

# GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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## FULL AND MEANINGFUL LIVES? (2 PETER 3:9)



**PLUS** GOD DOESN'T FORGET / WHEN YOUR LOVE GROWS COLD / NOAH: SAVED BY FAITH AND BY WORKS  
NOT UNDER LAW / BODY ARMOR / QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS / EASY SALVATION / **AND MORE!**

## CONTENTS

- 3 From the Editor
- 4 Full and Meaningful Lives?  
(2 Peter 3:9)  
BY BOB WILKIN
- 8 God Doesn't Forget (Hebrews 6:10)  
BY KEN YATES
- 10 Romans 14: A Concise Commentary  
BY ZANE HODGES
- 16 When Your Love Grows Cold  
BY PHILIPPE STERLING
- 20 Are You Predestined? (Ephesians 1-3)  
BY CAL STAGGERS
- 22 *Partners in Grace*
- 24 You Are Not Under Law (Romans 6:14)  
BY SHAWN LAZAR
- 25 The Bookstore
- 34 Body Armor (Eph 6:10-18)  
BY KATHRYN WRIGHT
- 37 The Mailbag  
BY YOU
- 38 Q & A  
BY ANTHONY BADGER



- 42 Noah: Saved by Faith *and* by Works  
BY SHAWN WILLSON

- 46 When People Get Angry at Easy  
Salvation (2 Kings 5:1-19)  
BY SHAWN LAZAR

## GRACE IN FOCUS

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FROM THE EDITOR

**M**asks. Mandates. Mayhem. Marginalization. Malcontent. Managing. Marveling. Mania. Madness.

2021 was the second year in a row with major disruptions in our lives due to Covid-19 and increased tensions in our country.

Sharon and I came down with Covid in May. She had very mild symptoms, while I was very sick for 7 to 10 days. Bethany had Covid last year as well. So did many Free Grace pastors.

Since we know we have everlasting life, we are not as concerned about Covid as others who have no certainty of their eternal destiny.

The impact on GES has mainly been the postponement of some of our international ministry. Our conference in Costa Rica was postponed. And Ken and Kathryn had one of their trips to Kenya delayed several months.

Thank you all for your prayers and your support. We have been able to expand our ministries as a result.

We started translating our blogs into several new languages (Filipino and Russian) this past year, and an Italian blog should start this January. Some of our booklets were translated into German and Polish as well.

Shawn and I plan to start filming weekly short videos, too.

*Grace in Focus* magazine is designed to aid local churches in evangelizing and discipling their people. Regular readers of *GIF* report to us that they are encouraged, edified, and maturing in the



## Mask Mandates and Gospel Mandates

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

faith as a result of interacting with our articles. That is our aim.

The motto of Dallas Seminary when I was there was *Preach the Word* (2 Tim 4:2). That sums up the mission of our magazine: to faithfully proclaim God's Word so that the readers grow in grace. **GIF**

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Rob Wilkin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.









COROT, THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM (1843-1857)

# Full and Meaningful Lives? (2 Peter 3:9)

By Bob Wilkin

Peter wrote, “The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).

But what did he mean?

## CONNECTED TO THE SECOND COMING

The first nine verses of the last chapter of 2 Peter deal with Christ’s promise to come again and set up His kingdom. The coming false teachers will actually deny that Jesus is coming again. Hodges writes, “For these teachers there is no such thing as the Second Advent” (Hodges, 2 Peter, p. 89).

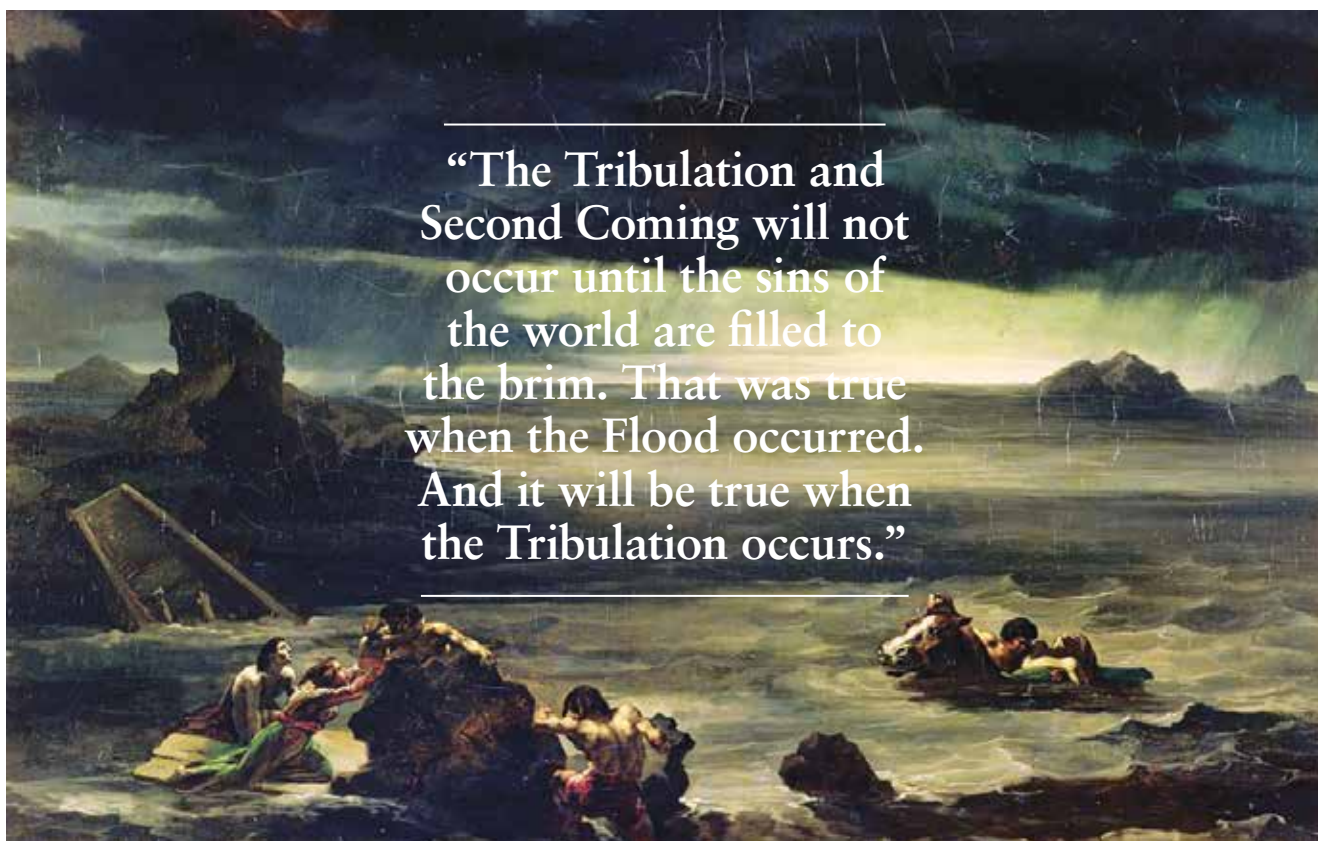
Whatever 2 Pet 3:9 means, it is closely related to the Lord’s Second Coming.

There is so much confusion about this simple statement in 2 Pet 3:9.

First, the promise in view in 2 Pet 3:9, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise,” is not the promise of everlasting life to the believer. It is the promise of the Second Coming of Christ (“Where is the promise of His coming,” 2 Pet 3:4). This is not an evangelistic context.

Second, the word *perish* in v 9 is explained in v 6. These are the only two uses of the word *perish* in 2 Peter. Perishing here is *physical death*, whether of believers or unbelievers. In the Tribulation, billions will die prematurely. God doesn’t want billions of premature deaths.

Third, repentance is the antidote to premature death, not to eternal condemnation. Peter spoke of the need *to believe in Jesus* to have everlasting



THEODORE GERICAULT, SCENE OF THE DELUGE, 1818-20

“The Tribulation and Second Coming will not occur until the sins of the world are filled to the brim. That was true when the Flood occurred. And it will be true when the Tribulation occurs.”

life in Acts 10:43-48; 15:7-11; and 1 Pet 1:23. The Lord on many occasions spoke of the need to repent in order to extend your physical life (Matt 12:41; Luke 13:3, 5; Luke 15:1-32).

Fourth, repentance is turning from one’s sinful ways. Compare Matt 12:41 and Jonah 3:10. Peter is speaking of global repentance, worldwide repentance. His point is that the Tribulation and Second Coming will not occur until the sins of the world are filled to the brim. That was true when the Flood occurred. And it will be true when the Tribulation occurs. Compare 2 Pet 3:10-12.


## WHEN JUDGMENT COMES

It is a Biblical principle that judgment doesn’t fall on a nation or the whole world until its sins are full. Remember the Flood? Remember Sodom and Gomorrah? Remember the Canaanites? Remember Jonah and the Ninevites? Remember the kings of Israel who humbled themselves and repented?

Therefore, the point of 2 Pet 3:9b is that the Rapture and Tribulation will not come until the sins of the world *are filled to the brim*. As long as

enough people repent worldwide, the seven-year Tribulation period and its billions of deaths will be delayed.

Make sure your worldview is that God wants everyone to have full and meaningful lives. He never wanted death in the first place. He is not looking forward to the billions of deaths during the Tribulation. He is delighted the longer the world forestalls that terrible time.

God is good and He wants what is best for the children of Adam and Eve. 



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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# God Doesn't Forget (Hebrews 6:10)

By Ken Yates

**R**alph Puckett was an acquaintance of mine. Nobody would call us best friends, but we did share some coffee over breakfast from time to time. He would also stop by my office on occasion to talk about Army stuff. He was a retired Army officer, and I was a chaplain.

He was about 30 years older than I was, so he served in a different era. I knew that he had fought in the Korean War, and that was of interest to me because I had lived in Korea for two years when I was a boy. One day, another soldier told me that Ralph had done some remarkable things in that war.

## **A HUMAN TARGET**

In November 1950, Ralph had led a group of men on a dangerous mission on top of a mountain. The enemy was all around, and in order to see where they were, he deliberately made himself visible so that they would fire at him. This would enable his men to know where to fire back. For two days the far numerically superior enemy tried to overrun their position. For the good of his men, Ralph continually exposed himself to the gunfire of the North Koreans, directing machine gun fire at himself. He was wounded twice, the second time so severely he could not move. He

then ordered his men to leave him behind and withdraw to safety. He did not want them to be slowed down by carrying him. He feared that would place his men in greater danger. The men did withdraw but disobeyed his order and dragged him down the mountain with them.

Clearly, Ralph had saved the lives of many of his men. When I first heard that story, I didn't understand why his exploits so many years ago were not more well known. For such feats of bravery, the Army has a medal, called the Medal of Honor. It comes with many honors for the recipient, and I always felt it was an injustice that Ralph was not awarded one.

## **FINALLY RECOGNIZED**

Earlier this year, about 20 years after first meeting Ralph, I was watching the news on TV, and they showed an old man receiving the Medal of Honor from President Biden. It was Ralph Puckett. He was 94 years old and had to use a walker to come up to the stage and have the medal hung around his neck. Over 70 years after saving the lives of his men, the nation was giving him the honor he deserved.

