

GRACE (in) FOCUS

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MAY / JUNE 2022

Elisabeth: My Hero



Romans 16 ♦ Reality is Christocentric ♦ If You Stop Loving ♦ Sexual Sins ♦
He Never Stops Working ♦ Two Pieces ♦ Miracles ♦ And more!

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GRACE (in) FOCUS

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Editor's Letter

You should have seen the “letter from the editor” I wrote! It was scrapped by Shawn and Bethany. They said I was too scatterbrained. I thought you would want to learn about my latest marathon, my leg cramps at night, how thick and unruly my toenails are, and my amazing stories about the rising price of eggs and gas. I’ll save that for my autobiography!

Assurance of everlasting life is arguably the single most important assurance that anyone can have.

Have you ever thought about what assurance means? Miriam Webster says that the number one meaning of assurance is “the state of being assured, such as, being certain in the mind... freedom from self-doubt or uncertainty... security.”

To be assured of something is to be certain that it is true, to be free from uncertainty about it.

Assurance is not just about our eternal destiny. Assurance concerns everything we believe to be true.

Sadly, many Evangelicals today say that assurance of everlasting life is a special type of assurance. Whereas assurance is certainty in other matters, most say we can’t be sure that we have everlasting life that can never be lost. For them, assurance of salvation is a sliding scale from a low to a high level of confidence that they are going to persevere and hence gain what they call *final salvation*.

For most, assurance is like the marathon runner who gets to mile 13 and is suffering leg cramps. He is not certain he will finish the race. He has to stop every mile to stretch out his calves and hamstrings. He is worried. But he is hopeful.

Most Evangelicals are beset by doubts due to the recognition that they are far from perfect. If their assurance is based in part on the quality of



The Most Important Assurance

Robert N. Wilkin, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

their lives, then they have to wonder if they will attain to *final salvation*.

What a joy it is to be certain that we have everlasting life! Don’t you agree?

This highly motivates us to live for God and to share our faith with others. I thank God that Warren Wilke shared the beautiful promise of everlasting life with me fifty years ago this September. May his tribe increase. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Bob Wilkin". The signature is fluid and cursive.

LOVE



HATE

If You Stop Loving Jesus

BY BOB WILKIN

If you stop loving Jesus, do you lose your salvation? A reader asks some heartfelt questions:

I am so confused about the logical outcomes of the theology being taught here [www.faithalone.org] and other grace doctrinal theologies. No doubt I agree with a lot of it, but I don't know what to think about my son who now hates Christ but at one time seemingly did not. Could someone still be a Christian while denying it all? Then too there are rapists and murderers who professed Christ. If they all believed at one moment like Martha, then I'm confused. I also know the lordship camp has holes in their theological boat too. ~R.M.

The problem here is not Scripture. The Scriptures are clear that whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has everlasting life that can never be lost no matter what happens in the future (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:25).

The problem is twofold.

TWO OBJECTIONS

First, it does not seem fair that bad people should be able to get into Jesus' kingdom. We tend to think that ungodly people must become godly people in order to have everlasting life. If bad people could have everlasting life, then it seems that people could misuse the grace of God to indulge their fleshly desires.

Second, most pastors and theologians teach that the only people who will make it into Christ's kingdom are those who persevere in faith and good works. So, the people R.M. mentions either will repent and get back on track, thus showing that they really are born again, or they will not, and the result would be that they end up being eternally condemned.

Let's deal with those objections in reverse order.


TWO REPLIES

It does not matter what most pastors and theologians teach. God tells us in His Word the condition of everlasting life. If most preachers and theologians say something contrary to God's Word, then they are wrong. We must believe what God says, not what our favorite preacher or teacher says.

The issue about bad people is very practical. R. M. views certain people, like murderers and rapists and people who hate Jesus, as bad people. So, who are the good people? Are good people those who avoid the big sins? If only "good people" have everlasting life, then salvation requires good works on our part. How many? There is the rub. One million good works and one sin would send a person to hell (Rom 3:21-31; Gal 3:10; Jas 2:10). Only God is good in the absolute sense. Jesus said, "No one is good but One, that is, God" (Matt 19:17; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19). When we believe in Jesus, then our faith is accounted to us as righteousness (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-5).

WHAT DID HE BELIEVE?

What about R.M.'s son? Is he born again, even though he now hates Jesus? He is *if he ever believed in Jesus for the free gift of everlasting life*. R.M. does not say that. He says that at one time his son did not hate Jesus. But did he ever believe in Him for his eternal salvation? If yes, then he is born again, even though now he hates Jesus.

If we must persevere in faith and good works to be saved, then no one can be sure of his eternal destiny until after he dies. We all would be doomed to go through life fearing an eternity in the lake of fire because we cannot be sure that we will persevere (1 Cor 9:27). But that is not what the Lord Jesus said. He said that if we believe in Him, then we know that we have everlasting life that can never be lost (John 11:26a). Our eternal destiny is not contingent upon our persevering in faith and good works. 

Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 45 years, Sharon. He is an avid bridge player and marathon runner.



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Romans 16

A Concise Commentary

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

BY ZANE HODGES WITH BOB WILKIN¹

PAUL'S COMMENDATION OF PHOEBE (16:1-2)

16:1-2. Evidently Phoebe is the bearer of the letter from Paul to the Romans. The word translated a **deaconess** (*diakonos*) can also be translated *a servant, an agent, or even a courier*. At the least Paul means that Phoebe served well in the church in Cenchrea.

Paul wants the church to **welcome her in the Lord** in a way **worthy of the saints**. That is, they were to house her, feed her, show her warm hospitality, and send her on her way with provisions. They were to assist her **in whatever matter she may need help** from the believers in Rome. She deserves such treatment because **she has proved to be a patroness** [or, *helper*] **to many and even to Paul**.

PAUL'S GREETINGS TO THE ROMAN CHRISTIANS (16:3-16)

16:3-5a. Paul in vv 3-16 is evidently listing every single house church or tenement church in the church of Rome *in which he knows someone*. Fifteen times he uses the verb "greet." However, most likely there were more churches than that. The church in Rome, counting all its house and tenement churches, probably had fewer than 1,000 members.

The first people he mentions are **Priscilla and Aquila**, whom he calls **my fellow workers in Christ Jesus**. Paul commends them in that they **risked their own necks for his life** (Acts 19:23-40). Paul indicates that **not only** is he thankful for them, but so also are **all the churches of the Gentiles**.

That Paul tells the readers to greet **the church that is in their house** shows that there was more than one house church in Rome. The early church had no church buildings like we do today. All church meetings took place in homes or tenements until the third century or so.

Since *Priscilla and Aquila* are mentioned first, and since Paul refers to *the church that is in their house*, their church probably was the largest of the churches in Rome.

