this provocative question:

I guess this is more a philosophical question than a theological one. Why do you think individuals want to make it so difficult to be saved? You would think they would be eager to embrace faith alone as the saving message. I guess the spirit of the Pharisees is alive and well and in charge of many churches!

I was one of the modern-day Pharisees when I was confronted with the promise of life during the summer before my senior year in college. I was a member of a religious boys' club that taught extreme Lordship Salvation. My best friend from the club had come to faith in Christ for everlasting life via the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC). He challenged me to come to a Crusade meeting.

I was afraid to go, since I was fairly sure they would try to deceive me. But I also knew that this was my best friend, and I ought to at least pray about it. I prayed and I went.

I can tell you it was fairly hard for me to believe the faith-alone message.

After that meeting, I made an appointment to meet with Warren, a CCC staff member. That step

“Tradition often hinders faith in Christ for everlasting life. Not just Roman Catholicism. Most Christian traditions warn their adherents to avoid the supposedly heretical message of easy believism or cheap grace.”

was hard too. It was another barrier. But I lacked assurance and wanted it. Warren opened his Bible and showed me Eph 2:8-9. It seemed too easy: saved by grace and apart from works.

It took five separate meetings with Warren before I was convinced. He must have quoted Eph 2:8-9 fifty times in those five meetings. Finally, I believed the promise of life. I knew I was saved once and for all.

So, my personal answer is one word: *tradition*.

The tradition I had been in for 14 years was antithetical to the faith-alone message. Warren essentially deprogrammed me. All unbelievers need deprogramming!


Think of all the traditions that reject the faith-alone message. I got an email today from a friend named William in which he listed 19 different denominations or groups that reject the faith-alone position. He included Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Church of Christ, Pentecostals, Charismatics, the cults, and other denominations, too.

Tradition often hinders faith in Christ for everlasting life. Not just Roman Catholicism. Most Christian traditions warn their adherents to avoid the supposedly heretical message of easy believism or cheap grace.

Let's envision a different Christian world. Imagine that 100% of the people within Christendom believed in Jesus for everlasting life that can never be lost. Then we'd be asking why the Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Orthodox Jews reject the promise of life. But the reality is that most people within Christianity not only do not believe the faith-alone message, they feel it is their duty to war against it.

What about people who come from atheist or agnostic homes and believe what they were taught? Well, they do not believe in God, the Bible, life after death, the Trinity, or everlasting life. They obviously do not believe the promise of life. Their tradition makes them especially hostile to the promise of life. Their whole worldview is opposed to not only the promise of life, but also the entire Christian faith.

However, I get Hal and Wanda's point. Why would anyone in his right mind reject out of hand that one will spend eternity with the Lord in His kingdom if he simply believes in Jesus? Shouldn't people at least be attracted to that message? Yes. They should. But tradition is a powerful thing. People learn to view the Bible and the condition for everlasting life in a certain way. And that way makes sense to them. It seems fair to them that bad people go to hell and good people go to the kingdom.

By contrast, the faith-alone message means that bad people can go to heaven when they die. Thank God it does, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). 



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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The Walls Have Ears

By Ken Yates

There is a phrase that I have heard, but I am not sure everybody uses it. The phrase is, “The walls have ears.” The meaning of the phrase is that adults need to be careful what they say. Children not only can hear what adults say, but they are listening. This is true even when we don’t think they can hear or understand what we are saying. But children understand more than we realize. Without a doubt, every parent can attest to the truth of this saying.

This saying has caused me sadness in recent days. As the readers of this blog well know, there is an ongoing fight between Free Grace folks and Lordship Salvation/Reformed theology folks over the assurance of salvation. For most people, the word “fight” is too strong because the Lordship Salvation side has won the war as far as the majority of Evangelical Christians are concerned. Free Grace folks are definitely a minority.

The sad result of this situation is that most people attending even conservative Evangelical churches do not have assurance of their salvation. That is the direct result of adopting a Lordship Salvation view.

Lordship teaches that one must have good works to have any measure of assurance, and these good works must continue until the end of one’s life in order to keep whatever assurance a person might have. Since nobody knows if he will continue with a holy lifestyle, assurance becomes an impossibility. Also, how many good works

must a person have to feel confident he is eternally saved?


It is sad enough that many adults live with this fear and agony. We all know such people and it is sad to see. However, the sadness is alleviated somewhat by knowing that these are adults we are talking about, and in many cases, they have been presented with the gospel of grace but are unwilling to believe it.

LORDSHIP CHILDREN LEARN TO DOUBT

But there is no way to diminish the sadness in this area when it comes to children. I have heard three stories recently that are heart-breaking.

A Lordship Salvation missionary told me how his 10-year-old daughter came to him and told him she did not think she would go to heaven and was afraid. The reason why she felt that way is because she did not enjoy going to different churches to raise support and she didn’t like her younger brother like she should. The missionary father had tears in his eyes when he told the story and said that it broke his heart to hear his daughter say these things to him.

I read the second story in a Christian magazine. Another 10-year-old—this time a boy—was dying of cancer. His family was very active in a Reformed church. He told his parents he wanted to be saved. They told him that he could not be saved because he was not serious enough and did not feel sorry enough for his sins. It was only after he sufficiently demonstrated that he was



“Most people attending even conservative Evangelical churches do not have assurance of their salvation. That is the direct result of adopting a Lordship Salvation view of eternal salvation.”

serious enough about his sin that they tell him he could pray for eternal salvation.


I became aware of the third story on Tik Tok. A woman put a video up, talking about her eight-year-old daughter. She had tears in her eyes as she told how she was the daughter of a pastor. But her daughter came to her and told her she, too, was afraid because she thought she was going to hell. The reason she thought that way is because she just did so many things that were bad. Even though the video did not reveal what kind of church they attended, it is not difficult to hear the echoes of Lordship thought. The girl certainly did not arrive at her fears in a vacuum. While crying, the mother made this telling statement: “I have let my daughter down.”

I realize that many Lordship Salvation folks will see these stories as evidence of God working in the lives of children by showing them the depth of their sins. Surely, the parents of the boy dying of cancer felt that way. However, it is interesting that the parents of the other children clearly did not.

My guess is that the other two parents felt that their children were just children and were innocent and good. They weren’t guilty of really bad sins like adultery or murder. They shouldn’t think they weren’t good enough to rest in their salvation. I also think they probably thought about how Jesus dealt with children during His ministry. Any child that thought of the Lord with fear because of his or her sin clearly did not understand His love and grace.

LETTING THE CHILDREN DOWN

It is hard to say, but as harsh as it sounds, the parents are at fault here. The mother was right—she had let her daughter down. These children did not come up with these theological ideas on their own. They had heard them from their parents, their pastors, and even pastors they were related to. Perhaps when the adults spoke among themselves and promoted Lordship Salvation and its lack of assurance, they did not realize their children were listening. What they were saying did not apply to the little ones! If they thought this through, maybe they would have said something like, “But this doesn’t apply to you. Jesus loves you more than we do. He gives you eternal life as a free gift when you simply believe in Him for it. Don’t worry about being good enough.”

I am not sure how the parents in the first and third story will address these issues with their children. These kids are simply believing what they have heard from them. They should be proud of what their kids say, but it is gut wrenching to these parents. They know something is wrong, even if they can’t put their finger on it. If they are not willing to give up their Lordship Salvation view of eternal salvation and (lack of) assurance, maybe a little advice is in order. When you get together—whether in church, Bible study, or just friendly theological discussions—take extra precautions. The walls have ears. 

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



Romans 12

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

By Zane Hodges

INTRODUCTION: THE CALL TO BE A LIVING SACRIFICE (12:1-2)

12:1. Paul has now reached the point where the practical implications of his theology can be spelled out as they relate to personal behavior. He appeals to the believing readers (**I exhort you therefore, brothers**) based upon the **mercies of God** (chaps. 9–11).

This leads to a call for a conscious religious orientation to life. Indeed, one might say the appeal evokes the image of a believer-priest through Paul's use of the term **service**. This *service* exhorts the readers to **present their bodies as a sacrifice that is living, holy, and pleasing to God** (8:9-13). The entire life of Christian obedience can be a sacrifice to God.

12:2. If Christian living can be described as the presentation of a “living sacrifice,” the process involved in such living can be characterized as a process of *transformation*.

Romans 12:2 may be regarded as summarizing the fundamental methodology by means of which the sacrifice urged in v 1 can be carried out. The first point is a negative one. If Christian brothers are to make a living sacrifice of their bodies, they must not allow themselves to **be conformed to this age**. The second point is positive. They are to **be transformed** in order to experience the **will of God**. This is done **by the renovation of your**

understanding, that is, by having a mind set on the Spirit (8:6).

MAINTAINING PERSPECTIVE ON ONE'S ROLE IN THE CHURCH (12:3-8)

12:3. This approach is evident here in Paul's call to modesty, or proper perspective, regarding one's own role in the Christian body (12:3-8). Paul's admonition comes via (**through**) his own experience of **the grace that has been given to him**. Though he speaks as an Apostle (cf. 1:1), this is a role attained only *through the grace* of God.

Instead of aspiring beyond their actual capacity, believers should **aspire to what is sensible**. That is, they should aim for service in the church that conformed to their actual ability and gift.

12:4-5. A physical body has **many members**. This analogy should be applied, Paul says, to the Church. We should recognize the basic fact that **we who are many in number are all a part of a single whole (one body in Christ)** and therefore we are members who are part of **one another**.