This was the right thing to do, but we are left asking why it took so long. Maybe it was because





his superiors in Korea did not put in the proper paperwork. Maybe somebody back then was jealous of what he did and kept him from receiving such recognition. I did not know Ralph well enough to ask him if he was bitter for not receiving the medal he deserved back in 1950. I assume that after 70 years he simply felt that the Army had forgotten what he had done on that hill in Korea so many years ago.

## THE LORD REMEMBERS

The Bible tells us that believers are soldiers for the Lord. He asks us to do things in service to Him. He promises that He will honor those who faithfully serve Him. Often times, in the NT, these honors are pictured as crowns.


I think it is easy for the believer to fall into the trap of thinking he or she is like Ralph Puckett. Maybe the believer feels that he will never be honored for what he does for the Lord. Such labors will be forgotten. With the passage of time, often involving decades, people certainly forget or believe that such work does not merit anything special. Subconsciously, there may even be a temptation to feel that Christ has more important things to concern Himself with than what we do with our lives.

Of course, that is not the case. The author of Hebrews tells his readers that, “God is not unjust

to forget your work” that they had done for Him (Heb 6:10). The whole Book of Hebrews is about rewards and honors in the future kingdom of God. These readers had suffered for the Lord, and they are reminded that God has not forgotten.

The paperwork has not been lost. Any petty jealousies will not prevent the Lord from rewarding His children.

I was so glad to see Ralph getting honored by the President. Somebody remembered what he had done and tried to correct the wrong done to him. But it was also a little sad. Harry Truman should have been the one who gave him his medal. At 94 years old, he does not have much time to enjoy the honor given to him. He also lost 70 years of being recognized for what he did.

How wonderful to realize that it won’t be that way for believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Not only does the Lord remember, but the rewards given on that day will be enjoyed forever. 



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





123RF



# Romans 14

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

By Zane Hodges

### IN LOVING OTHERS (14:1-26)

**14:1.** Paul was evidently aware that disputes on certain matters existed in the Roman congregations. His fundamental principle was mutual acceptance (15:7) and this acceptance must include **the one who is weak in the faith**. This signifies a person who does not fully grasp his personal freedom in Christ regarding mere earthly things.

The stronger brother was to accept the weaker brother, **but not to engage in disputes about opinions**. The word translated *opinions* refers to what we might call *doubtful things*. These are matters neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture. Paul is not talking about basic morality. Paul here refers to conclusions drawn from a person's own thought processes, rather than those drawn directly from God's Word.

**14:2-3.** The problem of differing opinions about foods is the first question that Paul brings forward here. It is possible that the **weak** included ascetics from pagan backgrounds. Paul's words are no doubt deliberately broad to include whatever food issues might exist in the Roman congregations.

Paul's words imply that some of the believers at Rome were vegetarians by conviction. The people Paul has in mind ate vegetables, in contrast to those who felt free to **eat everything**.

If the **person who eats** looks down on the **person who doesn't eat**, he has not accepted him in a truly Christian manner. But conversely, **the person who doesn't eat** should not adopt a judgmental attitude toward **the person who eats**.

The one *who doesn't eat* meat must not refuse to accept someone whom **God has accepted**. Even if he does not hold to one's own personal opinions about what can or cannot be eaten, *God has accepted him*. To refuse acceptance to someone whom *God has accepted* amounts to putting oneself above God.

**14:4.** No one has the right to pass judgment on someone else's **house servant** because only his master has that right. It is arrogant overreaching if a believer imagines he can pass judgment on a fellow Christian who, in fact, is God's *house servant*.

Thus, to **judge** a fellow Christian was to usurp the prerogative of the divine Lord of the Christian household.

The statement **because God has power to enable him to stand** does not sound like a mere question of approval or disapproval. Rather it sounds like an exercise of divine strength. God will give strength to the strong believer not to fall into sin if he is relying on God's strength.

14:5. The issue of observing certain days as special would have involved questions related to the feast days of the Jewish religious calendar, or even pagan traditions. The important question for Paul was not whether such scruples about special days were correct or not. The important thing was that everyone should **be fully assured in his own mind**. The observance of these rituals could easily breed a sense of division in a congregation. Paul will not forbid the observance itself, but he wants believers to undertake them only out of deep conviction.

14:6. If the conviction is deeply held, the observance of certain days, or the non-observance of certain days, will be a matter of conscience before the Lord. In the case of special days, Paul points out that whether **the person...esteems the day** or not, it is with the Lord in view. This no doubt means that the one who observes the day observes it with a desire to please the Lord, while the non-observer feels his relationship to God does not require this observance.

In the case of foods, the Christian who does not eat meat and the one who does **give thanks to God** for what each eats.

14:7-8. No Christian lives in isolation as if his experience concerned only himself. On the contrary, the Christian's experience is inextricably related to the Lord to whom the Christian belongs. If all of this is taken seriously, it is manifest that **whether we live or die, we are the Lord's**.

Paul is not speaking here of a choice we make (living or dying), but instead he is speaking of the inescapable reality that *we are the Lord's* and that we cannot avoid our connection with Him in whatever we do or in whatever happens to us. This leads quite naturally to a discussion of the Judgment Seat of Christ.

14:9. Christ both died as well as rose and lived to be Lord of all, whether they are dead or living. At first glance, the phrase *rose and lived* is unexpected. However, in the Greco-Roman world a belief in immortality beyond the grave was unexceptional, but a belief in *physical resurrection* certainly was exceptional. Here the addition of the words *and lived* makes clear that a return to physical life is involved. The word *rose* cannot in

that case be referred to some "spiritual" emergence from the experience of death.

14:10. Since Jesus is Lord of the dead and of the living, what business do believers have judging a Christian **brother**, or alternatively, scorning a Christian **brother**? The lord of a servant is the only person qualified to **judge** that servant. Since Jesus is Lord by virtue of both His death and resurrection, He alone has that prerogative regarding our Christian brothers and sisters. This is all the more true since all believers **must...appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ** to be judged.

14:11. Paul now gives Scriptural proof for his statement that all believers must give an accounting to God (Isa 45:23). This inspired pronouncement asserts that all humanity must someday **bow the knee and confess to God**.

It must be pointed out that the Isaiah prophecy is broad and general and leaves room for the differing situations we encounter in the NT. The unregenerate dead will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment after the Millennium (Rev 20:5, 11-15). Believers will stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ when He returns to inaugurate His kingdom (i.e., before the Millennium).

14:12. Individual believers should get out of the business of either judging or scorning their fellow servants (v 10), since those we judge or scorn, as well as ourselves, are subject to an accounting to be rendered **to God** (v 10). Of course, the issue here is not eternal destiny. All believers are secure (John 5:24; 11:26; Rom 4:4-8; 5:1; 6:23; 8:16-17). The issue is eternal rewards (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10; 2 Tim 2:12; 4:6-8). Any serious consideration of this coming time of **accounting of oneself to God** should cause us to focus on our own coming judgment, rather than on the presumed failures of other Christians.

14:13. The Roman Christians should **no longer judge one another**. Instead, they should pass judgment on their own behavior.

They should ask if their own conduct is harmful to their Christian brother. It should not **create an impediment** which might cause a brother to trip or fall. Neither should our conduct produce a **snare** in which another is caught. Seriousness in the light of our future accounting before God



should lead to careful consideration of how our behavior affects others.

**14:14.** The statement that there is **nothing unclean of itself** refers to what may be called the mundane, or ordinary, things of human life. Violations of God's moral law are not in view.

Thus, **to a person who considers something to be unclean**, it is actually **unclean** for **that person**. In other words, if such a person does not share Paul's knowledge and conviction (see above), his freedom *in the Lord Jesus* is inhibited.

**14:15.** But where such inhibitions exist, the strong Christian must be fully sensitive to them. **If because of your food your brother is grieved, then you are no longer walking in love**, but are living selfishly.

The cost of such unloving conduct could be that he would **ruin that person**, who is in fact an individual for whom Christ died. This refers to temporal loss or destruction.

*Ruin* is the opposite of edification (cf. 14:19-20). If a believer is led to violate his own conscience, he has sinned against God. The stronger brother must take care not to bring this destruction about.

**14:16.** When Paul says **so do not let your good activity be defamed**, he is addressing the stronger brother about the eating of foods that the weaker brother considers inappropriate to eat, but the stronger brother enjoys.

If the stronger brother bulls ahead when in the presence of the weaker brother and eats foods which he considers good, but which the weaker brother considers bad, then he will injure his brother and that brother will likely be moved to speak against what he has done.

**14:17.** Paul's point here is that **the kingdom of God is not food and drink** in the sense that our

freedom to eat or drink is not what will be the defining characteristics of the coming kingdom. Rather, that which defines the kingdom to come is **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**. Whenever we as believers today experience *righteousness, peace, and joy*, we are getting a foretaste of what our experience will be forever, except to a much greater degree.

**14:18.** The believer **who serves Christ**, rather than his belly and his own private desires, **in these things**, that is, in "righteousness, peace, and joy," is well **pleasing to God**. This will be seen at the Bema (14:10-12).

In addition, such a believer is **approved by men**.

Paul is talking about fellow believers from within one's own assembly. They approve of such service of Christ. The world does not.

**14:19-20.** Mature believers **pursue the things** that produce **peace and the things** that produce **edification for each other**. That means a giving up of one's liberties if the exercise thereof would

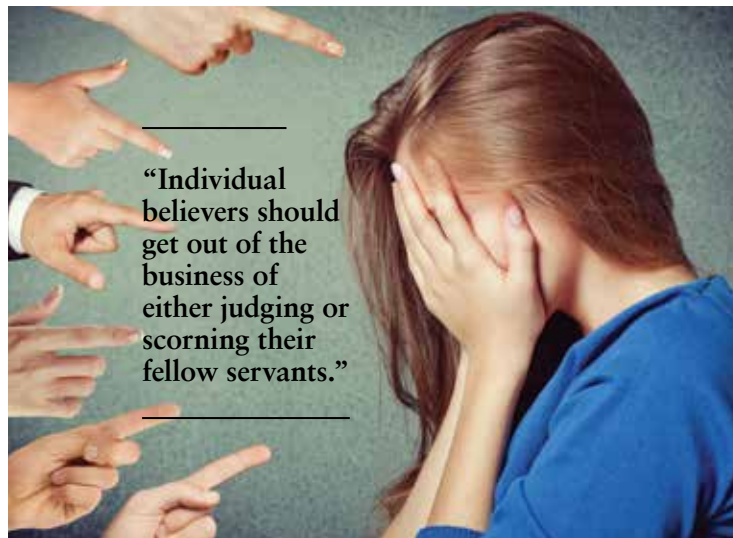
harm one's fellow believers.

The stronger brother knows that there are no longer any unclean foods. Thus, he might well reason that he will not give up foods that God has given him to enjoy simply because of the sensitivities of an ignorant fellow believer.