16:5b-9. Each time Paul says **greet** (vv 3-15), he is introducing a new house or tenement church. **Epaenetus**, mentioned only here in the NT, is identified as **my beloved** and as **the firstfruits from Achaia for Christ**. Paul means that he was either the very first believer in the region of *Achaia*, or at the least, one of the first (cf. 1 Cor 16:15).

Miriam (or *Mary*), whom Paul says **has toiled much for us** was likely Jewish.

Andronicus and Junia receive special commendation from Paul: they are **highly regarded** [or *notable*] **among the apostles**, which means

they were well-regarded by *the apostles*. In other words, *the apostles* had a very favorable opinion of these faithful servants of Christ. Paul uses his famous **in Christ** expression to indicate that they were born again before he was.

Paul refers to both **Amplias** and **Stachys** as **my much-loved**, a sort of generic expression of his affection for them (cf. v 5b). He refers to **Urbanus** as **our fellow worker in Christ**, which most likely signifies not that he served directly with Paul, but that Paul knew of his service for Christ and considered him an ally in ministry for Christ.

16:10-12. Paul says **Apelles** is **an approved one in Christ**. Christ's approval is not something every believer will have (cf. 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Tim 2:15). We learn here that one can be *in a current state of approval*. If **Apelles** perseveres in his service for Christ, then he will remain approved and will receive Christ's approval at His Judgment Seat.

Paul also greets two families or households, those of **Aristobulus** and of **Narcissus**. He does not say of either family what he said of Priscilla and Aquila in v 5: "Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house." This suggests that these churches met not in homes, but in tenements.

Tryphena and **Tryphosa** are commended by Paul as those **who have toiled in the Lord**. These two women were probably sisters.

Another woman, **Persis**, is said to have **toiled a lot in the Lord**. While the addition of the words *a lot* might imply that Persis did more than **Tryphena** and **Tryphosa**, it seems more likely that Paul is simply varying his style in his brief comments about various people.

16:13-14. Paul says that **Rufus** is a **chosen one in the Lord**. Likely this is not a reference to election to some particular ministry, since no additional information is given. It means that **Rufus** is an *outstanding person* in Christ. This probably is the same **Rufus** whom Mark mentions in Mark 15:21.

That Paul refers to the **mother** of **Rufus** as also his own mother suggests that at some time she had displayed motherly affection and extended hospitality to Paul.

In v 14 Paul mentions five men **and the brothers who are with them**. The latter suggests that these five men and the unnamed *brothers* were part of a house church together.

16:15-16. **Philologus** and **Julia** are probably husband and wife. **Nereus** and **his sister** might be their children. **Olympas** was another person in their house church, and so were **all the saints** who are **with them**.

The call to **greet one another with a holy kiss** (on the cheek) is a common one in Paul's letters (cf. 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26) and reflects an early practice in the church. Greeting someone *with a kiss* was also common among Jesus' disciples when they walked with Him (Matt 26:49).

Paul ends his greetings to individuals in the churches of Rome with a reminder of the love all churches have for them: **The churches of Christ greet you**. All

churches are bound together since they all belong to and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

PAUL'S WARNING ABOUT DIVISIVE PEOPLE (16:17-20)

16:17-18. Paul now turns to a significant closing concern. Unity is not to be maintained at the cost of truth. If people in a church **cause divisions and snares** that are **contrary to the doctrine** (or *teaching*) of the apostles, then the church should **avoid them**.

Paul does not indicate who these divisive people are. These might be people already present in some of the churches. Or they might be people Paul anticipates will come later. His point is that such people are to be avoided and not allowed to hurt the churches.

Divisive people like this may have **smooth talk and flattery**, but their message is false. These

"The early church had no church buildings like we do today. All church meetings took place in homes or tenements until the third century or so."

people do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but instead their own belly. That is, they are saying things that will bring them money so they can eat well. And with their false teaching they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Each church must protect its members by not allowing people with contrary teaching to spread their false doctrines. Doctrine matters and must not be overlooked.

16:19-20. The believers in Rome whom Paul is greeting are not like the divisive people about whom he is warning them. The report of the readers' obedience has reached to all. That is, their godly behavior and sound doctrine are well known among all the Gentile churches. Thus, Paul rejoices over them.

Yet he still is concerned and wants them to be wise regarding what is good and innocent regarding what is evil. This describes what the role of elders in a local church should be. They ensure that sound doctrine is taught in the church.

The words, "now the God of peace shall crush Satan beneath your feet soon" allude to the protoevangelium in Gen 3:15. Paul is here referring to the Parousia. When Jesus returns, He will crush Satan under the feet of all believers. That the return of Jesus is soon is in keeping with the fact of imminency, which Jesus Himself taught (e.g., Matt 24:42-51; 25:13).

POSTSCRIPT AND BENEDICTION (16:21-24)

16:21. Timothy is Paul's trusted aide whom he here calls my fellow worker. Lucius is probably not the Lucius of Acts 13:1. It is possible this could refer to Luke, the writer of Luke-Acts.

Jason is a common Jewish name often used as a substitute for Jesus (Acts 17:5-9). This may well be the Jason from Thessalonica mentioned in Acts 17:5-9. **Sosipater** is likely the same person who accompanied Paul to Asia and who is called "Sopater of Berea" in Acts 20:4.

16:22. Paul dictated this epistle to an amanuensis. Tertius here identifies himself as the one who wrote this epistle. He too sends his greeting.

The words in the Lord probably signify the importance of this letter and that Tertius realizes he has been used by the Lord in this endeavor.

16:23. Gaius was evidently a wealthy man as he was Paul's host in Corinth as Paul wrote this letter and he was the host of the whole church (1 Cor 1:14).

Erastus, the city treasurer, also greets the church in Rome (Acts 19:22; 2 Tim 4:20). He was an important official in Corinth.

The final greeting comes from Quartus, whom Paul simply calls a brother. He is not mentioned anywhere else in the NT.

16:24. Paul often ended his epistles with the benediction: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. The grace, or favor, of our Lord Jesus Christ was not merely some sort of catchy religious phrase for Paul. It was a key to his life and ministry.