If a believer “aspires” to some gift that God has in fact bestowed on another believer, rather than on himself, such an attitude fails to recognize the diversity in function which is inherent in the *one body*.

12:6-8. The premise on which the exhortation rests is stated clearly in the words **since we have gifts differing according to the grace that has been given to us**. Inasmuch as the functions of

the members of the body are not identical, it follows that each person should apply himself to the exercise of his own gift.

It is noteworthy that Paul does not here include the term *apostle* among the gifts mentioned. There were no apostles in the Roman church, since this preeminent gift (1 Cor 12:28) was apparently a closed group among which only fourteen individuals can be identified with confidence (see Acts 1:13; 21:16; 14:14).

The one who possesses the gift of prophecy should exercise this gift **in agreement with the faith**, which refers to the body of teaching that is believed.

Various kinds of **service** existed in the church of Paul's day (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 5:3-16).

With the mention of the next gift, Paul alters his grammatical structure slightly and in my translation this is signaled by a period following "**in service**." Paul also mentions the gifts of **teaching** and of being an **exhorter**, the latter would include the giving of comfort.

The giver should give **with generosity** is best understood as applicable to *all* who give, while **the leader** would include elders within the church. **The one who shows mercy** extends mercy to those whose circumstances are difficult or distressing.

MAINTAINING GODLY CHARACTER (12:9-13)

12:9. The superlative Christian virtue is **love** and it should be sincere, that is, **without hypocrisy**. It will also be accompanied by true disgust with **what is evil**.

Instead, a Christian ought to **cleave to what is good**.

12:10. Genuine **brotherly love** should not be reduced to a mere superficial cordiality but involves a real feeling for the worth and welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul urges here that **in regard to honor**, the believer should be in the forefront of bestowing it on other believers. He should be a model by

showing his fellow believers the path (**way**) to honor.

12:11. The Christian should be a person who takes his responsibilities very seriously (i.e., with **diligence**), especially in the church. And, Paul says, he should discharge his duties with commendable energy and effort.

Our spirit, i.e., our attitude, should be one of being **zealous**, which indicates a strong dedication to those responsibilities. This diligence and zeal should translate into genuine **slave-service** to the Lord.

12:12. To do slave-service to the Lord was to labor in **hope** of future glory and reward (Rom 8:17b; Col 3:24). However, *rejoicing* may often seem impossible in the face of earthly affliction. The Christian is called to **endure** (or bear up) **in... affliction** by persevering in prayer (**in regard to prayer, we should persevere**). The habit of persisting in prayer is valuable at all times, and especially in times of stress. The Christian should habitu-

ally persevere in prayer as a fundamental practice of his spiritual life (cf. 1 Thess 5:17).

12:13. The final member of this series (vv 10-13) focuses on the obligation to be charitable to fellow Christians (**the saints**) who have material **needs**. The verb *share* (*koinōnountes* from *koinōneō*) is used several times in the NT of the process of alleviating the material needs of other Christians (e.g., Rom 15:26, 27; 2 Cor 9:13; Phil 1:5; 4:15; Heb 13:16).

The command to **pursue hospitality** is regarded as an appropriate Christian virtue not just here, but elsewhere in Paul's letters and the rest of the NT (cf. 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8; cf. also Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9). In particular, Christians who traveled benefited from the hospitality of their fellow-Christians since accommodations for travelers in the Empire were poor and often disreputable.

“Genuine brotherly love should not be reduced to a mere superficial cordiality but involves a real feeling for the worth and welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ.”

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MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS (12:14-21)

12:14. The command to **bless those who persecute you...and do not curse** is not exclusively applicable to our non-Christian relationships. Whenever we feel anyone is against us and seeking to harm us in some way (not necessarily physically), it is then we are tempted to use harsh and disparaging language either about them or to their face. We should wish such people well or express the hope that God's goodness will be theirs (1 Pet 3:8-11).

12:15. The command to wish people well ("bless") instead of wishing them ill ("curse") that was given in v 14 is obviously reinforced by the commands of this verse. We could, in fact, express "blessing" with our lips and have little real concern for the person addressed (as so often happens). But here the command is to *feel* the feelings of others, that is, to possess true sympathy: **rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.**

12:16. To **have the same aspirations for each other** instructs us to desire that others should experience what we ourselves would like to experience. This contrasts sharply with what often actually happens in a church, where one's own ambition is to "get ahead" of others. This is achievable if we **do not aspire to high things.** This aligns with the attitude about spiritual gifts (v 3).

Instead of unrealistically aiming for *high things* (status, reputation, etc.), we should instead **associate with humble people.**

Finally, Christians should **not become wise in their own sight.** Paul is here especially concerned with the "social climbers" who might be in the various Roman congregations. The effort of aiming after *high things* could lead easily to a self-presentation that stressed one's own knowledge, skill, and insight to impress other people. This, says Paul, is not Christian behavior.

12:17. Paul says that believers are to **repay no one with evil in return for evil.** The impulse to get even is intrinsic to our sinful nature.

Instead of seeking retribution, Christians should **make provision for things that are good in the sight of all men.** Paul's word for *things that*

are good (*kala*) shows the breadth of his admonition. We should aim for our actions to look truly good to whoever observes them, that is, *in the sight of all men.*

12:18. If we are not to return evil for evil received, and if we are to be careful how our actions are perceived by others, it follows that our real aim is, or should be, **peace with all men** to the extent to which we are able to achieve this. The Christian attitude should be: "I, for my part, have no hostility against him/her."

12:19. Despite his best efforts, the believer will in all probability face injustice and undeserved mistreatment in one form or another (cf. 2 Tim 3:12). When this occurs, however, he must be careful **not to take revenge.**

Remarkably, when we decline to avenge ourselves, we **leave room** for the expression of God's **wrath** toward the offending party. Our own ill-considered or inappropriate revenge can short-circuit what God would otherwise do Himself.

The Scripture itself declares (**it is written**) that **vengeance**, is a divine prerogative.

12:20-21. The Christian should meet the needs of a person who is hostile to him when the occasion presents itself (Prov 25:21-22). From the perspective of divine wisdom, acts of kindness to one's enemy place that enemy in a more precarious position than would a refusal to assist him. In the light of v 19, and especially of the command to "leave room for wrath," to perform such kindness to one's foe is to "heap coals of fire on his head" and thus to augment divine wrath against him.

Vengeance is not our business but God's. In fact, behaving in this way is ultimately a victory over evil: **overcome evil with good.** ■



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



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5 Ways to Teach Kids About Gender

By Summer Stevens

FROM TOLERANCE TO FORCED APPROVAL

There is an intentional attempt to indoctrinate your children to the LGBTQ lifestyle, and your church is likely doing nothing about it.

This indoctrination is evident in obvious ways, such as in the mandatory teaching of LGBTQ history in many states across the country and a push for LGBTQ-inclusive sex education. Last year England made LGBTQ-inclusive sex education mandatory in public schools. A *Psychology Today* article reported that 81% of elementary and 88% of secondary teachers approved of LGBTQ-inclusive education, and 45% of kindergarten teachers felt comfortable addressing the topic with students.

The indoctrination shows up subtly, too, in the quick embrace of a same-sex couple in a TV commercial, on rainbow-colored kids' cereal boxes during Pride month, and in the quiet introduction of gay characters in almost every Netflix series or Disney movie. Mere tolerance is not acceptable any longer. People must embrace and celebrate LGBTQ practices or be threatened with labels such as *homophobia* or *bigot* and risk losing friends and jobs. And in fact, many people are embracing it. In 2001, 53% of Americans thought homosexuality was wrong; by 2021, that number had dropped to 32%.

“Young people today are more accepting of LGBTQ people than ever before. And as

acceptance has grown in this country, so too has the number of young people who describe themselves as LGBTQ,” said the 2017 GLAAD’s *Accelerating Acceptance* study. That is a fascinating quote by GLAAD. The church should pay attention to it because cultural acceptance equals higher numbers of people embracing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender lifestyles. Homosexuals used to comprise a relatively small percentage of Americans, but this number is rising fast. A Gallup Poll revealed that in 2012, 3.5% of the population identified as LGBT; that number climbed to 5.6% in 2020, and the youth of America are leading the charge with LGBTQ identification by almost 10% of teens aged 13-17 and a whopping 20% of millennials according to a GLAAD study.

MENTAL HEALTH

Let’s put Biblical morality aside for a moment and focus just on the mental health of LGBTQ youth. Every other year the CDC conducts a large Youth Risk Behavior Study that monitors six categories of health-related behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among young people. In 2015, the study began collecting data for those students who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Several surprising facts began to emerge—namely, the drastic mental health concerns for LGB youth specifically. For the 2019 data, those in this



group had experienced daily sadness or hopelessness for two straight weeks or more (66.3%), seriously considered suicide (46.8%), attempted suicide (23.4%), and had been forced to have sex against their will (19.4%) at much higher rates than their peers who identified as heterosexual (32.2, 14.5, 6.4, and 5.5%, respectively).

Transgender teens are almost *six times* more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.

For a lifestyle that is so prone to hopelessness and suicide, it is a wonder that our culture continues to recommend it to our youth.

WATCHING THE STORM

Sadly, the church has sat back and watched the storm, out of touch with the real struggles youth face, and has done little to affirm God-given gender identity in children. *Elementary and middle school children* are asking these questions and making sexual identity determinations.