Yet this is not a proper way to treat the weaker brother. The stronger brother is the one who should freely give up his rights so as not to hurt his fellow brother.

**14:21.** It is **good not to eat meat nor to drink wine nor to do anything** that causes one's **brother to run into an impediment or to be ensnared or to be made weak**.

Edification of our fellow believers (vv 19-20) is the goal in all we do, including eating and drinking. Paul is concerned here with what we eat and



drink *when in the presence of other believers* and not what one does in private.

**14:22-23.** The question for the weaker brother is to the point: **Do you have faith?** The intended answer is *yes* and is in regard to the eating or non-eating of meat.

Paul's command is to **have this faith by yourself** [i.e., personally and privately] **before God.**

The blessing here is to **the one who does not condemn himself** for the thing **which he treats as acceptable.** It is better not to eat certain foods or to drink certain drinks if the result of that eating or drinking is that one has violated his own conscience.

**And whatever is not by faith is sin** means that the way in which we live the Christian life is by living out what God has impressed upon us from His Word. If our actions are not *by faith*, that is, if our actions contradict what we believe the Scriptures teach, then they are sinful actions, not godly ones.

**14:24-26.** At this point most Greek manuscripts of Romans contain three verses which the Critical Text reserves till the last three verses of the entire book (i.e., Rom 16:25-27). The Critical Text reading not only is not supported by the external evidence, but it is unlikely contextually that Paul would add a benediction after he gave his famous closing words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rom 16:24). In none of his other epistles where this saying occurs with an *Amen* are any other words given after it (i.e., Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; Phlm 25).

This is a fitting conclusion to chap. 14 and Paul's admonition to show love to the weak.


Treating other believers in a loving manner requires an ongoing focus on God, **the One who is able to establish us.** Believers are not guaranteed that they will please God. But they are guaranteed that God *is able* to cause them to please Him.

Paul's readers knew this to be true based on Paul's gospel, **the message** [or preaching] of Jesus

Christ, and based on **the mystery.** When Paul uses the expression *the mystery*, he is referring to something not previously known. Specifically, he is talking about the church, the Body of Christ, made up of Jews and Gentiles united in one body, which was **kept silent through past eternal times.**

The church age is a fulfillment of the **prophetic Scriptures.** Though without the further revelation of the NT one would not understand the OT texts which prophesy about the church, such texts reveal that Gentiles would one day have a prominent God-honoring role in God's household. The church is designed to be a God-honoring body and to do so there must be unity and love.

The **obedience** which God desires to flow from faith in Christ includes, indeed is epitomized by, stronger brothers showing loving deference to weaker brothers. This involves areas such as eating, drinking, and the observance of special days.

**To the eternal God...who alone is wise be glory forever through Jesus Christ.** Paul here sees ahead to the new earth. *Forever* we will bring *glory* to God *through Jesus Christ. Amen.* 

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**"The way in which we live the Christian life is by living out what God has impressed upon us from His Word."**

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



# GRACE FOCUS

Would people in your church, small group, or Bible study benefit from a free subscription to *Grace in Focus*? Then sign them up!


# When Your Love Grows Cold

By Philippe Sterling

**W**hat do you look for in a church? Some people look for a dynamic, young, handsome pastor with a beautiful wife who raises cute children, sings wonderfully, and leads a lively Bible class for the women of the church. Others look for a church with a lavish sanctuary, a first-rate orchestra, or a contemporary worship band. None of those things are necessarily bad, but are they important?

What does Jesus look for in a church?

The Lord who “builds” the church has spoken concerning what He wants and doesn’t want in His churches. The theme of Revelation chaps. 2–3 is “Jesus speaks to His churches.”

Chapter 1 of the Book of Revelation ended with Christ as the Lord of the church moving in the midst of the seven golden lampstands which represented the seven churches in the Roman province called Asia, the western part of the present-day country of Turkey. Jesus told John to write to the seven churches about how they should respond to the prophecy of His coming.

These churches were real churches, where believers gathered together and listened to the letters read. Although the letters were written in the 1st century, they apply to our churches today and have value to all of us. They are as current as today’s calendar, and they offer a broad-based evaluation for churches today. Here, we might say, we have WWJS—What Would Jesus Say?

Ephesus was the largest city in the area and probably the largest church. Ephesus served as a mother church to the other six which were

connected by Roman highways. Those churches represented the variety of spiritual conditions that have characterized local churches throughout the centuries.

Jesus challenged the seven churches to attend to their areas of need, especially in light of the imminence of His return. First Peter 4:17 states that judgment begins with the household of God. Before Jesus begins to judge the world, He calls the churches to repentance. Churches 1 and 7 are in grave danger; churches 2 and 6 are in excellent shape; and churches 3, 4, and 5 are middling, neither very good nor very bad.

The seven letters to the seven churches share several features as a group. They are brief, and each contains a unique description of the Lord Jesus, mostly drawn from Rev 1:12-20, that is appropriate to that church. Furthermore, each contains a word of commendation (except the letter to Laodicea). And each carries some rebuke for the congregation (except those to Smyrna and Philadelphia). Additionally, each exhorts its readers to specific actions, and each holds out a promise of reward as an incentive for faithful obedience.

## **EPHESUS: A PRIVILEGED CHURCH**

The church at Ephesus was one of the outstanding churches of the apostolic era. Paul, Timothy, and John all served this church. Aquila and Priscilla were also involved at Ephesus, as was Apollos. This was a privileged church.





123RF

Ephesus was known as the “metropolis of Asia.” It was self-governing. There was no permanent Roman military stationed there. It was a large and prosperous city. Even today, its ruins are the most extensive in the region. It had a population of more than 250,000 people. It also had a large Jewish population.

The largest structure at Ephesus was the Temple of Diana, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The temple stood on a platform measuring over 100,000 square feet. That’s twice the size of a football field. The temple was supported by 100 marble columns, 55 feet in height. Inside the temple stood the statue of the goddess Diana (or Artemis in Greek).

## PORTRAYAL OF JESUS

In each letter, the exalted Christ presented Himself with a description relevant to the condition of the church addressed. In this instance, He emphasized His watchful relationship to the churches and their leaders. He holds fast the seven stars or messengers, and He is walking in the midst of the churches.

It was the assignment of the Jewish High Priest to go into the Holy Place and there to trim and light and care for the seven golden lampstands. In the great picture of the Lord Jesus here in the Revelation, He is dressed in His kingly and priestly robes, and He is walking in the midst of these seven golden lampstands. As He walks among His lampstands, He pours in sacred oil; He takes out impurities; He trims the wick; and He makes the light to shine.

Jesus walks among His churches and sees everything that affects their flame. He sends messages that congratulate, criticize, and counsel.

## PRAISE

The Lord commends the Ephesian believers for their labor, patience, faithfulness, and endurance (vv 2-3). They had stood true to the faith, despite their pagan surroundings. The constant

lure of temptation was all around them, yet they remained pure. They rejected false apostles and hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, false teachers who claimed the actions of the body didn’t affect the spirit, so go out and do whatever you want with the body. They did not tolerate false doctrine and false practices. Yet as time wore on, they had begun to lose their first priority.

## CRITICISM

Sounds like a great church, doesn’t it? But Jesus saw past all the external activity. The church at Ephesus had heart trouble. Jesus said, “I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (v 4). What a shock to be told that you don’t love Christ as you once did.

We hear something similar concerning some married couples. “He doesn’t bring me flowers anymore,” the wife might say.

## EXHORTATION

Once the diagnosis is made, the prescription can be written. Here are three steps to renewing love.

First, *remember*, literally “keep on remembering,” what it was like. Relive the thrill of romance.

When I perform a marriage and

see the faces of that couple as they look at each other, I want to tell them, “Don’t lose your first love.”

Second, *repent* and turn your life around. Take steps to make that relationship right again.

Third, *repeat*—“do the things you did at first”—those acts of first love, even if you don’t feel like it. Do those acts of first love and the feelings will follow! Reengage in prayer, Bible reading and reflection, obedient service, and worship.

Continually preserve the warm love for Jesus that you might have had when you first learned of His substitutionary sacrifice for you—the sacrifice which made it possible to receive eternal life as a free gift. It’s partly for that purpose that we often participate in the Lord’s Supper. Jesus says, “Renew your love for Me.”

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**“Jesus walks among  
His churches and  
sees everything that  
affects their flame.  
He sends messages  
that congratulate,  
criticize, and  
counsel.”**

---





## PENALTY OR REWARD

Jesus warned the church at Ephesus that it would lose its light and testimony if its first love was not revived. He might even close down the church.

## GENERAL ADMONITION

Jesus included in every one of the letters to the churches the same admonition: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The use of the plural “the churches” indicates the universal aspect of the invitation. By means of this call the message to a single church is extended to all the churches of Asia and through them, as representatives, to the churches throughout the church age. The exalted Son of Man gives His message through the Spirit.


Hear and respond to the message sent to the church at Ephesus. We may allow our love relationship with the Lord to grow weak in our busy lives. The church at Ephesus has an important message for us: love for the Lord is to have priority in our lives.

## PROMISE TO OVERCOMERS

To the believer who listens and overcomes, Jesus promises that he will eat of the Tree of Life which is in the Paradise of God. Revelation 22:2 states that the tree of life will bear twelve kinds of fruit. Perhaps each fruit will impart a special quality of spiritual life to the eater. Access to the tree of life will be limited (22:14). For example, a believer who adds to or takes away from the words of the prophecy of Revelation will forfeit the right to eat of the fruit of the tree (22:19). The overcomer in Revelation is the believer who perseveres and remains faithful to Jesus until death or until His return. This results in eternal rewards.

## CONCLUSION

What would Jesus say (WWJS) to the church that left its first love?

“Renew your love for Me.” 



*Philippe Sterling is the pastor of Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship in Lewisville, TX.*

# Are You Predestined? (Ephesians 1-3)

By Cal Staggers



123RF

In his letter to the Ephesians, does Paul say that you or I are predestined to be adopted as God's sons and to obtain an inheritance in the kingdom?

Let's use exegesis to define the words and terms in Eph 1:1-3:6 and try to understand Paul's argument using only the letter itself.

When Paul speaks of people being *predestined*, whom is he talking about?

## LOOK AT THE PRONOUNS

Let's start at the beginning of the letter and examine his use of "you," "your," "we," and "us."

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and *are* faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to **you** and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:1-2, NASB, emphasis added).

"You" refers to Paul's audience. He's writing to the believers in Ephesus. That may be important.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed **us** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose **us** in Him before the foundation of the world, that **we** would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He **predestined us** to adoption as sons *and daughters* through Jesus Christ to Himself...

He made known to **us** the mystery of His will... (Eph 1:3-5, 9, emphasis added).

I always assumed Paul included the audience when using the pronouns in bold. But did he? Let's keep reading and see how that develops.

In Him, **you also**, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of **your** salvation—having **also** believed, **you** were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of the promise... (Eph 1:13, emphasis added)

These comments are directed at Paul's audience, and he seems to differentiate and separate his audience from the "us" and the "we" that he spoke of in 1:3-5.