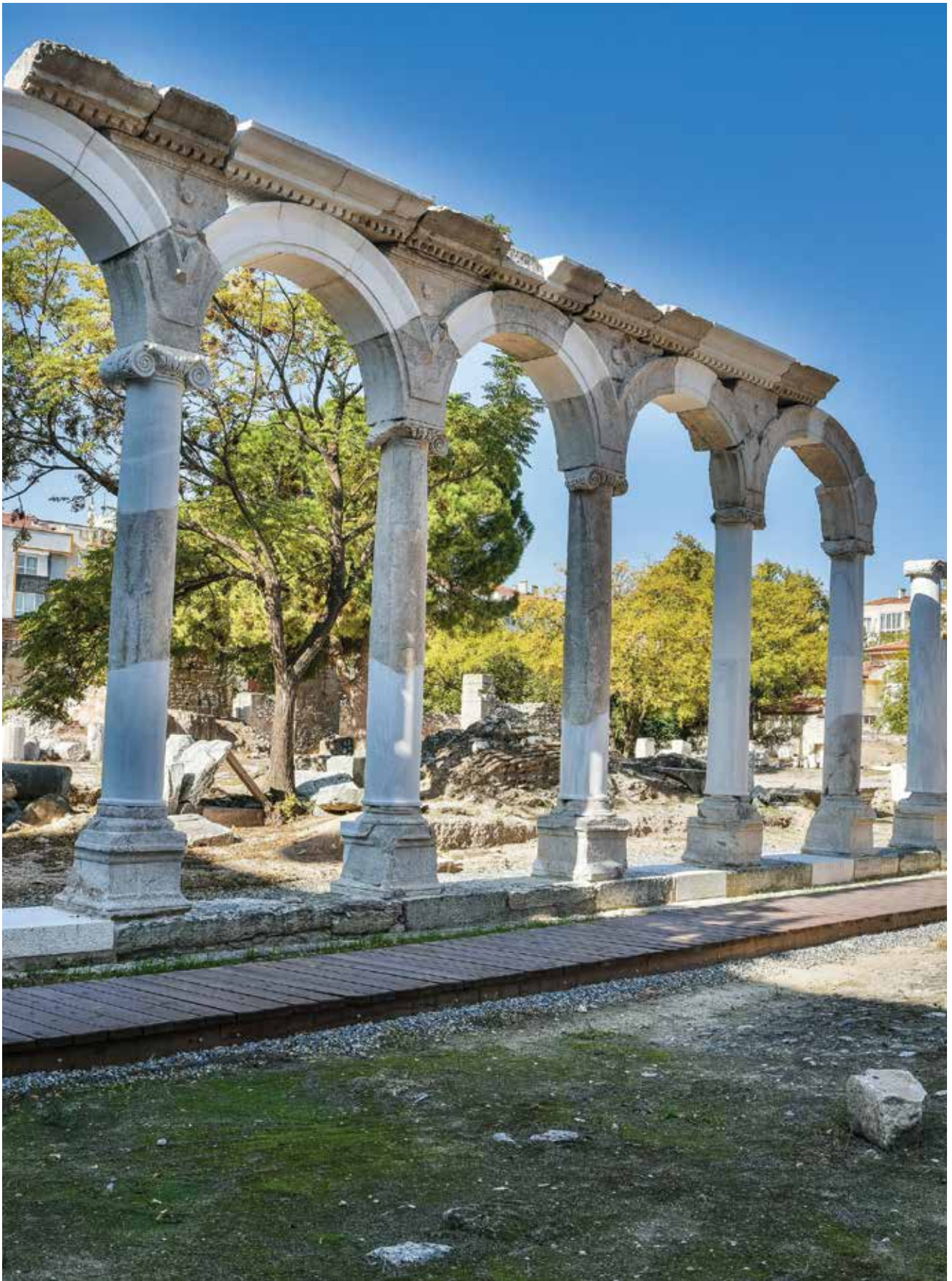
With these words Paul's grand letter to the Romans ends. The Critical Texts put three verses here, forming a sort of double ending to the letter. However, a double ending is not found in Paul's other epistles and most manuscripts have those verses as the end of chap. 14. See the discussion at Rom 14:24-26.

Properly understood, this letter is not an evangelistic tract (e.g., the Romans road). Instead, it is a primer on deliverance from God's temporal wrath by means of the gospel that Paul preached, the gospel of Christ (Rom 1:17). ■



Zane Hodges was a pastor, author, and professor of Greek at Dallas Theological Seminary.

1. Hodges died before writing the final two chapters of the commentary. Bob Wilkin wrote the commentary on Romans 15 and 16 using Hodges's notes.



ISTOCK

Sexual Sins in Thyatira

BY PHILIPPE R. STERLING

WHEN TEMPTED BY SEXUAL SIN: JUST SAY “NO!”

Jesus judged the church at Thyatira that tolerated immoral behavior (Rev 2:18-29).

We live in a sex-crazed world. Giving in to the world's sexual enticements will snuff out our spiritual fire. Sexual sin will pull us away from following Jesus. Heeding the message of the letter to Thyatira will help us arm ourselves against sexual temptation.

Our heading states *Just Say “No!”* We need to remain holy in a sex-crazed world. But our teaching about sex does not stop with, “Just say ‘No!’” The fact is that we also say “Yes!” to holiness, to sex as God meant it to be in the joyful union of a man and a woman in marriage (Gen 2:18-25; 1 Thess 4:1-8; Heb 13:4).

What happens to a believer who absorbs the world's view of sex and acts upon it? What effect does it have on his or her fellowship with Christ? That's an important matter that the Lord Jesus wants us to consider from the example of the church at Thyatira. The longest of the seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation was written to the church at Thyatira, the smallest of the seven cities, accentuating the importance of the message.

DESTINATION

Thyatira was about forty miles inland from Pergamum. It was not a major city, but it was a significant center for craftspeople and labor guilds.

The Book of Acts mentioned someone who came from Thyatira. Lydia, a businesswoman who sold purple cloth, was from this city (see Acts 16:13-14). Thyatira was known for its weaving and dyeing, among other trades such as pottery and bronze work.

The trades were organized into guilds that controlled the economic activity of the city. These guilds or trade unions had patron gods. They observed regular feast days for these gods that involved promiscuous sexual activities. Abstinence from the festivities of the guilds could jeopardize one's livelihood.