A high school youth group series on waiting for marriage is too little, too late. Satan seeks to steal, kill, and destroy children with precision and calculation (John 10:10). How much more should the church seek to preserve, protect, and guard children against the lies and devastation barreling through our world in the realm of sexual identity.

Christians are not exempt from these statistics. At one of my previous churches, about half of the youth group struggled with sexual identity. Many of these were kids who had grown up in the church. The answer, then, is to start early in affirming biological gender and sexual identity. Because, as the statistics clearly reveal, teens are embracing homosexuality at drastically higher rates than ever before. Sexual preferences are being offered like a smorgasbord, with very young children encouraged to sample whatever looks appealing. Naturally, more and more children are trying out homosexuality and transgenderism with devastating results like depression, anxiety, and suicide. We are told that this is because of a lack of acceptance for these youth, and the answer is simply to celebrate the lifestyle *even more*, but God's Word reveals that when we break from God's design and pursue our own

will, we will experience heartache and grief (Rom 1:28-32; 8:6).

The church must lead the charge. We cannot look to another organization. Each week the church has a unique opportunity to teach God's truth to children and equip youth with firm confidence in their sexuality and gender identity. If you have any influence in your church as a pastor, pastor's wife, elder, children's volunteer, or even a parent or grandparent who is willing to schedule a meeting with the leaders, I cannot urge you strongly enough to seriously consider this issue and come up with a plan. Please prayerfully consider what you can do in your home or your church to prepare children to live confident, honorable lives for God.

ACTION ITEMS

Here are five ideas to get you started.

1 Incorporate sexual identity-affirming statements into Sunday school classes on a regular basis. If you have teachers or administrators who attend your church, enlist them to help create short, age-appropriate lessons beginning with toddlers. That may sound very young, but if your children are watching Disney, then you need to begin these conversations.

These can be very simple for preschool children, like, "Raise your hand if you're a boy. Who made you a boy? Yes, God! Does God ever make mistakes? No! God meant for you to be a boy, and it's good to be a boy! If you are a boy, can you ever *not* be a boy? Nope. You will always, forever, 100% be a boy because that's how God made you. God made you a boy because the world needs brave, kind boys like you!" And repeat a similar statement for girls.

Elementary students can understand Biblical teaching on God's creation of Adam and Eve and His design for marriage between men and women, and questions like, "So did God design men to marry other men? Or women to marry other women? No, He didn't. God calls that sin."

Many public elementary school teachers read picture books about homosexual families to indoctrinate students to the LGBTQ agenda; the church must indoctrinate students to God's plan.

2 Affirm the authority of Scripture to young people. I've been surprised in recent years how adult Christians whom I considered mature could willfully embrace a lifestyle of sexual sin. I've concluded that these are Christians with a low view of Scripture.

As Free Grace proponents, we hold that someone can live a homosexual lifestyle and still be a Christian because our salvation does not depend on our sin; it depends on our belief in Jesus' promise of eternal life. Homosexuality is not a special sin, though Paul does say sexual sin in general is of the category that is "against their own body" (1 Cor 6:18), and therefore more central to our identity and can be more damaging to ourselves than other types of sin. If a homosexual has believed in Jesus for eternal life, his salvation is secure, just like it is for anyone else.

However, a sinning Christian will miss out on fellowship with Jesus, experience earthly consequences of his or her sin, and suffer a loss of rewards.

This is where the authority of Scripture comes in. A very firm foundation in, and reverence for, God's Word protects us from sin. Parents and church leaders must model obedience to the Scriptures and do everything possible to extol its value and relevance to speak into our lives. We must not only be hearers of the word but doers (Jas 1:22). Therefore, when youth come across passages of Scripture where God commands abstinence from sexual sin, they will respect and obey it, even if their feelings are confused for a time.

3 Address rebellion, pride, and arrogance in children through parenting classes. I believe there are two primary reasons children and teens veer toward homosexuality or transgenderism.

The first is trauma due to loss, abuse, or neglect, causing the child to fail to make appropriate and healthy connections with parents or peers. This child needs love, compassion, and counseling.

The second is a product of our smorgasbord culture that encourages children to sample sexual identities and choose what feels good at the time.

Today's philosophy governing the education system is that the child's unhindered self-expression is the purest and greatest path to self-realization and ultimate happiness. Parents must reject that philosophy and instead promote God's standards as the path to joy and satisfaction. When Christian parents fail to set Biblical standards for their child in all areas of life, that child learns that her or she has no actual standards. This inevitably crosses over into the child's sexual preference. "I can be attracted to anyone I want. It's my choice. I set the rules."

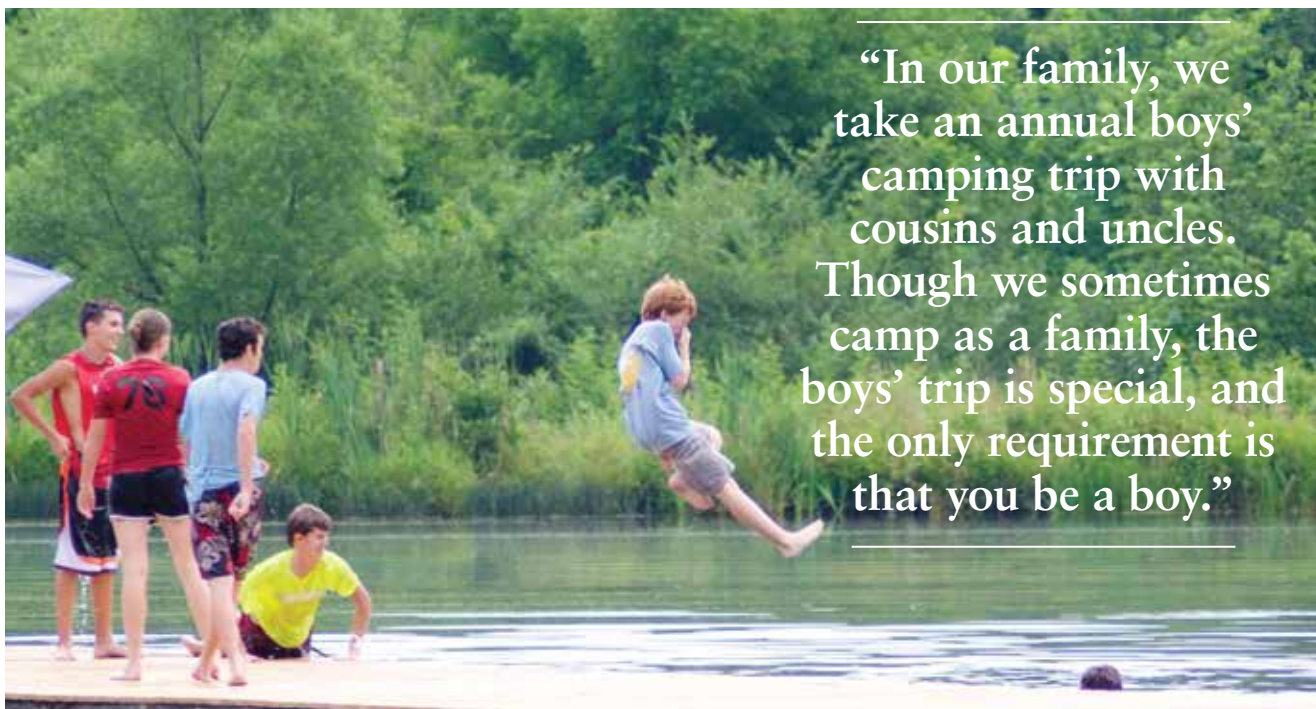
Parents must teach their children, "You cannot have what you want all the time. Some things are off-limits to you." When children understand that they must stay within God's standards, they will better comprehend this principle as they get older and remain within their sexual parameters, including heterosexual preferences or celibacy. An indulged child is more likely to gravitate toward believing that she is the author of her own morality, rather than God.

4 Affirming Biblical gender and sexual identity is not the same as affirming stereotypes. Certainly, boys can like football and girls can like tea parties and that's fine. Still, those are cultural expressions of masculinity or femininity that are unhelpful when teaching about sexual identity. God created some men to be bakers and poets and some women to be athletes and electricians. Boys can like pink and girls can like blue; however, do not celebrate a boy wearing nail polish or a girl wearing boy's clothes. Celebrate the correct type of distinctions.

In our family, we take an annual boys' camping trip with cousins and uncles. Though we sometimes camp as a family, the boys' trip is special, and the only requirement is that you be a boy.

This fall, my girls will be old enough to take them out for a special girls' weekend, and we are already planning our trip.

The church should plan activities and events that intentionally promote friendships and bonding within one's God-given gender. The goal is not to steer youth toward stereotypes. The goal is to firmly root them with confidence and joy in their identity as a biological male or female




“In our family, we take an annual boys’ camping trip with cousins and uncles. Though we sometimes camp as a family, the boys’ trip is special, and the only requirement is that you be a boy.”

whom God created. And if they choose to marry, teach them that God has created men for women, and women for men.

5 Create a positive environment for single people. Singles often feel like the third wheel at church gatherings, and “singles groups” tend to be focused on finding someone to marry. With an increasing number of young people identifying as LGBTQ and with the mental health struggles that accompany that, the church needs to offer genuine community for people who have chosen not to embrace the lifestyle. That situation can be very lonely and often shameful, but it shouldn’t be. The church should be the safest place for those struggling with homosexual thoughts and feelings—a place where they can find friendship, love, and people committed to helping them live a purposeful life that is pleasing to God.