Skipping ahead, we find:

And **you** were dead in **your** offenses and sins, in which **you** previously walked... Among them **we too** all previously lived in the lusts of **our** flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the rest (Eph 2:1-3, emphasis added).

Paul begins by addressing his audience ("you"), but then he transitions into referring to a group ("we," including himself) that is different from the audience:

Therefore remember that previously **you**, the Gentiles in the flesh... (Eph 2:11, emphasis added).

Here, Paul says specifically, "you, the Gentiles," referring to his immediate audience, and likely to



all Gentiles generically. Looking ahead, we see that Paul gives us more valuable information:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles... that by revelation **there was made known to me the mystery...**of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to mankind, **as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets...** (Eph 3:1, 3, 5, emphasis added).

This reveals that the mystery made known to the “us” in 1:9 includes Paul, the apostles, and the prophets, and it likely refers to the Jews generically.

*Is that the key?*

## JEWES AND GENTILES

In 1:13, we saw that Paul differentiates the “you” audience from the 1:3-5 “we” group. And again, in 2:3, he distinguishes the “we” group from the 2:1-2 “you” audience. The only group that is different from “you Gentiles” is the Jews.

Try going back and begin reading Ephesians with “you” meaning “Gentiles” and “we” meaning “Jews.” That distinction could clear up a lot of misunderstandings about predestination in Ephesians. Namely, in the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul refers not to individuals but *two people groups*.

Furthermore, during the overarching discussion from 2:11–3:12, Paul dives into the mystery he mentioned in 1:9, and which has “now” (when he wrote it) been revealed to the then-current generation of Jews and Gentiles:

...that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel... (Eph 3:6).

Could it be that God chose *the Jews* and predestined *them* to adoption as sons?

And does that fact lead into the discussion that the Gentiles were once separated from Christ, excluded from Israel, and without God in the world, but are now included?

## CONCLUSION

In summary, it seems that the words we sought to define by using Ephesians itself are that “us,” “we” and “predestined” refer to the Jews, who are distinguished from the “you” and “your,” which refer to the Gentiles.

So, it appears the answer to the opening question—i.e., does Paul say that you or I are predestined to be adopted as God’s sons and to obtain an inheritance in the kingdom?—is “no.” In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul’s purpose isn’t to address the predestination of *individuals* in the kingdom, but instead to explain the mystery of *the Jews* and *the Gentiles* being combined into one during the church age, with both having equal access to the Father.

By doing this, not only does Paul promote unity between Jews and Gentiles within the early church, but he also encourages his Gentile audience—both then and now—

with this new, church-age revelation that God Himself elevated your status!

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called... (Eph 4:1).



*In 1987, Cal Staggers became a believer through Bob Bryant’s teaching ministry at Cypress Valley Bible Church in Marshall, TX. He and his wife Becky attend a beach church in Naples, FL.*



The 1st year class at His Hill Bible School

## New Braunfels (TX) Bible Church November 2

Pastor Phil Congdon invited Shawn to speak at a men's group at New Braunfels Bible Church.

They were going through his book *Chosen to Serve*.

During the time, they got to talk about a wide range of issues, e.g., grace and how other views of election undermine assurance of salvation, while also leading to a works-salvation mentality.

The doctrine of election connects to so many different issues in theology and salvation.



Men's group at New Braunfels

## Ridge Pointe Fellowship Church Dallas, TX November 14

Pastor Bob Vacendak and his wife Kelly were out of town. I (Bob) was delighted to be able to pinch hit.

In Sunday school, I spoke on *Five Traditions That Contradict God's Word*. It was well received and we had a great time of Q & A.

In the worship service, I spoke on *The Two Ways* from Prov 4:10-19. The way of the wicked is the way of darkness, pain, suffering, and death. The way of the righteous is the way of light, joy, fulfillment, and fullness of life. We are to choose the way of wisdom, the way of



Ridge Point Fellowship





The 2nd year class at His Hill Bible School

the righteous. The issue is not eternal life versus eternal condemnation but fullness of life versus suffering in one's sinful ways.

## His Hill Bible School Comfort, TX November 15-19

Shawn was invited back to teach at His Hill Bible School, part of the Torchbearer network of Bible schools. He taught through the Gospel according to Luke, with 1st year students, paying special attention to the purpose of Luke's Gospel, the birth narratives, the Lord's Prayer, the Sermon on the Plain, and parables such as the lost coin, sheep, and prodigal sons. The students asked intelligent questions. The Parable of the Four Soils especially raised questions among some students who were struggling with assurance.

For the 2nd year students, Shawn gave an overview of the life of King Saul. Instead of overviewing the life of a Biblical hero, the idea was to look at the life of a Biblical zero. They explored how Saul started off well, but ended his life in failure.

## Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship Church Lewisville, TX November 21, 2021

Pastor Philippe Sterling has invited me to speak at his church ten to twelve times next year. We've been friends since our DTS days. He often speaks at our conference and writes for GES as well.



The faithful at Vista Ridge

He asked me to speak on *God Desires That We Have Full and Meaningful Lives* (2 Pet 3:9) and on *Turn and Live* (various texts that deal with repentance and physical life). I took questions after each message, and we had great times of interaction.

## The College of Biblical Studies Indianapolis, IN

I (Ken) began teaching a class through Zoom at the College of Biblical Studies in Houston. They have an extension in Indianapolis, and caters to students who are a little older than the students I usually teach in foreign countries.

The class is on the General Epistles and Revelation. Kathryn is helping with all the technical aspects.

There are 12 students and we meet as a group once a week. I record another class each week as well. The second recording is posted and the students listen to it at their convenience.



Ken and Kathryn with friends

The classes deal with critical issues in the books involved. It is a great opportunity to discuss the debated passages. The students have been very engaged, and there has been lively discussion. The school has asked me to teach a class next semester as well. I am hoping this turns into a recurring teaching opportunity.

# You Are Not Under Law (Romans 6:14)

By Shawn Lazar

**S**in shall not have dominion over you. Why not? You might *think* it still has dominion over you and that you have no other possibility but to sin. If so, Paul says you're wrong:

*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Rom 6:14).*

What Paul says is surprising. I expected the apostle to say that “sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under *sin*.” Instead, he says we're not under *law*. Why bring up the law?

Paul is anticipating the argument he will make in Romans 7 about whether sanctification is by law. The short answer is “no.” That's not what the law is for.

Unfortunately, Christians find it hard to accept that. We crave for laws and are conditioned to think they make us holier. If we only had the right laws, we think that everything would be better—our country, our schools, our business, our local churches, our marriage, our parenting, and especially our Christian life.

Are these thinkers right? Are you sanctified by being under law?

Absolutely not. Paul already explained why in Romans 3-4. A law can *demand* that you keep it and condemn you for failing, but it cannot give you the *power* to obey. No one will be justified by law. That's why we must be justified by faith apart from works of the law.

But as Paul develops his argument in Romans 5-8, you'll find that just as you cannot be justified by the law, neither can you be sanctified by it! As Hodges says, “the Mosaic law was no more an effective instrument for Christian living than



123RF

it was an instrument for justification” (Hodges, *Romans*, p. 176).

So why does Paul emphasize that the believer is not under law? What difference does that make to sin's dominion? Nygren elaborates:

As long as we live under the law, there can be no talk of freedom from sin. Paul has expressed himself as to the function of the law in 5:20. The law came in “to increase the trespass.” To live under the law is to be bound to sin, in the highest degree, and to stand under its dominion. In 1 Corinthians 15:56 Paul can say explicitly that it is the law which gives sin its strength (Nygren, *Romans*, p. 248).

If law-based spirituality will only produce a sin-dominated people, what other option is there?

Grace!

Somehow, grace accomplishes what the law could not. But how?

Let me illustrate it with a story.

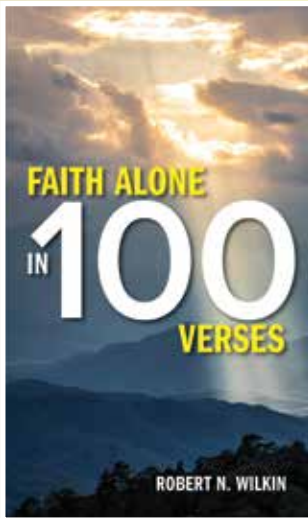
Rod Rosenblatt is a Lutheran theologian. He recalled when, as a teenager, he got drunk and crashed his dad's car. He expected the worst from his dad. Wouldn't you? How would *your* father have reacted? Rosenblatt expected severe punishment, but his father surprised him by doing something completely different:

After the accident, Rod called his dad, and the first thing his dad asked him was, “Are you all right?” Rod assured him that he was



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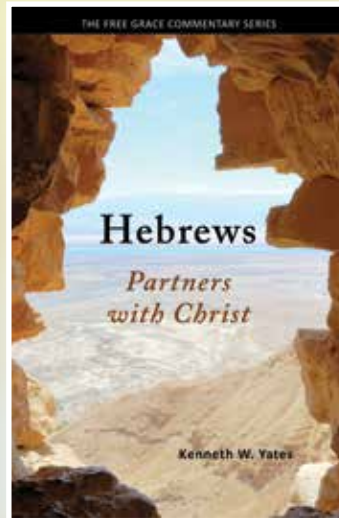
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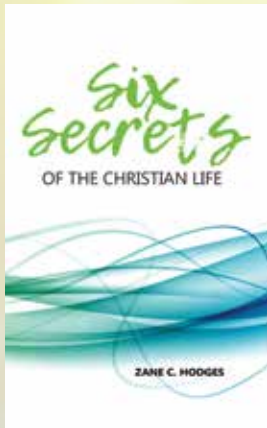
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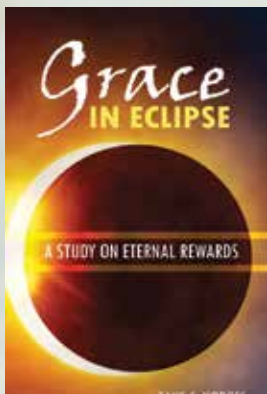


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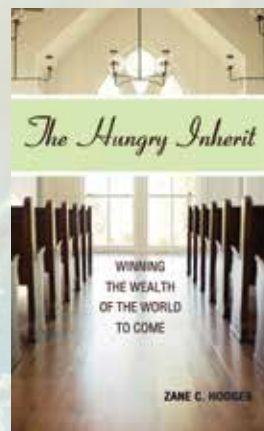


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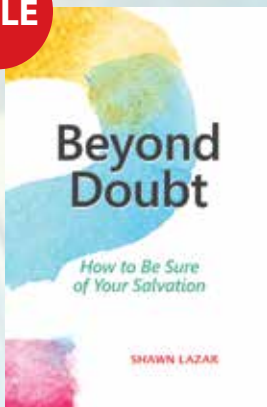
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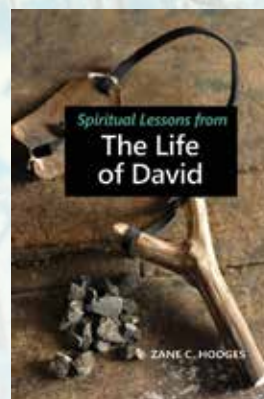