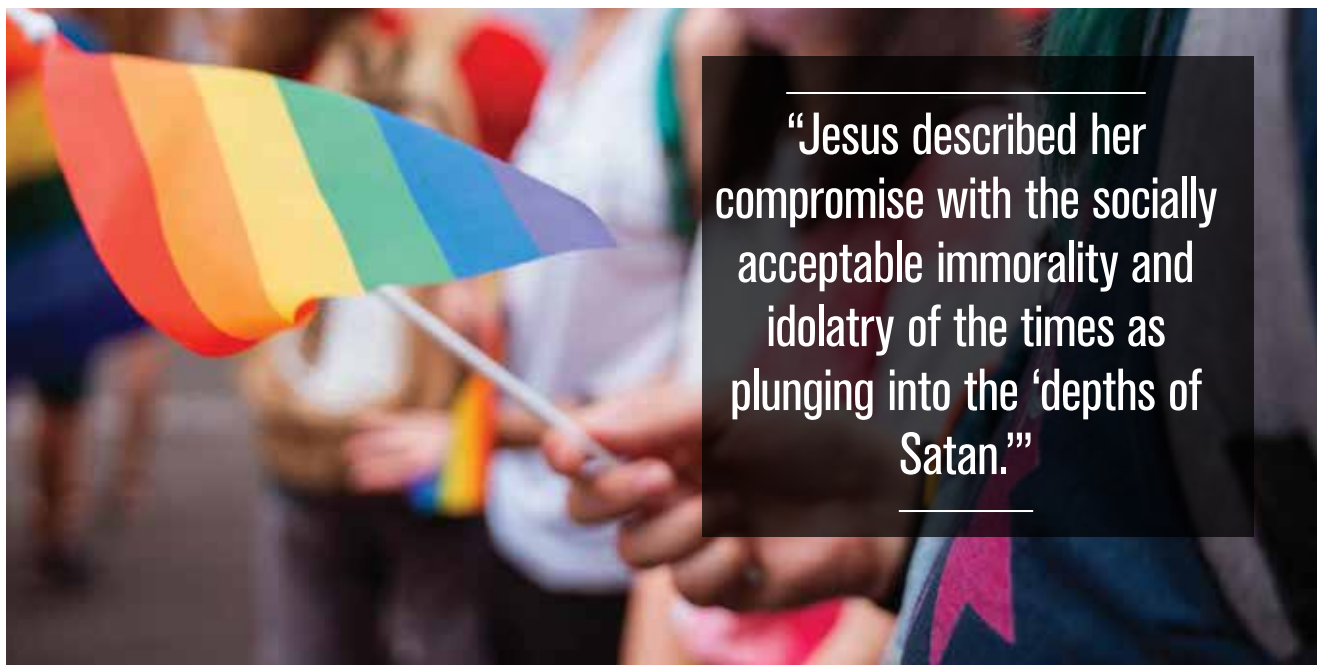
PORTRAYAL OF JESUS

The Lord presented Himself to this church as the divine Son of God who executed a searching judgment. He used terms that would have meaning to the craftspeople of Thyatira, especially to the smiths who worked with iron and bronze and fire.

Jesus stated that He was the *Son of God*. This identified Him as the divine Messiah who would one day rule the nations (see Ps 2:8-9 which is directly quoted in Rev 2:26-27).

Jesus had *eyes of blazing fire*. This depicted His piercing appraisal. The expression first appeared in Rev 1:14 and reappears in 19:12 in His climactic return. He searches the minds and hearts (v 23).

Jesus had *feet of burnished bronze*. This symbolized the judgment that was going to fall on those who did not repent.



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PRAISE FOR THE CHURCH

Jesus knew what was good about the church at Thyatira, such as their love, service, faith, patience, and the increase in their works. This may have included their worship of God, the sharing of their faith, and their care for the poor, and so on. The people of the church likely would have felt good after hearing that.

CRITICISM OF THE CHURCH

But there was a problem in Thyatira. A powerful woman in the church, symbolically called “Jezebel” (see 1 Kgs 16:31), had influence so great that she persuaded some of the believers to participate in the guild festivals, committing fornication and eating things sacrificed to idols (v 20). Good standing in the guilds may have been dependent on such participation. Just as the OT Jezebel, the pagan wife of King Ahab, led the Israelites astray, so this NT “Jezebel” was doing the same.

Jesus described her compromise with the socially acceptable immorality and idolatry of the times as plunging into the “depths of Satan.” This may be a reference to the idolatrous initiation secrets of the guilds inspired by Satan. “The depths of Satan” could contrast with what Paul in 1 Cor 2:10 calls “the deep things of God.”

The guilt of the believers at Thyatira was perhaps greater than that of the believers in

Pergamum. Pergamum had some people who held to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The believers at Thyatira tolerated the woman “Jezebel” and allowed her to remain in their fellowship to teach and seduce the servants of Jesus.

EXHORTATION

Jesus had issued a call for repentance (v 21), but the door of opportunity was about to close. The toleration of error had a long history. “Jezebel” had no disposition to change. She would continue her course of action. Jesus would soon afflict this woman and those influenced by her with severe sickness (vv 22-23).

PENALTY OR REWARD

The temporal punishment would fit the sin—“Jezebel” had sinned on a bed of adultery, so she would be punished on a sickbed. Those who followed her in her immorality would also experience great tribulation. This is not a reference to the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:21) but to the severe, temporal discipline of sinning believers. Sin may land a believer onto a sickbed (1 Cor 11:30).

The initial tribulation for the followers of “Jezebel” was meant to elicit their repentance (v 22). A lack of repentance would lead to premature physical death (v 23). God sometimes disciplines

His people with physical death. This happened with Ananias and Sapphira and the believers at Corinth (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:29-30). This was meant as a warning to all the churches. Jesus would give to each one according to his deeds. No believer is exempt from the Lord's discipline. If we sow to the flesh, we invite the Lord's temporal judgment and loss of eternal reward; if we sow to the Spirit, we reap present spiritual well-being and eternal reward (Gal 6:7-8).

Jesus encouraged those who had not compromised to remain faithful (vv 24-25). We live in a sex-crazed world: hook-ups, affairs, prostitution, pornography, cybersex. Hold on to what you have in Christ. What we have as believers is better than what others are promising. Guard your purity. "Just say 'No!'"

Jesus said, "I will put on you no other burden." This recalls the words of the letter to the Gentiles in Acts 15:28-29. The primary requirement for our sanctification is that we abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thess 4:3).

Jesus continued, "[H]old fast what you have till I come." That is, hold on to your love, faith, service, perseverance, and ever-increasing works. Hold on to these until Jesus returns. This could apply to the Rapture of the Church.

PROMISE TO OVERCOMERS

The overcomer is the one who keeps the work of Jesus to the end. Jesus promised the overcomer the privilege of ruling with Him over the nations and sharing in His royal splendor.

Jesus is going to come and rule the nations. Some believers of the church age will rule with Him, but not all. Only those who have earned that right by being faithful to the end of their lives, or until His coming for them at the Rapture of the Church, will have that right. Jesus will reward the faithful by making them rulers with Him.

Jesus will give the overcoming believer the morning star. He says in Rev 22:16 that He is "The Bright and Morning Star." This may refer to His royal splendor. Thus He may be promising the overcomer a share in His royal splendor. All believers will be glorified, but not all will share

the royal splendor of Jesus and the privilege of reigning with Him.

GENERAL ADMONITION

The order of the promise to the overcomer and the general admonition to hear what the Spirit says to the churches is reversed in this and the three remaining letters as compared with the first three. A reason for this may be to connect the rewards closely with the commendable response to Christ.

CONCLUSION

What would Jesus say (WWJS) to the church tolerating immoral behavior? "Just say 'No!'" The church at Thyatira, like the other six churches and the churches of today, should listen to the judgment of Jesus and heed the admonition of the Holy Spirit. Say "No!" to immorality and "Yes!" to holiness. ■



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

Elisabeth: My Hero

BY KEN YATES

This is an excerpt from a forthcoming book.

ONE YEAR LATER

July 14, 2021. Libby died exactly one year ago today. She was 35 years old. She was my daughter.