It is honorable for a Christian man or woman with same-sex attraction to choose celibacy, but that shouldn’t mean a life of isolation from the Christian community.

Single heterosexual Christian adults must choose celibacy as well. The church must create an environment where being single for any reason and at any age is acceptable and not deemed

socially inferior. The Apostle Paul considered singleness the preferable status (1 Cor 7:7-8), and the church should also affirm this. It is also essential for the teens in your church who may struggle with homosexuality or gender confusion to see a thriving church community where they can find friendship so they are less tempted to pursue a lifestyle of sexual sin motivated by loneliness. 



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

Why Do Some Faithful Believers Die Before Reaching Old Age?

By Bob Wilkin

Matt asks a super question: I know that most if not all Free Grace theologians hold that unfaithful believers may be disciplined by God with an early death. Obviously, there's Scriptural evidence for this, such as Ananias and Saphira. However, someone new to Free Grace may ask, can *faithful believers* die before their time? What about martyrs? Would the early death of a faithful believer be used by God to draw his or her church and family closer to Him? Thank you, and keep up the good work.

We know that the Lord Jesus died before age 40, well before the 70 to 80 years that Moses spoke of in Ps 90:10. The Apostle James, the brother of the Apostle John, was martyred in AD 44 when he was around 40 (Acts 12:2) by Herod. The apostles Peter and Paul both died in Rome, circa AD 66, when they were likely in their early 60s. Jim Elliot, age 29, and four other young missionaries were killed in South America by the very Indians they hoped to reach. Lois Evans, wife of Dr. Tony Evans, died from cancer at the age of 70 in 2020.

We all know cases of believers who died young and yet were faithfully serving the Lord at the time of their deaths.

Matt's unstated question is why God allows this.

He gives one possible answer: God uses the death of faithful believers to draw their church and their family and friends closer to Him.

Of course, not everyone responds to the death of a friend or loved one by drawing closer to the

Lord. Some get angry with God and some even backslide.

I would say that the reason God allows the premature deaths of some faithful believers is because those deaths glorify Him.

It could be that God taking some faithful believers home early is a mercy.

Maybe terrible times were ahead for them in the city or country in which they lived. The peaceful death of Jeroboam's son by an illness was likely a mercy on God's part (1 Kings 14), giving him a glorious burial and sparing him an ignoble death when all the sons of Jeroboam were killed by Baasha (1 Kings 15:29).

Or it could be that the Lord knew that this faithful believer might fall away if given more time on earth. I don't know if God does that often. But He tried to do something like that with King Hezekiah. When Isaiah told him he was about to die and to set his house in order, Hezekiah begged for more years and God gave him fifteen additional years (2 Kings 20). But Hezekiah then wrongly showed representatives from Babylon all of the treasures and strength of Judah. Hezekiah would have avoided that if he had just departed when the Lord told him he was to die. Plus, during those fifteen extra years, Hezekiah had a son whom he named Manasseh. That son ended up being a terrible king. He would never have been king if Hezekiah had died when God originally intended.

As Matt pointed out, God sometimes takes the lives of rebellious believers prematurely. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) and Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5) come to mind. So do the believers who dishonored the Lord's Supper in Corinth (1 Cor 11:30). But that does not mean that all believers who die young were rebellious. Many believers who die young were faithful. God has His reasons for taking home faithful believers before they reach old age. **GM**

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



El Paso Bible Church

June 1, 2021 Lordship Debate

Shawn participated in a debate on “Free Grace or Lordship Salvation?” hosted by Marlon Wilson’s *The Gospel Truth* channel on YouTube (see episode 188).

Cole Perkins, an Assemblies of God pastor, defended the Lordship Salvation side.

As it happens, Cole lives in Denton, so they met a couple of times beforehand.

The debate was irenic, and hopefully, people coming to these issues for the first time will find it enlightening and become interested in learning more about the Free Grace position.



June 6, 2021 Bayside Community Church Tampa, FL

Shawn got to speak at Bayside Community Church. In Sunday school, he spoke on “Dominion and the Meaning of Life” and

“Breaking Bread.”

Appropriately, he was able to break bread with several church members the night before, at a dinner hosted by Susan Service, and for Sunday lunch hosted by the

Wiegmans. Shawn was very impressed by the high level of theological discussion around both tables. Bayside is a theologically engaged church. Thanks to Don Rice for the invitation to speak.



JeJu Island and Zambia

In June, I (Ken) continued teaching the Book of Hebrews with students in Zambia through Zoom. The class also includes folks from the US and Spain. It started as a study for students Kathryn and I have had in Zambia at a Bible institute, but their ability to attend is hit and miss. Part of that is due to the internet connection. The other part is that the school has been hit pretty hard by COVID. In fact, at this time, the school has stopped in person teaching. Lord willing, Kathryn and I are scheduled to return next year to teach a total of four classes.

I also taught a three-week course on the Book of Revelation through Zoom at the Word of Life Bible Institute on JeJu Island off the southern coast of South Korea. It concludes on July 5. There are about 20 students in the class. Each of them received the commentary by GES on the whole New Testament, as well as Zane Hodges's book on *The Atonement and Other Writings*. This last book contains a small book on the Olivet Discourse, which was required reading for the students, as well as the commentary on Revelation.

This has been an excellent opportunity to get good material into the hands of the students as well as to present the book of Revelation from a premillennial, dispensational, and Free Grace perspective. Most of the students are from Korea, but all speak English. This is another place that we are planning on teaching at in person next year if the Lord delays His coming.

Special thanks go out to Kathryn for her technical support and her help in teaching the class.

June 11, 2021 Sitting Down with Standing for Truth

Shawn and I (Bob) appeared on a YouTube show called *Standing for Truth*. The host, Donny, primarily puts on debates and discussions about Biblical Creationism. But he became a Free Grace guy years ago and he wanted to have a show in which we discussed Free Grace Theology.

We met for about 35 minutes and had a great time fielding Donny's questions.



June 27, 2021 El Paso Bible Church

Shawn filled in for Pastor Josh Meier at El Paso Bible Church.

The church was very welcoming, and he especially enjoyed the hospitality and conversation of Bill and Becky Holmes.



Bob with Andrew Bacon on the side

June 30, 2021 Chewing the Fat with Andrew Bacon

Bob and Shawn had lunch with Andrew Bacon, from Niagara Falls, Canada.

Andrew is thinking about transitioning from working in software to doing Free Grace ministry, but he's not sure what ministry to pursue. So far, most of his opportunities have been in youth ministry.

We bounced around several ideas.

Pray that God gives Andrew and his family direction on what to do.

May 2022 National Conference

The 2022 National Conference will be held at Camp Copass in Denton. The camp has a hotel, a motel, and eight spots for RVs. We are hoping this will improve the "fellowship" aspect of the conference. We are also planning on making the conference family-friendly, with a VBS-type program for kids. Please pray that we find the right volunteers to help.

A Simple Way to Start a Church Meeting

By Shawn Lazar

One of the most frequently asked questions we get is what to do if there is no Free Grace church nearby. And one of our most frequently given answers is, “Start a meeting in your home.” Is that too hard to do?

Consider the example of Anthony Norris Groves.

In 1827, Groves wanted to be a missionary to Persia, but he had a growing conviction against ordination. He asked the Anglican Church Mission Society if they would send him as a layman. They said he could go, but in that case, he could not celebrate the Lord’s Supper. To Groves, that posed a serious problem. If he went to a place with few or no Christians, where could he find a clergyman to celebrate communion?

When Groves went to Scripture, something suddenly became clear: “the thought was brought to my mind that ordination of any kind to preach the gospel is no requirement of scripture. To me it was the removal of a mountain” (Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, p. 49).

“From then on,” Groves’s biographer writes, “without the authorization or support of any denomination, he would preach wherever the Lord led him, and take the Lord’s Supper with any who loved Christ” (Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, p. 49).

That not only impacted Groves’s view of missions, but also of how to meet together as believers. As Groves talked about these issues with his wife and friends, they made a decision:

They would meet simply as a company of disciples, to share together in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, prayer and breaking of bread, without ministers, sacraments or rules of any kind (Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, p. 49).

The band was small at first. But as word spread, they learned of like-minded individuals who also met together:



By November 1829, Bellett, Cronin, Darby and another friend, Francis Hutchinson, had started meeting regularly to “break bread” at Hutchinson’s rather large dwelling in Fitzwilliam Square (Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, p. 50).


They were not the only people who hungered for a more Biblical Christian meeting. Soon they were joined by more people:

Eventually they decided, in token of their unity in Christ, to meet in one of their homes and celebrate the Lord’s Supper together. So blessed was this hour of worship that they began to meet regularly and before long others, both men and women, were added to their number. Their meetings were deliberately informal, like those described in the New Testament (Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*, p. 50).

Doesn’t sound too hard, does it?

There’s nothing particularly complicated about such a meeting. It requires no special planning, training, or equipment. At a minimum, you just “break bread” and discuss the Lord together.

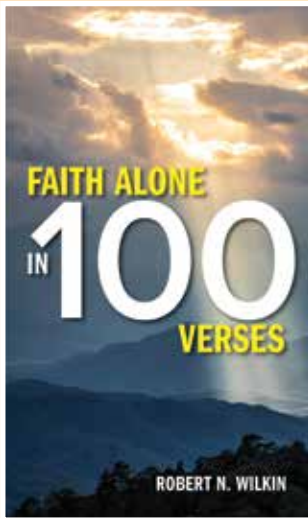
Several of these men later grew to become leaders in the Plymouth Brethren movement. And as you know, two hundred years later, Brethren meetings (and other meetings inspired by them) are found worldwide. But it started with friends simply breaking bread together.