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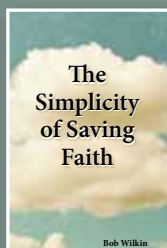
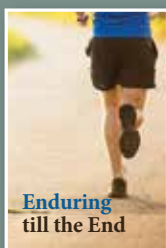


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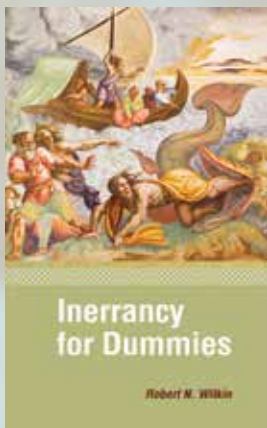


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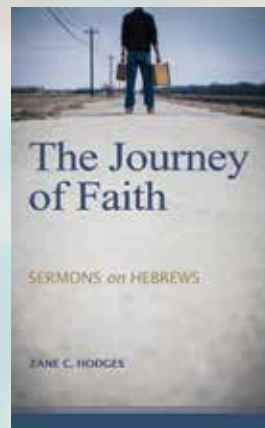


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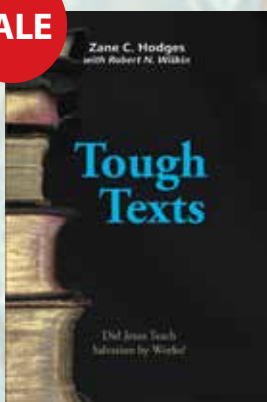
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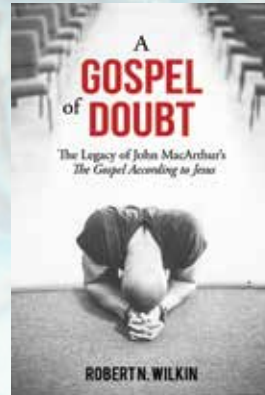


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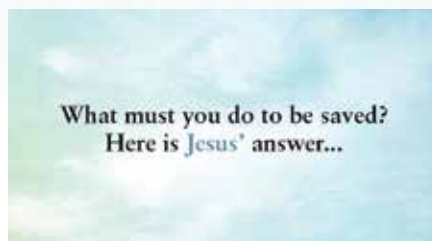


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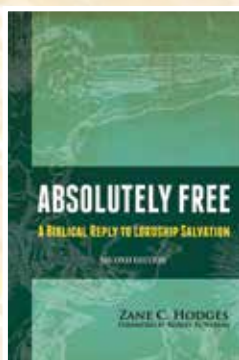
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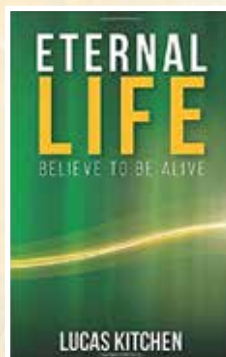


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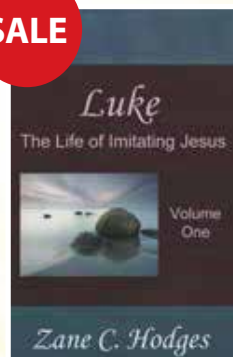
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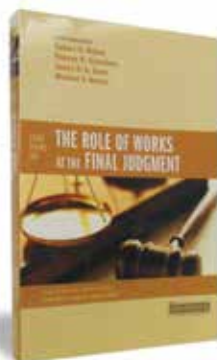


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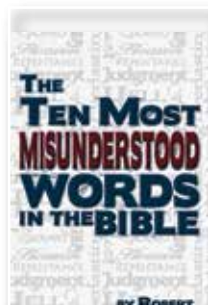


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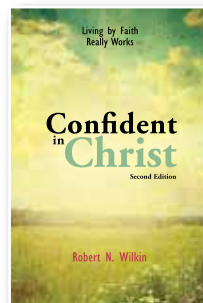


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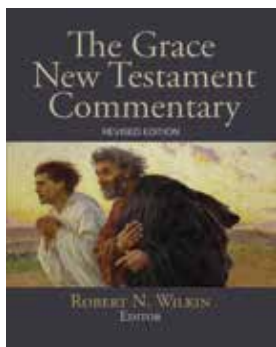
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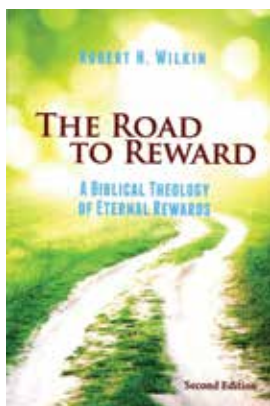
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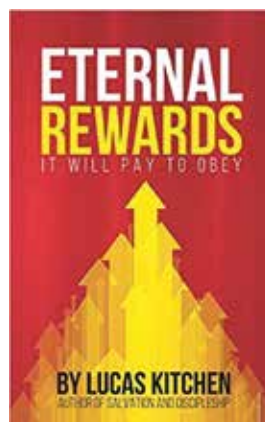
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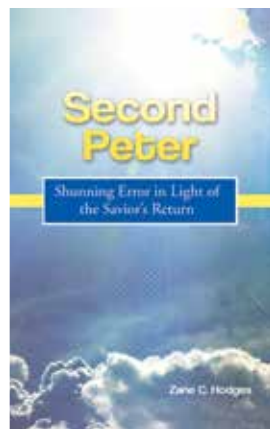
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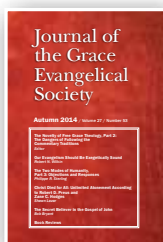
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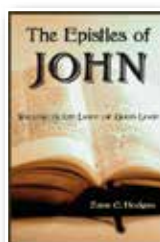
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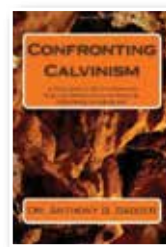
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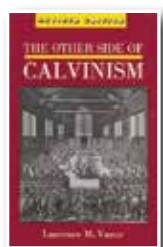


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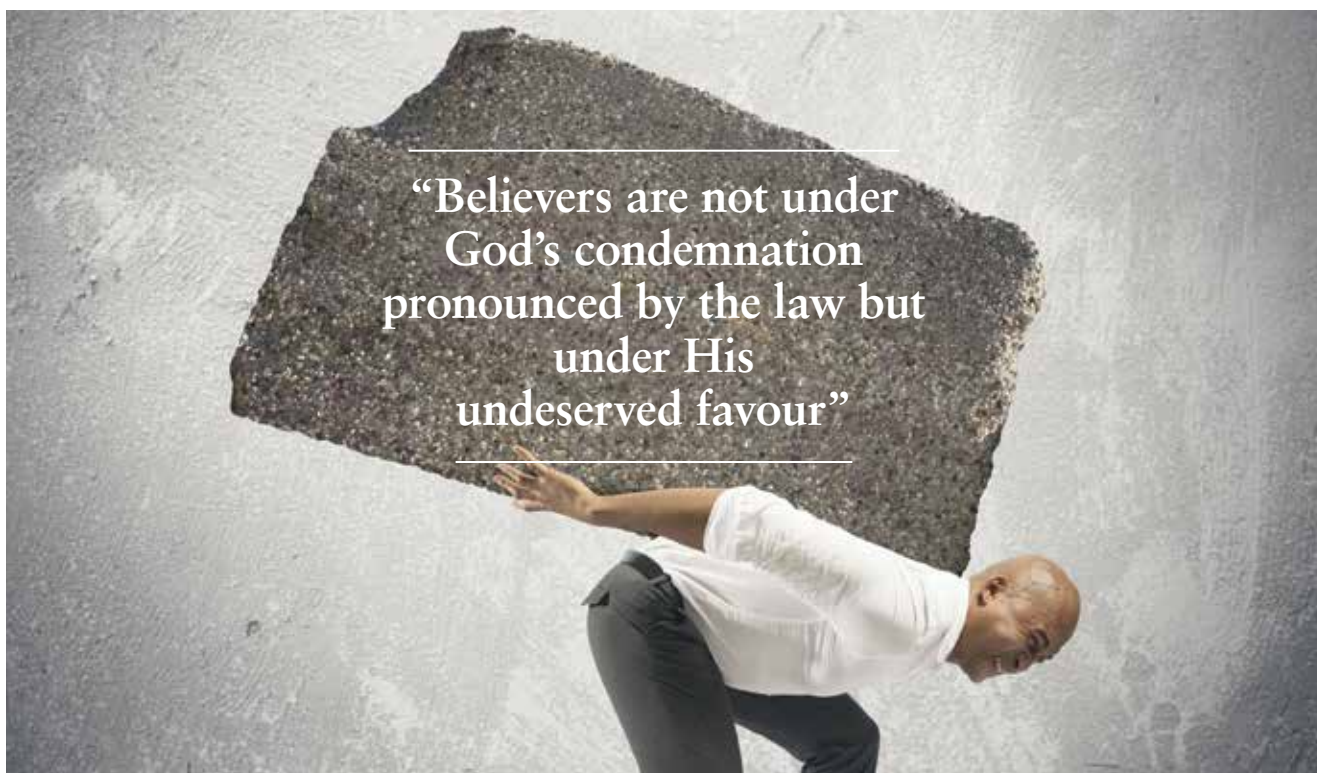
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“Believers are not under  
God’s condemnation  
pronounced by the law but  
under His  
undeserved favour”

fine. Then he confessed to his father that he was drunk. Rod was naturally terrified about how his father might respond.

Later that night, after Rod had made it home, he wept and wept in his father’s study. He was embarrassed, ashamed, and guilty. At the end of the ordeal, his father asked him this question: “How about tomorrow we go and get you a new car?”

Rod now says—and he has lived a lot of life, being in his seventies now—that he became a Christian in that moment. God’s grace became real to him in that moment of forgiveness and mercy.

Instead of crushing him, Rosenblatt’s father forgave him and showed him grace. And that’s when Rosenblatt finally understood what God’s grace was like—a realization that produced a lasting change in him that the law never could.

And I think that’s Paul’s point. As a believer, you’re not under law, but grace. As Cranfield explains, “believers are not under God’s condemnation pronounced by the law but under His undeserved favour” (Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 140). Being under grace creates a completely different motivation for Christian living than does being under law.

Instead of being driven by law-based guilt and fear (which can only lead to even more bondage to sin), grace produces the opposite effect and releases you to be holy. It releases you to experience practical sanctification. “The man who knows that he is free from God’s condemnation finds himself beginning to be free to resist the tyranny of sin with boldness and resolution” (Cranfield, *Romans*, p. 140).

Sin *shall not* have dominion over you because you *are* under grace.

Grace rules over you, not sin.