My wife, our daughters, and I went to her favorite restaurant for dinner in her memory. The waitress asked if we were celebrating something, and none of us knew exactly how to answer her. I guess for various reasons, we changed the subject and didn't tell her why we were there. I think part of it was we didn't want her to feel bad about asking the question. If we told her why we were there, she would have felt uncomfortable.

Another reason we didn't tell her was that we didn't know what to say. Were we there to celebrate Libby's life? Were we there to feel sad about our loss and how much we missed her? But I also think we didn't tell the waitress why we were there because we as a family wanted to remember Libby in a private way. That evening, however, I went home and began writing this book. I think others need to know some things about her. I feel strongly that some could benefit from learning more about her life.

CALL HER ELISABETH

For those reading this book, perhaps the first thing you need to know about her is that if you

had met her, you wouldn't have called her by the name Libby. It was a family nickname. Her real, given name was Elisabeth. When she was younger, everybody called her Libby. But when she was around twenty, she asked her sisters, her mom, and me if we would no longer call her that. She informed us that it made her sound like a little baby.

I think she may have gotten the idea from one of her favorite movies, *Anne of Green Gables*. It is the story of a young, orphaned girl whom an elderly brother and sister adopted. Neither of them had ever married and they were childless. They were looking for help on the farm they ran together.

It is a funny movie, in which the girl is known for being very talkative. At one point, she asks her adopted mother if she would do her a favor. Whenever her mother writes Anne's name, will she make sure she writes it "Ann with an e"? The girl then went on a long explanation about how "Ann" was just so plain, but Ann with an "e" (Anne) was so much more elegant.

Libby was like Anne in the movie. She took a certain amount of pride in that her real name was spelled with an "s" instead of a "z." She would point out to people that the older Bibles, like the King James Version, spelled it that way. In her





mind, Elisabeth was indeed an elegant name, much more so than the name Libby.

The adopted mother in the movie thought that was just silly and told Anne that she found no reason to do what she asked. Ann was a fine and dignified name after all, and it was a practical one.

I find a little bit of comfort in that fictional encounter. In one of many parental mistakes my wife and I made during her life, we told Libby that the family would not start calling her Elisabeth. It wasn't going to happen. She was always going to be Libby to us. Her mom and I said she would always be our baby, so it didn't matter one bit that the name Libby made her sound like one.

But we did make a compromise. We told her that we would ask people outside the family to call her Elisabeth from then on. She agreed that this was a workable solution. To our credit, from that time forward, the whole family did indeed introduce her to others as Elisabeth. But we reminded them that we would call her Libby so that they would not get confused. She never said it, but I know that she loved that arrangement.

In keeping with that agreement, I will refer to her as "Elisabeth" as I write this book. After all, whatever readers this book may have will overwhelmingly be non-family members. I am pretty sure Elisabeth would have smiled at this concession on my part.



SHE HAD CEREBRAL PALSY

To understand what will be said about Elisabeth in this book, there is something more important to know about her than what you would have called her. Elisabeth had cerebral palsy.

Cerebral palsy impacts those who have it in many different ways and with varying levels of severity. It can affect the ability to speak. It can affect different parts of the body. This impact can be mild, profound, and anything in between. The disease often results in various mental disabilities as well. Finally, a person can be afflicted with the disease at birth or at any time during his or her life.

In Elisabeth's case, she suffered an injury to her brain at birth. She had cerebral palsy her whole life. The most obvious sign that she had the disease was that she lost the vast majority of the use of all four limbs. She would never walk and could only use her arms and hands in very limited ways. It was challenging for her to sit up straight, as cerebral palsy prevented her from having enough strength in the core of her body to do so.

As a result, she was dependent upon others her whole life. She could not care for herself in any way. If somebody prepared it, she could eat with great difficulty certain finger foods. But she could not dress herself, clean herself, go to the bathroom, get in bed, or get up. She never took a step but had to use a wheelchair her whole life. In certain circumstances she could use an electric wheelchair, but most of the time she utilized

a manual one that a family member or friend pushed.

Fortunately, cerebral palsy did not affect her voice. Like Anne of Green Gables, she could talk clearly and loved to do so. She would talk about the movies she had seen or the books she had listened to on tape. Stories in the Bible, and even politics, were some of her favorite topics to discuss with others. It was easy to carry on a conversation with her.

In fact, it was so easy that you sometimes forgot that cerebral palsy had left her with certain learning disabilities as well. Elisabeth could only read slowly and with difficulty. Weakness in her eyes contributed to that situation. Things others take for granted—such as figuring out how much change you would get back from a twenty-dollar bill if an item costs ten dollars—were beyond her ability to figure out. She could not carry out the simplest of math problems. The same could be said about things like geography. She could tell you what state she was in but would not be able to show you on a map where that state was located.

NEGOTIATING SOCIAL SITUATIONS

An interesting aspect of her physical and mental disabilities was her sense of humor and her ability to negotiate certain social situations. Often, but not always, Elisabeth would see something as being very serious, even though it would be obvious to others that the person she was talking with was joking or using sarcasm. On many such occasions, the family reminded her that she had no sense of humor. We would have to point out to her that whoever she had been talking to was not serious.

Similarly, Elisabeth would sometimes not know if it was appropriate to say certain things. I will never know how often that happened, but I know there were many times she chose not to say something just to make sure she didn't say the wrong thing and hurt somebody else. She would never

want to hurt somebody's feelings by saying the wrong thing, and it would have been devastating to her if she did so.

In these social situations, she also didn't want to appear, in her words, "dumb." She realized she didn't sometimes understand the nuance of what was going on and would remain silent to not let others figure out that "secret" of hers. If there were an inside joke that she didn't understand, she would prefer that others thought she was in on it.

Simply put, my daughter Elisabeth lived a life full of difficulties. Just how hard certain things were for her, those of us without cerebral palsy simply cannot know. I came to realize that the

disease caused her to experience pain and discomfort, much of which our family was not aware. She simply lived with such things and accepted that they were part of her life.

On the other hand, there were sad parts of her life that all who knew her could grasp. She would never go on a first date or marry. Even though she said she

would have loved to have become a mother, that would never become a reality for her. The college experience would be out of her reach, as would holding a job and eventually becoming an independent adult, striking out in the world on her own. As she saw her sisters, other relatives, and friends experience all these things, I am not entirely sure how she processed her situation. I never heard her express resentment or jealousy over such things.

The fact of the matter was that she knew she would always depend on her family to care for her. While most might look at a situation like that and think how hard that was on the family, it is easy to overlook how hard it was for a person like Elisabeth. It is not an exaggeration to say it was harder for her, even in this area.