The challenge of promoting a Biblical Free Grace soteriology in your hometown may start with you recovering a more Biblical ecclesiology. 

Shawn Lazar edits and writes for Grace in Focus.

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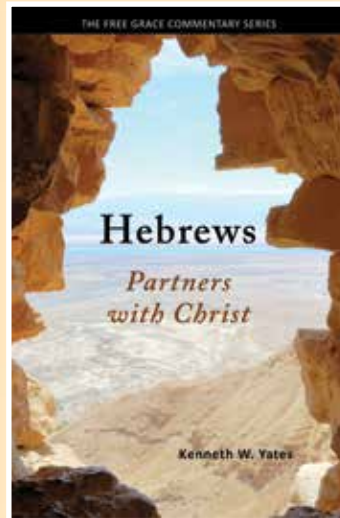
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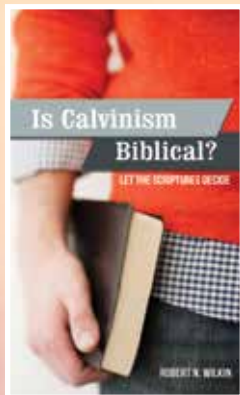
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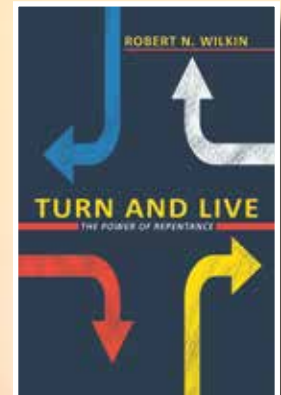
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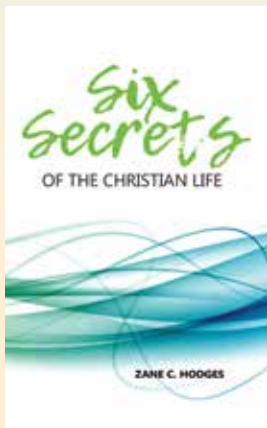
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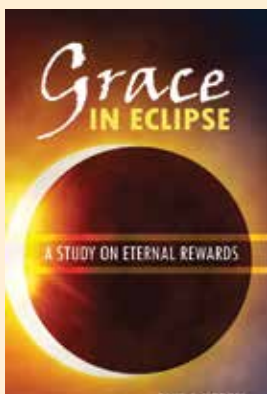


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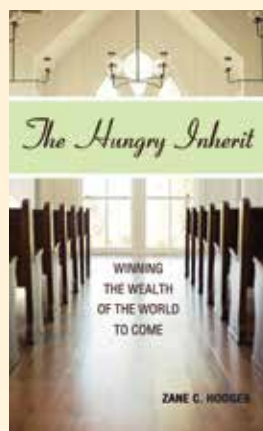


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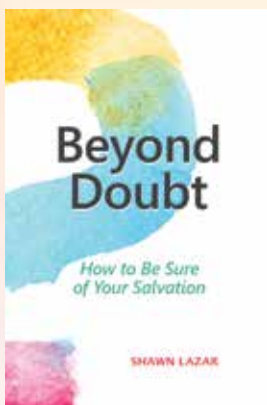


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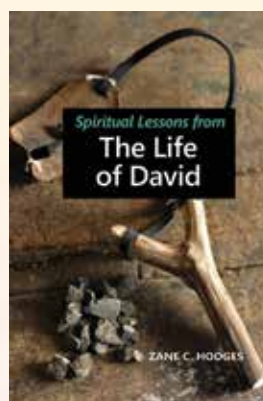


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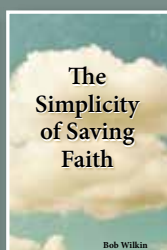
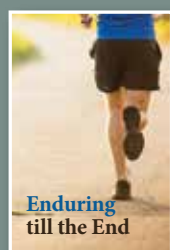


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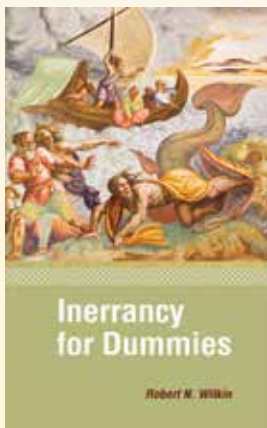
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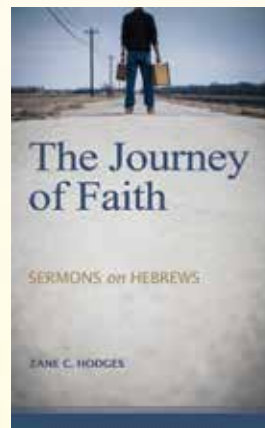


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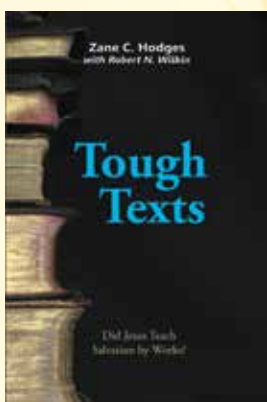


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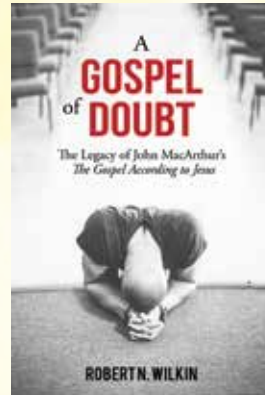


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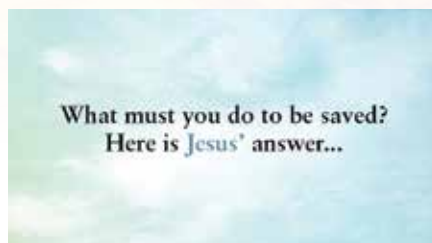
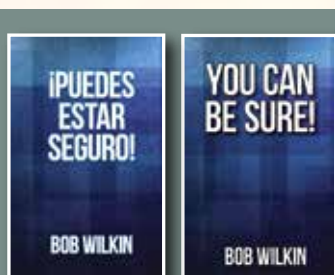


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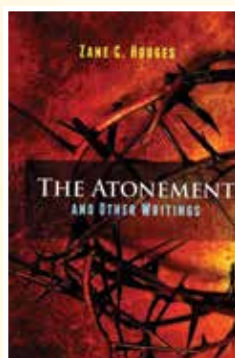


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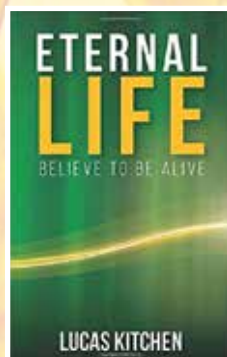


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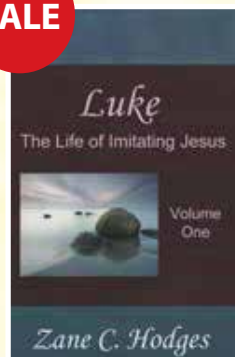
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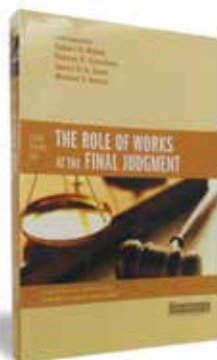


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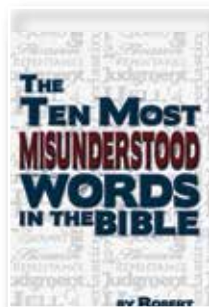


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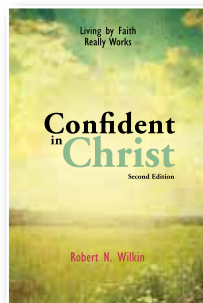


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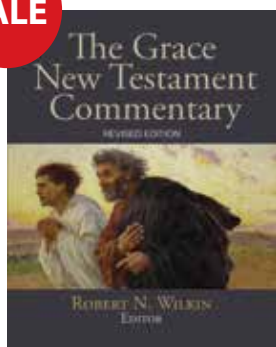
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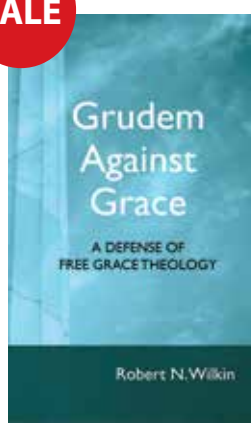
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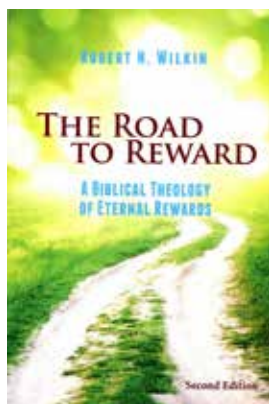


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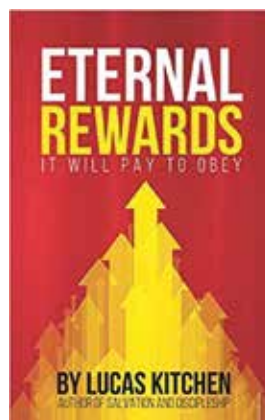


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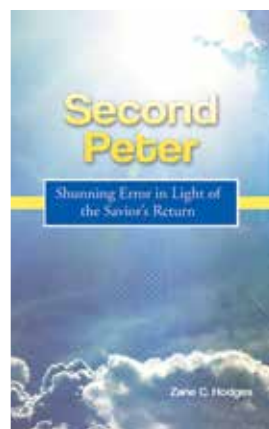


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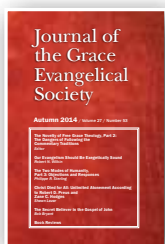


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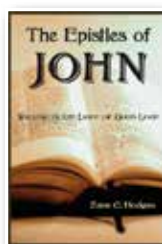
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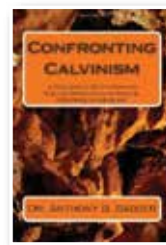


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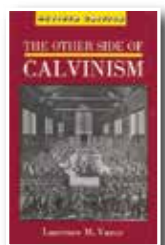


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Ribbons and Mints

What the State Fair Can Teach Us about God's Word

By Kathryn Wright

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

A few years ago, I got the chance to work for the state fair in South Carolina. A friend is a supervisor for one of the main buildings at the fairgrounds; she is in charge of the submissions for homemade items. The quilts, crafts, and baked goods come to her building to be judged and displayed during the fair. It was a lot of fun, and I learned a lot about how state fairs function.