Paul does not proclaim that as an obligation or as a hope, but as a fact. ■



*Shawn Lazar edits and writes for Grace in Focus, and is trying to learn what it means to be a gracious father to his kids.*



# Body Armor (Ephesians 6:10-18)

By Kathryn Wright

In 2001, the United States Army began using the motto an “Army of One.” It replaced the popular slogan, “Be all you can be,” which ran for over 20 years. By contrast, “Army of One” only lasted five years. Critics of the motto made an insightful observation: an “Army of One” goes against the very essence of the military, which fundamentally functions on *teamwork*.

Many Christians study the Scriptures with an “Army of One” mindset. We look at verses that deal with the church and individualize them. An example of this can be found in Eph 6:10-18, famously known as the armor of God passage.

## IN THE LORD’S ARMY

Growing up an Army brat, I have many memories of that passage being taught. In Sunday school we sang “I’m in the Lord’s Army” while memorizing all the pieces of armor. All the kids would make their foam helmets of salvation and construction paper shields of faith and gleefully wear them home feeling just like Dad in his BDU’s (military uniform). The pieces of armor were individualized for each kid.

Even as adults, people come to these verses and think they describe the individual believer dressed in armor. Perhaps you see yourself standing on the battlefield. You are a lone warrior, with the gold from your breastplate glistening in the sun.

You wield the sword of the Spirit above your head.

However, these verses can be overwhelming if taken individualistically, and that armor’s weight is seemingly crushing. That’s a lot of responsibility for the lone soldier to carry. And it is hard to fight a battle as a single soldier.

I want to suggest that an individualistic interpretation forgets a key element of this passage.

## WHICH BODY WEARS THE ARMOR?

The Book of Ephesians deals with the unveiling of the mystery of the Church (3:1-6), where both Jews and Gentiles have come together to form something new, i.e., the Body of Christ.

In other words, this book is not about me, the individual, but about the members of the “Army of God” joining together, serving, and submitting to one another. This corporate theme runs throughout the book.

In Ephesians 1, Paul tells us that Christ is the head over all things in the Church, which is His body (1:22-23). In Ephesians 2, we are told that the two (Jews and Gentiles) have been brought together to create the new man. This “new man” is the Church (2:14-16). Paul reveals the “mystery” of the Church in Eph 3:1-8. Then, beginning in Ephesians 4, he unpacks how the Body of Christ should be unified (4:1-6), giving special attention to spiritual gifts (4:7ff). Then, in Ephesians 5, he deals with how we are to submit to one another (5:21ff).

In short, we are His body (4:4), created to function as a team!

This is the backdrop to Eph 6:10-18. Rather than seeing these verses as a call to be an army of one, Paul is calling in the troops.

## EQUIPPING THE CHURCH

If I could summarize Paul’s point: The armor of God is about equipping *the church* to function as a healthy team when facing spiritual enemies.

Notice that in v 12, we are not fighting a single demon or force, but a plurality of “principalities,” “powers,” “rulers” and “hosts.” That’s an intimidating opponent to be against, and if I take



this passage as a battle between them and me, the odds are not in my favor.

However, if I consider the corporate theme of the book, with the church working as a unit, I find this far more encouraging.

Bring in the reinforcements!

## THE FOOTWEAR OF GOD

Let's take one piece of the armor and apply it with this corporate emphasis. In v 15, Paul talks about the footwear of the church saying: "and having shod your feet with the preparation of *the gospel of peace*."

What is this gospel?

If you view this verse as referring to the individual, you might think this verse is talking about how we each should be bold witnesses to the unbelieving world. You have a responsibility to go out and share the gospel of eternal life by faith alone in Christ. Individual believers are supposed to share with the unbelievers that they can have "peace" with God when they believe in Jesus for the gift of eternal life.

While that is true, that is not Paul's point in this verse. Evangelism is a foreign concept to this

passage. It would be a huge change in subject regarding the overall discussion.

There are two words in the term "the gospel of peace" that are worth closer study.

## WHICH GOSPEL?

The word *gospel* simply means "good news," and can refer to many different things in the Bible. The question we need to ask is which piece of good news does Paul have in mind in the book of Ephesians?

Just a few verses later, Paul uses the word a second time, saying that he has boldly taught the "mystery of the gospel" (v 19). Which gospel is that? Bob Wilkin makes this comment regarding this verse:

The gospel is clearly in the Old Testament. The death of Jesus is spoken of in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, as well as in Genesis 22 via typology when Abraham offered up his only begotten son, Isaac. The resurrection of Jesus is also prophesied in the Old Testament (cf. Ps 16:9-11). So, what is this mystery? Is this not the mystery of the church, Jews and Gentiles together in one body? Indeed, it is. That is the good news Paul has in mind here. The church

was a mystery in the Old Testament (Wilkin, *Ten Most Misunderstood Words*, p. 143).

The mystery of the gospel is the good news *about the church*. That makes sense in light of Eph 3:1-9, where Paul discusses the “mystery” that is the church.

## WHAT PEACE?

That this gospel is good news about the church also makes sense when we consider the next word, *peace*. What kind of *peace* does Paul have in mind?

In Eph 2:14-17 he talks about peace three times.

First, in v 14, he talks about how, having broken down the middle wall of separation, Christ is “our peace.” Paul is speaking about the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles and the wall that kept them separated from each other in the temple. In Christ, that wall was destroyed, and the Gentiles now can have *peace with the Jews*.

Second, in v 15, Paul talks about how the Law was abolished through Christ, making “peace” where there was once enmity between the two groups.

Third, in v 17, he talks about how the Gentiles who were afar off were preached “peace.” What is this good news of peace that they heard? It’s the peace Paul has been discussing in the previous verses, that Jews and Gentiles are equals in the Body of Christ. The whole passage deals with the peace between Jews and Gentiles. Significantly, this is not peace between mankind and God, but between two opposing groups. The Law separated the Jews from the Gentiles, but now through Christ, we are equals in the body of Christ and should pursue peace with one another (Rom 14:19).

Fourth, in chap. 4, Paul gives a summary statement for the whole book. He describes the unity of the church. He talks about how there is one body, one Spirit, and one faith (vv 4-6). Leading into these verses, Paul encourages the readers to endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the *bond of peace*.”

We see a common theme in all these passages. The main point is that the church, especially these Jewish and Gentile readers, is to be unified

with one another. In fact, this is such an important issue to Paul, it is one of the last things he says to the church at Ephesus.

Notice how Paul ends his letter saying: “*Peace to the brethren*, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23, emphasis added).

When we put these terms together in 6:15, the message is clear—“The gospel of peace” is not about evangelizing to the unbelieving world, but refers to the good news of the church, which has brought peace between Jews and Gentiles. That’s an encouraging message. Regardless of our background, nationality, gender, or status, we can have peace with one another in the Body of Christ. When unified, we can withstand the evil of the day.

## CONCLUSION

It is no secret that we are living in dark times. We are increasingly seeing church attendance fall, undoubtedly exacerbated by the last year of quarantines, lockdowns, and an upsurge of people working from home.

While this makes things harder, the truth of the Scriptures is clear. We were made to function as a body.

The Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation. You are not meant to fight this battle alone. Individually, you are not an “Army of One.” However, the Body is one, and for that we should praise the Lord (Eph 3:21). ■



Kathryn Wright is a missionary and coordinates overseas speaking and teaching for GES.



# The Mailbag

## By You

I wanted you to know that I love you and pray for you and pray for Shawn, Ken, and Bob. You are appreciated, and there are people out there who read every single blog and article that you post and meditate on what you are working to explain and teach. You have been a great help to me. Thank you and don't grow weary in well-doing." ~Noah

"Thank you for the work you do. May God bless your efforts." ~Ellsworth, NY

"May each of you involved with GES have a blessed Thanksgiving. So grateful for all you do." ~Fort Worth, TX

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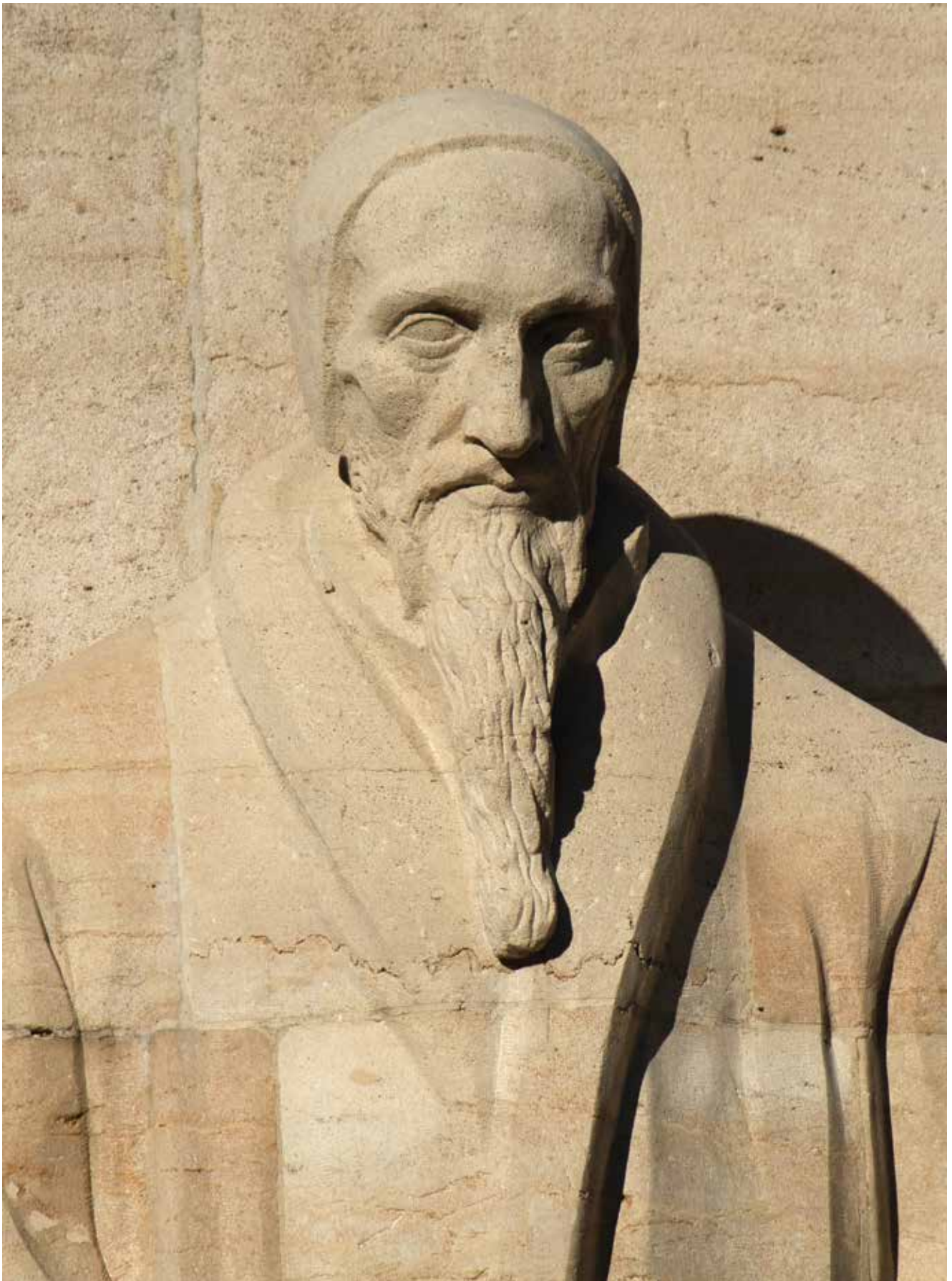
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"Thanks for your faithfulness to our Lord and His Word. You continue to impact many lives, including mine!" ~Email 

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# Q&A

By Anthony Badger

## CALVINISM

**Q**uestion. I see a lot of people turning to Calvinism. I believe God in His sovereignty gave us free will, and He does intervene on earth, but that doesn't take away our free will. I just wanted to ask what the church believed before Augustine (300-400 years after Christ)? Also, Calvinists aren't Roman Catholic, yet they hold to Catholic doctrine. Why?