For several years Elisabeth attended a summer camp in Missouri called *Camp Barnabas*. It is a camp for children with a very, very large range

Simply put, my daughter Elisabeth lived a life full of difficulties. Just how hard certain things were for her, those of us without cerebral palsy simply cannot know.

of physical and mental disabilities. There are hundreds of children who attend each summer. The camp has a large number of young helpers. Some adults are cabin leaders, with each cabin having around 10 or 12 campers. In addition, each “camper” is assigned at least one of these young helpers, a high school or college student, to assist with all their needs. The campers and their aides participate in all kinds of activities together. The camp’s goal is to provide a summer camp experience where the campers are not excluded from anything they offer. They do things like sliding down a water slide, canoeing, and archery. Elisabeth loved going to the camp because so often in her life her disease prevented her from doing what those around her were doing. (As a side note, I cannot express how much my family and I are grateful to Camp Barnabas.)

One activity the kids like to do is stay awake on their bunks and talk before they sleep each night. This is an opportunity for teenagers with similar experiences to talk to each other. We can perhaps imagine how much more open they are with each other than with those who don’t understand. One year, Elisabeth’s cabin “mom” told me she listened as the kids engaged in this activity. She told me that all of them had something in common. They all said they wished they weren’t such a burden to those who loved them. In other words, these kids were laden with another difficulty that they often didn’t want to share even with those closest to them.

It is heartbreaking to realize that in addition to the obvious difficulties Elisabeth faced, others were not as obvious. For example, through the years, I realized that there were so many things we took for granted that she couldn’t do. If she was uncomfortable in her bed at night, she couldn’t adjust her body to a more comfortable position.

PEOPLE WOULD NOT TALK TO HER

Another area of difficulty for her, that most would not notice, is that she told me that she wished people who didn’t know her would talk to her when they met her. She pointed out that they always talked to me, her mom, or her sisters about her, even though she was right there! She would say, “They see my wheelchair and assume I cannot talk. I think sometimes, especially little kids are afraid of me.” I sometimes wonder how many things like this happened to her, of which I was totally oblivious.

I say all of these things just so that you, the reader, can get a picture of what Elisabeth’s life

was like—what she was like. Each person is complex, and she was no different in that regard. However, she lived in our home for thirty-five years, and most people have not had a person with her physical and mental circumstances live with them for such an extended time. Understandably, for most folks, it is difficult to understand what that involves.

Unless the reader has some

kind of mental picture of these things, the lessons I learned from Elisabeth cannot be shared. She was a living illustration of profound truths. Our family was fortunate enough to have her under our roof for all those years.

But everyone can benefit from her example. And that is the purpose of this book. Most of us cannot relate to the circumstances of Elisabeth’s life. But to some degree, we all currently have difficulties and will live with difficulties. We will experience the loss of loved ones. We will get sick. If we live long enough, almost all of us will need to rely on others. We might lose our livelihoods or businesses. The list goes on and on. Some will have even more difficulties than Elisabeth did. I am convinced that the things I learned from watching her can help all of us go through whatever trials we face both now and in the future.

“I am convinced that the things I learned from watching her can help all of us go through whatever trials we face both now and in the future.”

MY HERO

As I describe certain events in her life, one might be tempted to conclude that I am exaggerating things. I am, after all, a biased father. Dads are often accused of thinking their little girls are perfect and can do no wrong. It would be easy to read the words written here and conclude that I have fallen into that trap when it comes to what I have to say about Elisabeth. In talking about her, however, I want the reader to know I am not as blind as some might conclude.

I will admit that Elisabeth was a hero of mine. My dad was a career soldier and was in the military the whole time I was growing up. I spent almost 30 years in the military myself. As a result, I have met many heroes, and I know what they look like—men and women who are braver and better people than myself.

The Medal of Honor is given in the United States military to the bravest of the brave. For those who don't know, this medal is the highest honor our nation can give a soldier. It is extremely rare. There are only about 100 recipients of the honor living today. Their stories of bravery and sacrifice are truly awe-inspiring. Most who have received the medal did so at the cost of their own lives in battle, often by saving the lives of others. The honor is so great, it is improper to speak of a Medal of Honor "winner." They are called "recipients." This is because what they did is so heroic, a grateful nation gives them this honor through Congress. They have "received" this recognition from the country they served.

When I was in the military, I even had the privilege of working with two Medal of Honor recipients. I have met a few others after I retired. Of all the soldiers I have had the privilege of knowing, they surely stood apart.

But Elisabeth was the greatest hero I ever met.

Oh, I am sure that there are others who were and are greater, but I haven't been given the honor to live with them for over three decades. I was able to see Elisabeth's life up close and personal.

With that being said, let me assure you, that I know that Elisabeth was not perfect. Like all of us, she was a sinner. The Apostle Paul perhaps said it best when he wrote in Rom 3:10, "There is none righteous, not even one." A few verses later, he says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). These words were true of her, just as they are for all of us. The fact that she was my daughter and that she was clearly a better person than I am—a spiritual hero, if you will—does not change what Paul reveals about all of us.

"It may sound strange to say about a book whose title is *Elisabeth*, but when everything has been said, this book is not about my daughter at all. Jesus Christ is the subject of this book. It is about what He did in Elisabeth's life."

But the lessons from her life are not found in the universal truth that we all sin. They are found somewhere else. More accurately, they are found in Someone else. It may sound strange to say about a book whose title is *Elisabeth*, but when everything has been said, this book is not about my daughter at all. Jesus Christ is the subject of this book. It is about what He did in Elisabeth's life. The fact that she was a sinner magnifies His power and grace. Her physical difficulties just add to the absolute wonder of who He is and what He has done for her.

I was simply a witness to these things. I am just sharing what I saw in the hope that it can help others. The bottom line is that what Christ did for her, He can do for any of us.

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FIRST THINGS FIRST

To understand what Jesus did in Elisabeth, it is best to start at the best thing He did for her.

Even from a young age, Elisabeth loved to hear stories from the New Testament about Jesus. She was well aware of a promise He had made, which is good news for all of us. He repeated this promise on many occasions to many different people.

To a religious man, Christ pointed out, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.” Jesus is the Son of God that the Father gave to the world. The Son would die on a cross to pay for the whole world’s sins. As a result, Jesus made a promise: “All who believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

As they talked by a well, He made the same promise to a sexually immoral woman. If she only believed that He had the gift of eternal life to give to her and the ability to give it to her, she too would receive it and possess it forever (John 4:10-14).

To a large group of people listening to Him, Jesus promised the same thing. If they believed in Him for it, they would have eternal life (John 5:24). To another group, He guaranteed that, “the one who believes in Me has eternal life” (John 6:47).

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

I think Elisabeth’s favorite account in Christ’s life was the conversation He had with a friend of His named Martha. Martha’s brother, Lazarus, had died four days earlier, and Jesus and Martha were standing at the tomb in which he had been buried. Jesus promised this friend of His:

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And he who believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

Elisabeth understood exactly what Jesus was saying. He was saying that anybody, including her, who believed in Him for eternal life would receive it from Him.

But she also knew He spoke of a resurrection. If she believed in Him for eternal life, He also promised that her body would rise from the dead one day. He promised that her body, which was ravaged by cerebral palsy, was only a temporary situation. An eternity awaited her, an eternity in which she would live in a different kind of body altogether. A body that was not racked by pain and discomfort. A body that would not require her to depend on others for her every need.