In case you have never submitted anything to a state fair, let me fill you in on some of the details.

It is free to submit goods to the South Carolina State Fair. And anyone is allowed to do it—we had men and women, young children and seniors submit things.

Every item was judged, no matter its condition, and every item was displayed, regardless of whether or not it received a ribbon.

There were four categories of ribbons that people could win. You could either receive nothing, second place (a red ribbon), first place (a blue ribbon), or best in a category, which we call “Sweepstakes” (a huge purple ribbon).

Our state fair uses the Danish scoring system. Whereas the typical American system has exhibitors compete against each other, in the Danish system, each exhibitor is judged according to specific standards, and there isn't a limit to how many blue or red ribbons can be awarded. If there were fifty chocolate chip cookies and all



were blue ribbon quality, they could all receive a blue ribbon. And if they all tasted terrible, all would get nothing. In other words, every item was judged on its own merits and not compared to the other entries.

I was in charge of the candy admissions. I would bring the candies to the judges to eat and then hand out ribbons. Hundreds of beautiful caramels, chocolates, fudges, and hard candies covered the tables. It smelled like a bakery all day!

It's hard not to notice all the work that goes into some entries, compared to the less than appetizing ones.

One lady admitted minuscule mint candies no bigger than a postage stamp—like sad-looking white squares.

Another lady turned in these elaborate caramels, topped with chocolate and nuts.

It was always a game trying to guess who would win the Sweepstakes for the different categories.

During my time at the fair, I was struck by how many parallels I saw between it and the truths of the Biblical distinction between salvation and rewards.

FREE ADMITTANCE

Just like the fair, admission into heaven is completely and totally free (John 4:10; Eph 2:8-9; Rom 4:1-5; Rev 22:17). The Lord invites every person to believe in Him for eternal life as a free gift (John 3:16; 1 John 2:1-2; Heb 10:10). No exceptions.

NO GETTING KICKED OUT

And also like the fair, once you have entered the kingdom (i.e., once you have believed in Jesus for eternal life), you cannot be kicked out. Every single item was kept and displayed at the fair, regardless if it received a prize.

The same is true for the believer in Jesus Christ. Once a person believes in Jesus, he will be in the kingdom. No matter how he lives, even if he failed the Lord a million times, he cannot lose his salvation (John 10:28-29; John 6:35)

EVERY ITEM EVALUATED

While every single item was allowed in for free, every item was also judged to determine its prize. And the same will be true for believers.

In 2 Cor 5:10, we are told that every believer will stand before the Lord and be judged according to his or her works. That is called the Judgment Seat of Christ, or the Bema. The issue at the Bema is not salvation from hell (believers will never be judged for their eternal destiny; cf. John 5:24), but a matter of determining the believer's "prize" or reward.

What "ribbon" are you going to get?

Some believers will receive a red ribbon, some blue, and some are going to get nothing. All still have eternal life, just like none of the items were kicked out of the fair, but some will be rewarded better than others depending on how faithful they were to the Lord.

THE NO-PRIZE

In Matt 25:14-30, the Lord presented the Parable of the Talents where a man gives three servants different amounts of money. One gets five talents, another two, and the last gets one. The man goes on a journey, and when he returns, he finds the first and second servants have doubled their money, while the last buried it, earning nothing. The man rewards the first two servants equally (vv 21, 23), while the last servant receives nothing (v 28).

This parable is talking about the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Lord has given every believer different abilities and resources, and He will return one day to see what each did with those things.

Like those items judged at the fair, each believer will be judged according to his own merit and will not be compared to others. I will not be judged compared to what you did, but according to what I did with what I was given. The same goes for you.

Notice, both the first and second servants receive the same reward, based on what was given. Just like the judges at the fair, the Lord can give us all blue ribbons. There are no limitations to the rewards that the Lord can give to those who have been faithful to Him. My hope is that we all strive for the better prize (Heb 10:34).

Sadly, some entries received nothing, just like the last servant in the parable. The same will be true for unfaithful believers. As Christians, if we live a life that is displeasing to the Lord, we can't lose our salvation, but we can lose the reward that comes from faithfully following Him in this life. While the no-prize items were still displayed in the fair, they had to experience the shame that comes from being disapproved by the judges. The same can be true for the believer in Jesus Christ. While we won't lose our place in the kingdom of God, we can experience the disapproval of our

“While the no-prize items were still displayed in the fair, they had to experience the shame that comes from being disapproved by the judges. The same can be true for the believer in Jesus Christ.”

Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Tim 2:12-13, 15).

SURPRISE WINNERS

The last thing that I think the fair can teach us deals with those little white mints I told you about earlier.


During the judging, the staff looked at the entries and tried to guess who would win the Sweepstakes. I thought the fancy-schmancy caramels were going to win. But in the end, it was the tiny, unassuming mints that won. The judges said those small mints were the perfect size and balance of flavor. While you couldn't tell by looking at them, the mints were perfect inside.

I think that illustrates a Biblical truth about rewards. We cannot always tell by outward appearances how the Lord will reward us. Humanity is easily deceived by outward appearances (1 Sam 16:7). For example, it is easy to look at people in ministry and think they will be great in the kingdom to come, while a stay-at-home mom or a local plumber won't be as great.

But that is not necessarily true.

Anyone can be great in the kingdom *if* he or she is faithful to the Lord.

The Lord speaks to this issue in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matt 6:1-21, Jesus warns His audience not to do things to be seen by the world (6:1-2, 5, 16), but rather do things in private in order to be rewarded by God.

After all the chocolates and caramels the judges ate that day, the refreshing mint stood out. I think we can learn something from those small, simple candies. First, we should be careful in judging other believers because we cannot always judge a book by its cover (Rom 14:12-13). Second, in a world full of caramels, strive to be a mint. 



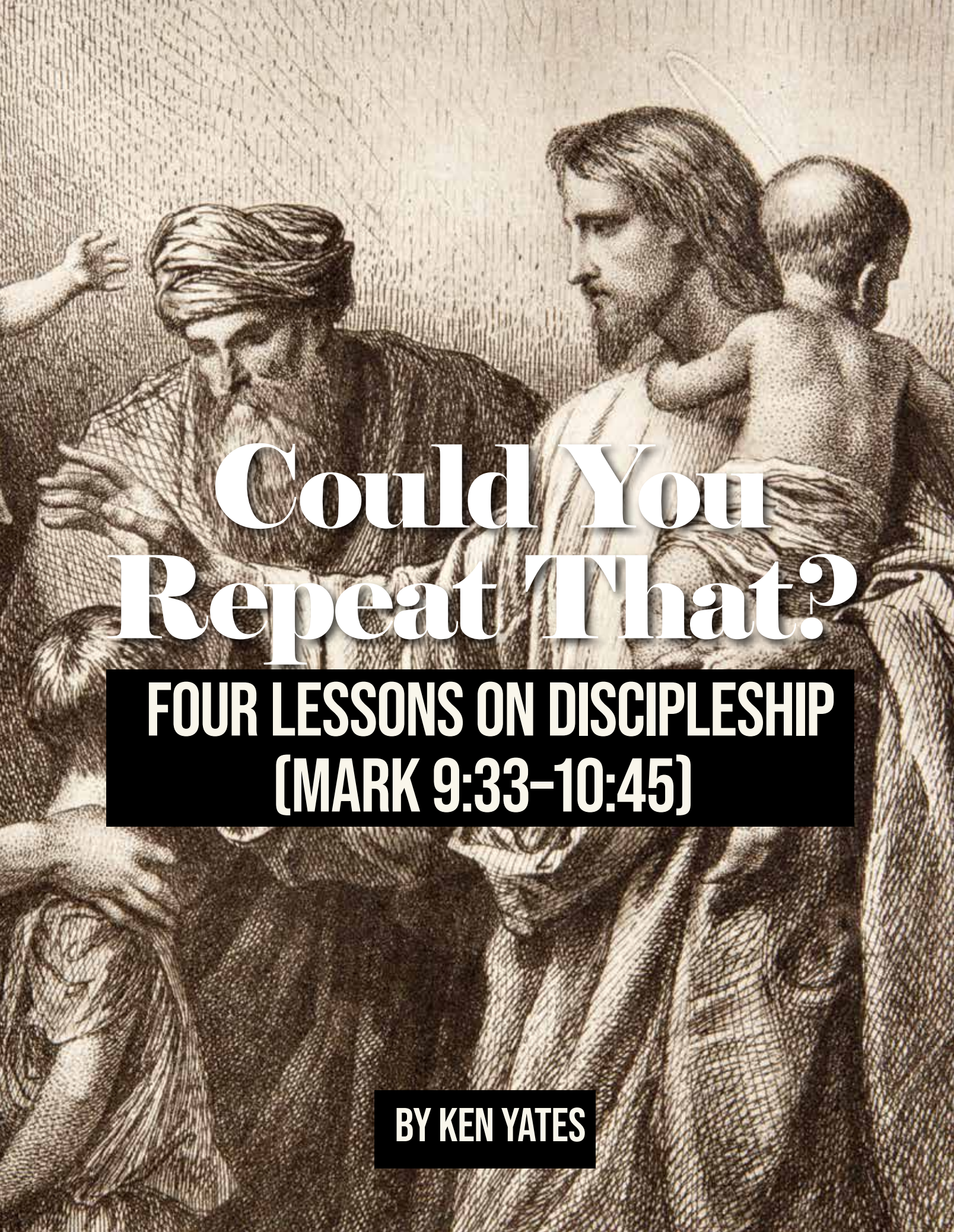
Kathryn Wright is a graduate of Luther Rice and teaches for GES both online and overseas.