**A**nsWER. Great to hear from you and to try to answer your great question. I can tell you're seeking the right path. I've written a book dealing with Calvinism as a whole, and it might be helpful. Right now, I'll just deal with your question.

I think that there are several reasons why people turn to Calvinism. Part of it is psychological. To be included under such a broad umbrella gives a person a certain amount of psychological security and a feeling of safety. Who's going to seriously be threatened when so many people believe it?

Another psychological reason is the felt need to be included in a group.

Further, the very teaching of Calvinism is that an elect group of people, those God chose before the foundation of the world, are special to Him. This puts the Calvinist in an elite cluster and produces, I think, a certain amount of pride. "God chose me, but not most other people." This creates a false sense of spirituality.

Calvinism offers a structured doctrinal position which, in itself, is logical, but it is totally unbiblical. Folks seem to be drawn to that which is apparently logical. They can fit into the system that way.

I made a point in my book to show that not a single one of the Calvinist doctrines—i.e., the

five points of Calvinism (TULIP)—is supported by even one passage of Scripture, understood correctly.

They say, for instance, that we are such fallen creatures that we are unable to believe and be saved. But all through the Bible we are urged to believe in Christ. Faith is what it's all about.

They say that God selected only some, but not others, for eternal life. Somehow, they feel that this glorifies God, but in reality, it makes God arbitrary and unloving. They deny that God loves everyone.

Further, they say that Jesus just died only for those that God supposedly selected, whereas several Scripture passages indicate that He died for all (e.g., John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:19; 1 John 2:2).

Calvinists say that since man has no actual free will to look at the facts of the gospel message and consider them so as to believe, or be convinced, about the message of life (i.e., the offer of everlasting life based on God's promise with the sole condition of faith or belief). God must impose His will upon those He has selected and essentially regenerate them so they are able to believe. Somehow this avoids God's plan being defeated by man's rebellion.

Finally, Calvinists say that one's success in the Christian life is also a condition for being considered saved and for having assurance of salvation. They leave no room for a believer to fail or to make his own choices after he becomes a believer. As for what the church believed prior to Augustine, we should realize that the early church was involved in a process of systematizing the truth of the Scripture for several centuries. I suppose it's still doing so. Augustine was probably the first major theologian who was influenced by Greek philosophy, particularly Manichaeism dualism, among other things. This involved the idea of fate being a determining factor of what occurs, and he just worked that idea into the doctrine of unconditional election. Unfortunately, the Reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries took their lead from Augustine and worked his deterministic views into their own theology.

Roman Catholics also followed Augustine as one of their leading church fathers. I think Calvin was trying to persuade the Roman Catholic

Church that his doctrine was orthodox in that he followed Augustine and his teachings. This is probably the main reason why Calvinists and those who follow the Reformed theology teaching which developed out of his theology are comparable to Roman Catholics in some respects.

Thank you very much for your question. I hope this helps.

## ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

**Q**uestion. A video pastor of Columbus Bible Church says that OT believers are not in heaven, but Sheol. If OT saints are still in Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:19-31), where do tribulation saints go when they die? Are they in heaven based on Revelation 6:9?

**A**nswer. The video pastor begins with an unfounded assumption that the OT saints, i.e., OT believers, are indeed still in Sheol/Hades. However, there is no Biblical indication that they are the same group as in Revelation 6. He essentially claims that those who were believers in the OT had not been led to heaven when the Lord Jesus ascended. He also indicates that the Tribulation saints in Rev 6:9 are not in heaven, where the altar is, but are with Abraham in the center of the earth.

In Rev 6:9 the Apostle John sees the souls of faithful believers who will be slain during the Tribulation. That is the period of time that he is referring to. Their location is stated to be under the altar in heaven. No altar in Sheol is ever mentioned in Luke 16 or anywhere else. The location of the Rev 6:9 vision must be in heaven. It is noted that it is the souls of those slain, not their bodies that he sees.

It seems that this video teacher rejects the idea that Rev 6:9 refers to dead Tribulation saints being in heaven. He goes on to explain what he calls conventional teaching that the OT saints remained in Abraham's bosom until Jesus ascended to heaven. However, he fails to give the basis for such teaching in his attempt to explain things his way. The basis for the teaching is found in Eph 4:7-8 which says, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the treasure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, 'When He

ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives and He gave gifts to men.'" The apostle is giving a basis for the giving of spiritual gifts in this church age. It is usually understood that the statement "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives" indicates that He transported those with Abraham from a place called Paradise (Luke 23:43) into heaven since He had paid the full price of sin with His blood. It was not their bodies that were transported to heaven, but their disembodied souls. The pastor in this video somehow failed to give the reasoning behind this teaching. He gives the implication that this view is old-fashioned and, therefore, incorrect.

This video pastor seems correct that those of the OT period expected to be resurrected on the earth. Isaiah 26:19-20 teaches that they will be resurrected after the time of Tribulation. He misapplies 2 Cor 5:1. Paul simply means that God will one day give every believer glorified bodies when He returns. The complete verse says, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house made with hands eternal in the heavens." He goes on to indicate that the OT saints are looking for a resurrection on earth and did not anticipate going to heaven. He then proceeds to Rev 20:4 and argues that the Tribulation saints did not anticipate going to heaven either. He essentially claims that they look forward to a resurrection on earth. But so do we in this church age. That we all look forward to a resurrection on earth does not indicate the location of our disembodied souls after death until then. He confuses the temporary state of our souls between death and resurrection with what we expect to be the final destiny of our resurrected bodies for all eternity.

I hope this answers your questions satisfactorily. May the Lord bless you in your search for the truth. ■■

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*Anthony Badger has a ThD from Dallas Seminary and is the author of Confronting Calvinism, available in the bookstore.*



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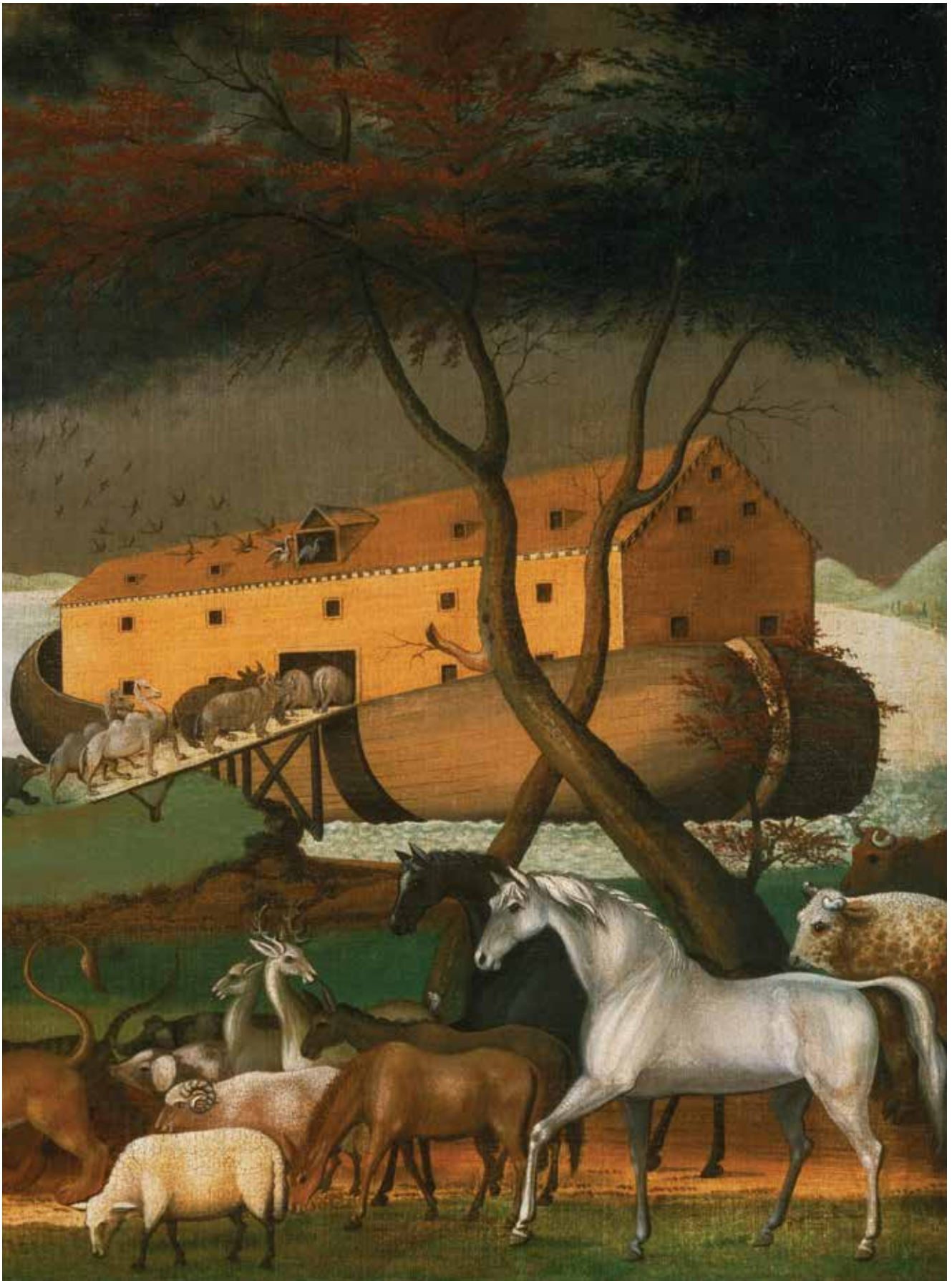
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By Shawn Willson

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**I**n late 2021, I preached through the story of Noah for the second time in my pastoral ministry. As I began the series, I took a moment to look back on what I wrote on Noah in 2009. I cringed when I saw the title of the second sermon in the series. “Noah: Faith + Works = Salvation.” I concluded the sermon with the following words: “We need faith in the work of Jesus Christ. Without faith in what He has done, no one can be saved. But faith alone is empty. It is worthless. We need real faith that results in works.”

Thanks to the eye-opening works of Zane Hodges and others, I have come to see how my previous view of saving faith distorted the wonderful free gift of the gospel and also opened my eyes to the depth and breadth of God’s salvation found throughout the story of Noah.