Elisabeth believed what the Apostle Paul would say about this body that she would have one day because of what the Lord had done for and

promised her. Paul described our present bodies, as well as what the bodies of believers in Jesus Christ will be like in eternity:

It [our present body] is sown a perishable body [when it goes into the grave], it is raised an imperishable body. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power” (1 Cor 15:42-43).

Can you imagine what Elisabeth thought when she believed these words? She knew all too well about a physical body that was “perishable” and wasting away. She knew that her body certainly would not earn any honor on this earth but would cause others to pity her. People would often avoid eye contact with her and often not even speak to her because of that pity. Or perhaps they didn’t talk to her because they thought she was “dumb.” She certainly knew about a body that was full of “weakness,” one that would not even allow her to take care of everyday functions.

But here was the Son of God Himself, telling her that He loved her. He was promising her an eternal existence with Him. And that existence would be one in which she would have an “imperishable” body that was full of “glory” and “power.” In that body, the limitations of cerebral palsy would be a thing of the past.

Many people today hear such promises and are skeptical. There are different reasons for that skepticism. One possible reason for such an attitude can be a feeling of self-sufficiency. If we are well educated, healthy, strong, or perhaps rich, it is often more difficult to think about such things. Why should we look forward to eternity in the kingdom of God and a new body when the present age and our current body are just fine?

In addition, such self-sufficiency might lead one to simply not believe such an offer. After all, would Christ really offer for free a gift that is great? Surely, a person must do something for it? There is no such thing as a free lunch. It stands to reason that eternal life, the greatest gift, cannot be free.

Many even question whether there will be any kind of existence after this life. If there is, the religions of the world are full of people who are convinced they must do works to be part of the eternal kingdom of God.

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit plays an indispensable role when a person comes to faith in Christ for eternal life. The Spirit convinces the unbeliever of the truth of who Jesus is and the gift He has to give (John 16:7-11). Nobody can come to faith without this work of the Spirit as He reveals this truth—shines a light on that truth—to all who hear the message (John 6:44; 2 Cor 4:4).

But the person hearing may not believe what the Spirit reveals to him or her. The person may be unwilling to believe it (John 5:40). Again, a common reason for this is human pride or self-sufficiency. But here was the first great work of God that I saw Him do in Elisabeth. She did not have any such obstacle. Feelings of self-sufficiency were not a problem for her. She was totally dependent upon others. She knew she was “weak.” When the Spirit of God revealed to her that the greatest Man who ever lived said that she would live with Him forever and that He would give her a glorious body in the Resurrection, she simply believed what she heard. The gift was completely free. As horrible as cerebral palsy was in her life, God used it to help prepare her to receive the greatest gift in the universe.

Many would describe this kind of faith as a child-like one. And that is exactly what it was. While some would scoff at the simplicity of such a belief, Jesus said that only that kind of faith would result in eternal life. In a well known encounter, some children came to Him. The adults around Him tried to push the kids away. But He took the children in His arms and blessed them. He reminded those around him that it is only with a child-like faith that one can enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:15).


A child does not come to his parent expecting to work for acceptance. He does not think he must work to become the parent’s child. The child is dependent upon the parent and believes what he says. Such is the faith of a child.

Elisabeth never doubted when the Lord said that by faith alone, she would receive eternal life from Him and be His child forever. This is the very definition of a child-like faith.

Her mom homeschooled her for much of her life, and my educated guess is that she first

understood and believed when her mom spoke to her about the Lord. Whenever it was, she expressed from a young age the assurance that she would live with the Lord forever. One of the wonderful works of the Spirit in her life is that she maintained that child-like faith her whole life.

Because she had cerebral palsy for 35 years, you could say she was like a child all those years. Like a child, she would always be dependent upon others. That was how she lived her life. From a human perspective, I suppose that it also helped her simply rely upon the Lord to do what He had promised her.

This is one of the areas where the reader might accuse a dad of exaggerating. But I assure you I am not. She never wavered in her faith when it came to knowing where she would spend eternity. She always knew that she would be with the Lord. I am grateful for whatever role her difficulties played in that regard. 



Ken Yates is director of GES Missions. He has written a commentary on Hebrews. His book Elisabeth is forthcoming.

Partners in Grace



Women's Conference at Cypress Valley

IGLESIA DE FE

March 6 /
Indianapolis, IN

I (Ken) traveled to Indianapolis to speak at Iglesia de Fe (Faith Church). It is a Spanish speaking church that meets after the English speaking service in a church by the same name. I am trying to make connections in the city in order to get out the message of Free Grace. Indianapolis is where I taught in a Bible college last semester. That college has also asked me to teach a course this summer.

I enjoyed speaking at the church. I spoke on the woman at the well because I did not know their understanding of the gospel. It provided a great



opportunity to clearly present the message of eternal life. In addition, I enjoyed the opportunity to practice my Spanish. If they were not able to understand me, they were polite enough not to let me know. They were also very nice.

At this time, the church does not have a pastor. They have asked me back to speak again in May, and I am planning on doing so. In March, some of the members were out sick. Here is a picture of those who were able to come.

BAYSIDE AND SPRING BREAK

March 13-18 / Tampa, Dade City, FL

I (Shawn) and my family went to Bayside Community Church in Tampa. I preached on why the law cannot sanctify, based on Rom 7:1-13. And then I preached on Jesus' invitation in Matt 11:28-30 for the weary to come



Little Everglades Ranch

to Him for rest. Afterwards, our family got to enjoy some rest at Little Everglades Ranch.

A big thank you to Harley Riedel for arranging the stay. And thank you to Scott and Mary Sayre for visiting and bringing groceries.

Pray for wisdom for the board of the ministry running Little Everglades as they seek to know how best to use the property for the Lord.

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

March 26 / Marshall, TX

I (Kathryn) spoke twice at Cypress Valley Bible Church for their annual women's conference, where they had around 120 women in attendance.

In my first session, I spoke on John 3:16 and eternal life being a free gift for all who simply believe in Jesus for it. There were many women who were visiting, and we wanted to make sure a clear gospel message was given.

I was also asked to speak on Rom 8:5-6 and what it means to "walk by the Spirit." The response was wonderful. There were many women in attendance who had never heard a clear gospel message. Two examples in particular were very encouraging.

During a small group discussion time after the session, there was a woman who mentioned that she had been a part of a church that taught that if you didn't speak in tongues, then you weren't saved. She expressed how significant the clear gospel message was in light of coming out of such a strong works-based background.

In another discussion group, there was a young woman who had originally been a Jehovah's Witness. She sparked a conversation on eternal security which allowed for clarification, and the response was very encouraging.



Ambassadors International University, Zambia

A special thank you to Cypress Valley for having me and for their faithfulness in sharing a clear message of eternal life to all who believe.