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Could You Repeat That?

**FOUR LESSONS ON DISCIPLESHIP
(MARK 9:33–10:45)**

BY KEN YATES

INTRODUCTION

Oftentimes, when we attempt to learn something new, we have to do it over and over again.

We all remember when we were taught something new in math, such as our multiplication tables. We had to repeat the tables numerous times, write them out on sheets of paper, and our teachers would drill us until we learned them.

The Lord does the same thing for us. If we want to grow in discipleship and learn new things in the process, we can ask Him to teach us and He will do it. Sometimes, however, it takes more than one lesson.

I recently noticed that He does this with His disciples in the Book of Mark.

A LACK OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Mark 8–10 is often called the discipleship section of the book. The disciples, who are already believers, are depicted as not understanding what it means to follow Christ. While receiving eternal life is a free gift that can never be lost, following Christ is difficult, and believers can choose to pay the cost and follow Him, or choose not to do so. If they decide not to follow, they will lose rewards in the kingdom of God, even though they can never lose their eternal life.

One lesson the disciples needed to learn was that if they wanted to be rewarded in the kingdom and be great in the world to come, they would need to learn to have the right attitude about themselves. Fortunately for them, the Lord was a patient teacher. They didn't get it the first time, so He gave them many lessons.

THE LESSON PLAN

In school, some lessons were more difficult to learn than others. The teacher would tell us that in those cases, the class would spend more than one day on the topic. The extra time was needed to let the new concept seep into the brains of the students.

Similarly, it is evident in Mark 9:33–10:45 that the Lord has a particular topic He wants to teach the disciples. This section begins with them arguing about which of them will be greatest in

the kingdom (9:34) and ends with that same idea (10:37). It begins with the concept of who will be “first” in the kingdom (9:35) and concludes with that as well (10:31). The Lord tells them the answer to what they want to know at the beginning and end of the section: if they're going to be great in the kingdom, they must be servants of others (9:35; 10:44–45). That is a concept they don't get, and it will take four lessons to learn what the Lord wants them to see.

THE FIRST LESSON

The first lesson concerns a man that is casting out demons (9:38). The disciples want him to stop doing that because the man was not one of them. They saw themselves as privileged disciples and resented that somebody outside of their group would dare to operate without their approval. In their minds, they were superior to that man—he was not on their level.

The Lord had to rebuke the disciples for this way of thinking. Instead, they should encourage this man in his labor for the Lord. Their attitude towards him ran the risk of doing the exact opposite and actually discourage him from following the Lord. Here was a novel idea for them. They should serve this guy and actually help him.

THE SECOND LESSON

For their second lesson, Jesus used a different illustration to teach the same point.

Based upon their culture, these twelve men saw themselves as superior to women. For example, in Jewish society, a man could divorce his wife, and the only issue was whether he needed a reason to divorce her. On the other hand, a woman could not divorce her husband, no matter the circumstances.

By contrast, the Lord teaches them that it was never God's design for divorce to take place, but it is a necessary evil due to the hardness of men's hearts (10:5).

So here is the lesson for the disciples: they looked at the issue of divorce and tried to determine what would be best *for themselves*, but did not ask what was best for the woman or ask what God wanted. Contrary to their tradition,

the Lord places the wife on equal footing with the husband.

This was a hard lesson for these men. Was the Lord really telling them to be concerned about women who they wrongly supposed were obviously inferior to their husbands?

Once again, we see that the disciples couldn't grasp the concept. They had to go off with the Lord and get some more instruction on this novel idea (10:10).

THE THIRD LESSON

For His third lesson on this topic, the Lord used children. When these little ones approached Him to be blessed, the disciples drove them off, thinking that children were a nuisance. In their way of thinking, the disciples were too important to be bothered by kids. And the Messiah was certainly too busy to be bothered by such unimportant people, too.

Jesus rebuked the disciples for their attitudes toward children (10:13). As with the exorcist and the wives, these twelve men had an inflated opinion of themselves and despised others they considered beneath them.

THE FOURTH LESSON

The fourth and final lesson comes to the disciples in the form of a rich man. He approaches the Lord, and the disciples are glad that this man is in their presence. After all, he is rich and powerful, and they can receive him as an equal. They saw him as an important person (which is how they saw themselves).

To their surprise, the Lord had to correct them once again. He taught them that the rich and powerful of this world are often not those who will be rich and powerful in the kingdom. In fact, many such people will not even be in the kingdom (10:23). That idea was astonishing to the disciples (10:26). They thought the poor in this world would be poor in the world to come as well.

THE BIG TAKEAWAY

All four of these lessons have something in common. The disciples thought those outside


their group—including children, women, and the poor—were not significant enough to waste time on. The disciples also had an elevated view of their own importance. They wanted to follow the Lord, but they needed to change their mindset.

In each of these four situations, Jesus tells the disciples that instead of thinking they were better than others, they should look at all these people as more important than themselves and should seek to serve others. What a radical way of thinking! But Jesus makes it clear that it is that kind of attitude that will make a believer great in the kingdom.

CONCLUSION

The word *disciple* means *a student*. The Twelve desired to learn from the Lord, but they had much to learn. Fortunately for them, and for us, the Lord is patient when He teaches His children what they need to know. If we want to learn, He will keep teaching us until we get it.

Here, in the Gospel of Mark, we are told the Lord taught four classes on the same subject. The good news is that these men eventually understood the lesson. Instead of thinking about how great they were, they learned that they ought to look out for others. John, one of the Twelve, would later write that believers ought to be so concerned for others that they should lay down their lives for them (1 John 3:16). That is the epitome of what being a servant is all about.

All of us have things we need to learn. We are even unaware of some areas where we need instruction. We should ask the Lord to teach us. Perhaps we should add: "Lord, when I don't get it the first time, can you repeat it until I do?" 



*Ken Yates speaks for GES all around the world. His latest book is *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* and he is currently working on a commentary on Mark's Gospel.*

The Mailbag

By You

Thank you for your clear teaching in the recent podcast series on *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words*. I shared the link with some friends and hope that they will listen.” ~Oswego, IL

“I just wanted to let you know that I think your YouTube video clips are great! I appreciate the fact that they are short and that I don’t have to listen to an elaborate opening music score along with some oh-so-clever graphics.” ~Shreveport, LA. [Ed. We’re not smart enough to make elaborate openings or graphics!]

“Bob and Shawn, so great to have you both speaking at Bayside! We have been blessed with the podcasts. Please keep up the good works.” ~Tampa, FL

“I always learn from your magazine. Learning more about our Lord and how to give Him honor and glory as I live out this life is eagerly desired. Coming from a ‘works salvation’ background, I can testify that grace alone made me a new creation. Once I believed in Jesus, I knew the things I had done up to that point were wrong.” ~Smithville, MO

“I recently decided to start at the end of the blog archives on faithalone.org and move to current date...I have to say, one of them really spoke to me about the ‘Desert Father,’ Sisoës. Particularly, the last few paragraphs really frame the folly of Lordship Salvation...This ties into another article that I think Shawn wrote about the patheticness of ‘Lenient Lordship.’ Anyways, I love you guys, and thank you.” ~Email

“Keep spreading the gospel! Y’all are awesome!” ~Anchorage, AK




“Thank the Lord for your ministry. And thanks for the clear and simple gospel message.” ~Tyler, TX

“Thank you for all the wonderful blogs—really inspiring!” ~Email

“Thank you for your sound Bible teaching. May the Lord richly bless you for your faithfulness.” ~Oceanside, CA

“I’m enjoying your radio program. Thank you!” ~Seoul, South Korea

“In 1992, the Lord miraculously placed Zane Hodges’s *The Gospel Under Siege* in my hands. At the time I was an associate pastor in a very legalistic denomination and a church even more so. I read this book secretly, away from the senior pastor and elders of the church because I knew they would not approve. It would definitely cost me my job if discovered. Over the course of about a year, I made a complete conversion from the Arminian view to Free Grace.” ~Hebron, KY

“I am eternally grateful for all that God is doing through GES and I pray He allows the ministry to continue making an impact for His kingdom!” ~Email 

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Free Grace Gives Better Reasons to Obey God

By Shawn Willson

A COMMON ACCUSATION

Someone recently shared with me an article by R.C. Sproul entitled, “What Is Saving Faith?” (www.ligonier.org/blog/what-saving-faith/). In Sproul’s definition, he made the following statement defining the Free Grace view of saving faith from his perspective: “for antinomians, faith minus works equals justification.”