Noah was a man saved by faith and by works. I was right on that point. But I went wrong where so many other students of the Bible have been shipwrecked. Noah’s faith seen through God’s grace brought one kind of salvation. Noah’s works seen through the construction of the ark brought another.

## **NOAH FOUND FAVOR**

The definitive moment in the story of Noah occurs in a brief verse where our great ancestor did nothing:

*Noah, however, found favor with the Lord  
(Gen 6:8 CSB)*

In Gen 6:1-7, while Noah’s generation was falling into the worst abuses of the image of God in human history, Noah found favor or grace with God. Today, especially in light of Gen 6:9, a reader may be tempted to believe Noah earned this favor through righteous and blameless living. Allen Ross, in his commentary on Genesis, points out that this Hebrew word for *favor* most often means not only an unmerited grace, but a favor given when one is in a position to deserve the opposite, i.e., judgment.

The first eight verses of Genesis 6 open with the depths of man’s violent and sexually perverse depravity. The conclusion of this cold darkness is the warm light of grace. Grace was given to Noah, not as a reward for victorious living, nor as a payment for faithful living, but because the Lord looked upon Noah and gave him a gift in love. Noah rightfully should have been swept away with his generation, but he was instead offered salvation in friendship with God.

It may not appear obvious in our English Bibles, but there is a clear narrative break between Gen 6:8 and 6:9. The first words of “These are the family records of Noah” (CSB) inform the reader of the beginning of a new narrative section. Moses structured Noah’s story to clearly separate

his deeds from God's grace. God did not provide favor to Noah on account of works. God entered into a relationship of favor with Noah when he deserved no such special treatment. The faithfulness of Noah is only praised following God's grace.

This is a beautiful picture of our salvation to eternal life. There is nothing the sinner could ever do or say to merit the favor of God. In fact, we all deserve God's judgment and not His grace. In righteousness and fairness, Jesus should have come as judge to ruin and destroy our race. In grace, Jesus came as a lamb to die for the sins of the world.

Noah was set apart from his world for salvation, but not on account of his skills as shipwright or animal tamer. Instead, he came into a relationship of peace with God by grace alone. No works required.

If everyone was cautious and careful in our Scripture reading, it would bring us to one obvious conclusion. Noah was saved by grace and brought into relationship with God *before* he hammered the first nail into the wood of the ark or gathered a single animal. Noah's eternal place with God as one redeemed by the future death of Christ was settled at the end of the first narrative portion of the story of his life. Genesis 6:8 proclaims the wonders of God's compassion to save Noah and to save him by grace alone.

## NOAH SAVED BY WORKS

In Gen 6:9 and following, Noah is already a saved man—saved by grace through faith. His eternal destiny was settled. Noah is forever a friend of God. Since Noah is God's friend, it is appropriate now to warn him of the troubling days ahead. God comes and informs Noah of the impending doom of the worldwide Flood, and God provides a way of salvation from the Flood and the judgment coming upon the world. Thankfully, Noah obeys and saves his life to live

another 350 years on the earth after the Flood (Gen 9:28).

It's hard to underestimate Noah's trust in the Word of God along with his faithfulness to build the ark. Noah believed in a coming Flood when no such disaster had ever been seen on the face of the earth. He worked on building a massive three story ship which would have made him the subject of gossip and ridicule to everyone who discovered what he was up to and why. The perseverance and labor in the building of the ark is one of the most outstanding efforts of human labor in history. Noah was saved by his works when he built the ark.

Second Peter 3:6 speaks to the destruction of the world in the Flood.

*Through these the world of that time perished when it was flooded (2 Pet 3:6 CSB)*

The Greek word translated as *perished* is the same Greek word for *perish* in John 3:16. The destruction or perishing caused by the flood was not eternal death and separation from God, because Peter

is speaking of the destruction of mankind and animal life together. Noah was saved from the fate of both the animals and mankind by building the ark. Noah was saved, so he would not perish, but this was not salvation to eternal life.

In Bob Wilkin's *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*, he speculates that *believers* may have died in the Flood. He follows John Whitcomb's assumption that people could have believed in God's message of salvation after the rains began to fall, but before they were drowned in the floodwaters. Many could have heard Noah's preaching and dismissed it as nonsense while the skies were still blue. Once the skies darkened and the thunderstorm of thunderstorms began, they might have seen the wisdom in Noah's preaching and believed after the door to the ark was already shut by God Himself. This belief would have saved their souls by grace, but their physical lives would have been lost in the floodwaters.

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**“In righteousness and fairness, Jesus should have come as judge to ruin and destroy our race. In grace, Jesus came as a lamb to die for the sins of the world.”**

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Noah's story is also told in the briefest of narratives in Heb 11:7:

*By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith (Heb 11:7 CSB).*

Noah's preparation for the ark saved himself, his wife, sons and daughters-in-law. Since Noah could not believe on their behalf to gain eternal life for his children, this must refer to salvation from the floodwaters and not to eternal life.

The mention of Noah's inheritance as an heir of righteousness tells us the eternal importance of Noah's obedience to construct the ark. Noah not only brought the temporal blessing of continued life, but he also saved up eternal rewards for glory in an inheritance. The salvation based on works as seen in Noah's life brings eternal blessings following the pattern of salvation by faith which brings eternal life.


Noah's work in building the ark saved his physical life. He also saved the lives of his sons, including Ham. Ham is significant, because there is a possibility, based on Gen 9:18-29, Ham may have been an unbeliever. He could have been unregenerate, but was still saved physically by his father's and his own efforts. Our efforts in obedience to God not only preserve and provide blessings to our own lives, but it also transforms us into preserving forces for those around us, believers and unbelievers alike.

## LEARNING TO ASK BASIC QUESTIONS

Before having my eyes opened by others in the Free Grace community, I read the Bible with faulty assumptions. I almost always saw salvation as unto eternal life. I never noticed in my own studies on *sōzō* (Greek verb for *saved*) how often salvation related to the preservation of physical life. I simply dismissed them as unimportant to a study on salvation.

Thankfully, I now read the Bible and ask basic questions when I come to words that have been filled with theological meanings. What are we saved from? How were those people saved? Is this

passage speaking of God's salvation by grace or another salvation by works?

Noah is a powerful illustration to the church of the importance to look for more than one salvation in the Scripture and our lives. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ to eternal life. This is the most wonderful and important salvation in world history. At the same time, salvation from the consequences of sin, salvation from enemies, salvation from sickness, and more are still vital forms of salvation in the eyes of a loving Heavenly Father who is compassionate beyond measure. The Father desires to save sinners from eternal death, and He desires to save His children from the negative consequences of a sinful life in this world. May we all be saved by faith and by works. 



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# When People Get Angry at Easy Salvation (2 Kings 5:1-19)

By Shawn Lazar

**H**ave you ever noticed that people are not only *reluctant* to believe in God's grace, but it also makes them *angry*?

In *Life Is Impossible: And That's Good News*, Nick Lannon points to Naaman the Syrian as an example of someone who was infuriated at an easy salvation.



## NAAMAN THE POWERFUL

If you remember, Naaman was commander of the Syrian army and was immensely rich and powerful. He was used to success—to achieving his objectives, overcoming the odds, getting the job done, and being praised for winning difficult battles.

Then he got leprosy. The soldier who had defeated so many enemies was slowly being killed by his own body.

He resolved to win that war, too, but no matter what he tried—and with his enormous wealth and power, he must have tried it all—nothing worked.

Then a recently captured slave girl from Israel told him about a prophet who could heal him. And Naaman was desperate enough to listen.

He set out with a company of horses and chariots carrying a treasure worth millions of dollars. As Lannon says,

He comes to Samaria intending to overwhelm the prophet with his riches. He's got all this silver and gold and beautiful clothing, and he rolls us to Elisha's house with all his horses and chariots. He wants Elisha to notice how awesome he is (Lannon, *Life Is Impossible*, p. 13).

But when Naaman arrived at Elisha's house, instead of being welcomed with fanfare, the prophet didn't even come out to see him! Instead, a messenger greeted him with simple instructions:

*“Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean” (2 Kgs 5:10).*

God would heal Naaman! Isn't that amazing news? Isn't that exactly what he wanted? And it couldn't be easier—just take a dip in the Jordan, and no money, sacrifice, or grueling treatments required.

Wouldn't you be overjoyed?

Not Naaman. On the contrary, he was enraged:

*But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, “Indeed, I said to myself, ‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.’ Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage (2 Kgs 5:11-12).*

Why was Naaman angry? Because it seemed all too easy. He expected something more...impressive and overtly “religious.”

He expected Elisha to come and greet him and then make a big show of his healing with a calling out to God and maybe some waving of the hands, and who knows what else.

But most of all, Naaman apparently expected Elisha to give him some difficult tasks to *earn* his healing:

He wants a complicated ritual, or a recipe with all sorts of steps that he has to follow. He's angry that he's not getting a long assignment. This seems incredibly counter-intuitive on the surface, but when you think



about it, it makes perfect sense: if Naaman can't purchase this healing, he wants to earn it by showing Elisha that he's willing to do any arcane ritual that the prophet can come up with (Lannon, *Life Is Impossible*, p. 14).

Naaman was expecting to prove how awesome and worthy he was to be healed, but Elisha wanted him to do something as easy as washing in the Jordan? Nonsense!

### WHY NOT ACCEPT THE EASY WAY?

As he marched away in a huff, Naaman's servants came to him and reasoned with him saying:

*"My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (2 Kgs 5:13).*

Naaman was ready to do the hard thing, so why not do the easy thing? He was ready to pay millions, so why not pay nothing? What's the problem with doing less than what you expected?

So Naaman relented, accepted the easy way, washed in the Jordan, and was miraculously healed, just as Elisha promised.

When I share the good news that God gives away eternal life for free, people often react like Naaman. They not only doubt the message, but actually get angry! Why is that? Why treat such good news as if it were bad? Lannon suggests—

We can't handle being given something for free, and certainly not if that thing is forgiveness, the love of God, and eternal life! We want desperately to earn it. We are like Naaman, incensed that our riches (our spiritual quality) and obedience are not required for our healing (Lannon, *Life Is Impossible*, p. 15).

"Religion" has convinced us that salvation can't be as easy as that!

Having convinced ourselves that a righteous life is the path to God's love, the fact that

God's love has been given to us for free on account of Christ should make us weep tears of joy, not frustration (Lannon, *Life Is Impossible*, pp. 15-16).

### SERVING UNBELIEVERS

So what can you do when someone hears the good news and reacts like Naaman? Maybe you can take a lesson from the three servants in the story.


The first servant pointed Naaman to who could heal him (vv 2-4).

The second servant told Naaman what to do to be healed (v 10).

And when Naaman was walking away in a huff, the third servant (or servants) tried to persuade him to reconsider (v 13).

You can be like those servants, i.e., you can point people to Jesus as their Savior, explain that the only condition to have eternal life is to believe in Him, and if

someone finds it hard to believe that eternal life could be a gift, you can try to persuade him to reconsider.

"If Jesus had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when He says to you, 'Whoever believes has everlasting life?'" 



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

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