The Free Grace community would proudly proclaim Sproul’s math equation as the Biblical message of salvation. Faith with no works added does equal justification—as long as that faith is set on the object of Jesus Christ and His promise for eternal life.

But the question for our detractors, such as the late R.C. Sproul, is this: Does this make the Free Grace community out to be antinomians, encouraging lawlessness or unrighteous living?

The entire Free Grace community would loudly answer, “No!”

Whenever we are charged with being antinomians, we answer with the Apostle Paul’s words in Romans:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (Rom 6:1-2).

We are horrified that anyone would see Christ’s grace as a motivation to remain in sin. Instead, we call the church to walk in the new life given to her by our Savior Jesus Christ.

Free Grace people do not tolerate sin more so than the Reformed. However, we have a different motivation to put off sin and to follow God’s commandments. While Free Grace proponents do not require any works to obtain justification in Christ, we do preach other significant drivers to motivate the Christian to do good works.

I want you to spend a few minutes with me tracking the Biblical reasons to turn from sin and turn to holiness.

LOVE FOR GOD

The most obvious and repeated reason to obey God is out of love.

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength (Deut 6:5).

One of the last lessons given by Jesus to His disciples was the significance of love as an inspiration of obedience (John 14:15-24). Jesus didn’t want His followers to obey Him out of fear and guilt, but out of love and gratitude. Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). So we should never obey out of fear over a possible removal from the family of God (which is impossible). We should serve in loving confidence of our security in God’s family.

LOVE FOR OTHERS

The second reason is due to the second greatest commandment—we are to love others (Matt 22:36-40).

The most loving action you can do for any person is to obey the will of God. Pride, selfishness, greed, and lust all harm those who are closest to us. The adult child who is stuck in self-destructive behaviors causes as much if not more damage to his parents as to himself. We clear sin out of our lives to show love to others.



One of the most beautiful chapters in all of the Bible is 1 Corinthians 13, which proclaims the importance of our love for others.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SPIRIT

Another reason is to grow in fellowship with the Spirit.

At the moment of belief, the redeemed are sealed by the Holy Spirit. Your body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the Christian should take great care in guarding and nurturing his relationship with the Spirit.

Paul calls on us not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30). One of your highest concerns should be not to insult or offend the Holy Spirit who always indwells you for both God's glory and your good.

Paul also warns us not to quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), which pictures the extinguishing or suppression of the work of the Spirit in us.

We walk in holiness because we want to grow and develop our walk with the Spirit and do not want to insult and suppress His work in and through us.

ETERNAL REWARDS

Living for eternal rewards should not be an afterthought in the life of the believer. Jesus commands us to lay up treasures in heaven (Matt

6:16-20). We are to set our minds on Christ in glory and not the things of this world.

Jesus has given us all talents and gifts, but He desires us to take those gifts and use them to multiply His work on earth as we await His return.

That focus on eternity should have a tremendous impact on how we follow God's Word in obedience today.

GOSPEL WITNESS

Jesus was the light of the world (John 8:12). All those who follow Jesus will not walk in darkness but in light (1 John 1:7). Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Jesus has ascended into heaven, so at this time, *we* are the light of the world (Matt 5:14). If we hide ourselves under the sins of the flesh and out of fear of men, how will the world be able to see our light that reflects the true light of Jesus Christ? The world must hear to believe, but how will they believe if we do not go to them with the truth of the gospel?

We obey God's calling to bring the love of the gospel to the world.

CHRISTIAN DEVELOPMENT

Jesus not only desired us to preach the good news of salvation by faith alone, but His final

command was to go and make disciples out of the nations (Matt 28:18-20). A disciple is simply a learner, someone who is active in learning from someone who is spiritually mature. How can we hope to make disciples of others if we are not an active disciple of the things of God in our own lives?

The disciples multiplied their faith in Christ and their faithfulness to His Word during the first generation of the church, because they spent three years at the feet of the Master. Do you want to make disciples of others? Then you must first be a disciple yourself in obedience to the truth.

I could go on with many more reasons to obey God—from your family’s health, to your own spiritual health, to the benefit for your community—but we would be wise to take a moment to list the wrong reasons to obey God.

UNBIBLICAL REASONS TO OBEY

I don’t think anyone should need much of an argument as to why these are not godly reasons for obedience. Just ask yourself, “Would I want my children, spouse, or friends to follow or love me for these reasons?” If sinners like us wouldn’t use these motivations, why would God?

For example, don’t obey God to prove your place in His family. God doesn’t make obedience the standard for your place in His family in the same way you don’t do that to your kids.


Don’t obey God out of guilt over past sins. Your sins are forgiven and removed by the blood of Christ. Serve out of love and not to cover guilt that has been washed clean by Christ.

Don’t obey God to earn His love. If God’s love for you was based on your obedience, He would only be a deity trying to get something from you.

Don’t obey God to gain assurance. Your assurance should come from the promises and faithfulness of Jesus Christ and not your feeble efforts.

Finally, don’t obey God to manipulate Him to follow your desires. God is not a vending machine where we give Him \$100 in the offering plate and can expect to get \$200 back.

CONCLUSION

Free Grace Christians loudly proclaim countless benefits for obedience to Christ. The key to our benefits for obedience in comparison to the Reformed or Lordship community is the spiritual and mental health these benefits bring. We do not call for obedience out of fear, guilt, shame, or a need to secure our place in the family of God. We obey out of love, hope, and a position of confidence. Don’t allow someone to accuse you of lawlessness or of being a promoter of sin. Proclaim the importance of obedience out of a place of confidence and not fear. 



Shawn Willson is the pastor of Grace Community Bible Church and the author of Reset Your Life. He lives in River Ridge, LA, with his lovely wife Jennifer and their four loud children. Check out his Rev Reads channel on YouTube.

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The Overcomer

By Zane Hodges

**“And he who overcomes, and keeps
My works to the end, to him I will give
power over the nations—‘He shall rule
them with a rod of iron; They shall
be dashed to pieces like the potter’s
vessels’—as I also have receive from My
Father” (Rev 2:26-27).**

The overcomer,” says Jesus, “will rule the nations like I rule them.”

In Rev 3:21, Jesus said, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” In other words, “I am My Father’s partner in His throne, and the victorious Christian will be My partner in Mine.” It was Paul who said, “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12).

Dear Christian friend, if you are Christian by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will always possess eternal life. You can be absolutely sure of living forever with Jesus Christ. But partnership with the King is something that you have to hold on to. For we have become partakers, partners, and companions of Christ, *if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm to the end.*

There is a very lovely story about a young woman in the state of Maine who was in love with a sailor. One night, as she and her boyfriend were together, and he was preparing to sail away the next day, she made a promise to him. She promised that every night while he was gone, until he returned, she would put a light in her window. The next morning, her sailor friend got on board his ship and sailed away and was never heard from again.


Do you know what that woman did? She put a light in her window every night for fifty years until the day she died. That is loyalty. That is commitment.

My Christian friend, our Lord Jesus Christ has left the world, but it is only temporary. His Father has said to Him, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Heb 1:13). Someday, He is coming back to set up His kingdom and triumph over His enemies. His partners in that day will be those who have been faithful to Him and who have kept His works to the end. To put it very simply, the partners of the King are those who have kept their lights burning.

The songwriter was right when he wrote:

Give me oil in my lamp. Keep me burning.
Give me oil in my lamp. I pray.
Give me oil in my lamp. Keep me burning.
Keep me burning 'till the break of day.

Christian friend, if your light is always burning for Jesus Christ, you will always be a partner of the King.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Heb 12:28). 



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



Where All Minister

(Ephesians 4:11-12)

By Shawn Lazar

Free Grace Theology is exciting. It clarifies the freeness of salvation, and in doing that, it clarifies other areas of theology, too. The Free Grace movement involves a reformation of more than one area of theology.

For example, did you know that the NT places spiritual growth squarely within the *ekklēsia*—the believing community? As Paul said:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12).

According to Paul, who does the work of ministry?

The saints.

That means you.

Jesus gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the saints to do ministry. That means you cannot grow alone. Other people in the church must equip you.

And then, according to Paul, how is the body of Christ edified?

The body grows as the saints do the ministry for which they are equipped. Everyone has his or her part to play in the local church—everyone is called to minister. That is not a new insight but has been noted by many theologians and

scholars. For example, Emil Brunner, in his study of the NT church, said:

One thing is supremely important: that *all* minister, and that nowhere is to be perceived a separation or even merely a distinction made between those who do and those who do not minister, between the active and the passive members of the body, between those who give and those who receive. There exists in the *Ecclesia* a universal duty and right of service, a universal readiness to serve and at the same time the greatest possible differentiation of functions (Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, p. 50).

If you are not equipped or allowed to do ministry, you will not grow, and the body will not be edified.

How do grace people grow spiritually?

Together. 



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. He is married to Abby.

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