VISTA RIDGE BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

March 27 / Lewisville, TX

I (Bob) gave an overview of the ten Bible words that I cover in *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*. We had good interaction.

Then, in the worship service, I spoke on James 1:12-18, "Handle Trials Well by Loving God." The message was well received.

Starting next month, I will be teaching an adult Sunday School class at Coppell Bible Fellowship.

HEADED TO ZAMBIA, PLUS NEW PODCAST

We (Ken and Kathryn) have officially booked our tickets for our trip to Zambia in May, and now we are in the process of getting everything ready. Prayers for travel plans would be appreciated. This will be our 5th year going to Zambia to teach at Ambassadors International University.

Ken will be teaching the junior class on Romans, while Kathryn is teaching the freshmen course on salvation.

Lord willing, we fly out May 5th.

We also recorded the first episode of "Grace Through the Bible," our new podcast! Our goal is to discuss whole books from a Free Grace perspective.



The Mailbag

BY YOU

Thanks for your hard work in the ministry of the saving message of the gospel. You have given us an incredible website that we can go to and get information if we have questions we can't answer. We consider it an honor and a blessing to give to this ministry.” ~C.K.Q., Gratiot, WI

“God bless you, Bob and Shawn. I became a believer in Free Grace two years ago, but my family still believes in Lordship Salvation and go to a Lordship Salvation church...Keep up the good work.” ~J.D., email.

“Thank you for all that you do to keep reaching out to win souls to Christ, to give them the assurance and the peace that comes from knowing they have it when they first believe in Jesus.” D.C., email.

“I just wanted to say thanks to everyone involved in putting together the podcasts. I've really enjoyed listening to them on YouTube. Shawn and Bob complement each other very well. It's cool to hear them joke around and have fun while answering tough questions.” ~R.B., email.

“Hi, guys, I love the show and the format. Thank you for the resource!” M.F., email.

“We listen to your podcasts on Apple Podcasts and see you all on YouTube. Thanks for your ministry. It is so helpful.” ~J.M., Santa Teresa, NM

“Thank you very much for your ministry. I have purchased some of your books through Logos. I have learned many things from you guys!” ~R.T., email.


“Thank you so much for the encouragement you send out in your blogs. I read them everyday.



123RF

In a world of despair, your words are a beam of light for me and my wife. The magazine is read in a few days, cover to cover. Hope the donation helps.” ~R.P., Bismark, ND

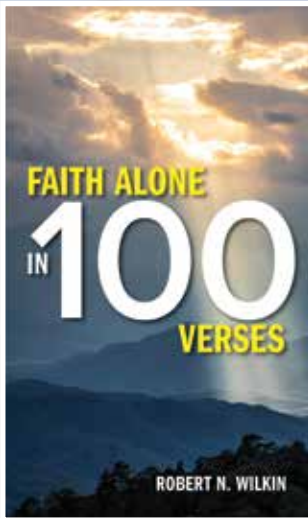
“I have been loving your latest emails, especially in regards to faith not being a choice.” ~J.E., email.

“Thank you for your ministry. You are honoring and glorifying the Lord Jesus by “handling accurately the Word of truth” and by sharing accurately the message of life! Thank you for all you are doing!” ~S.P., Forest, VA. 

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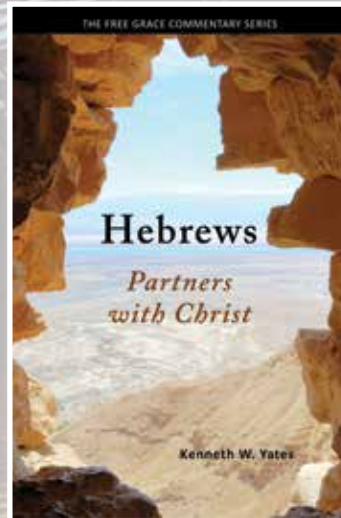


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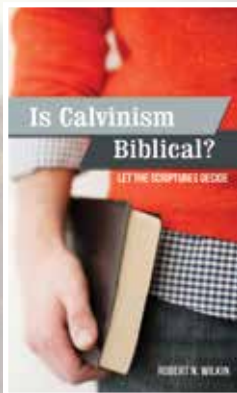


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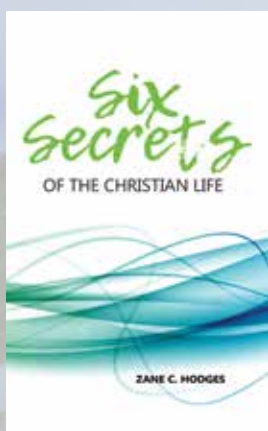
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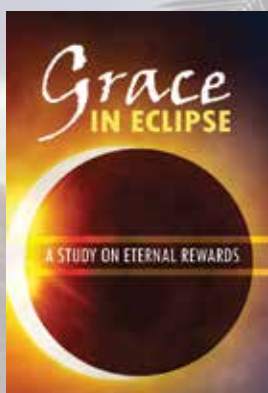
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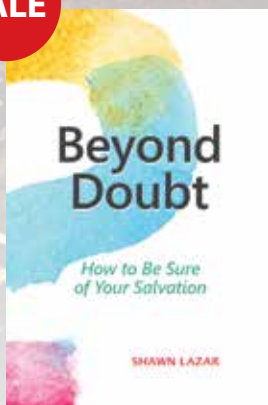
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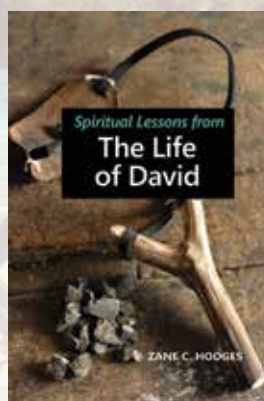


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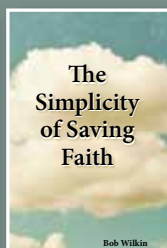
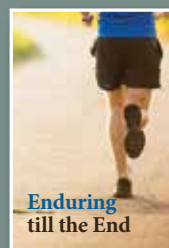
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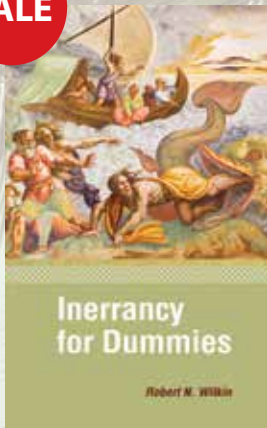


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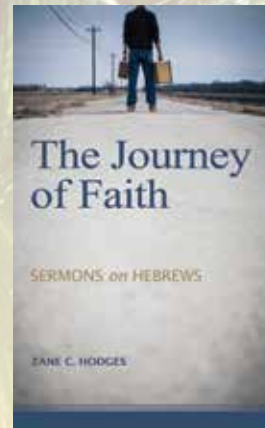
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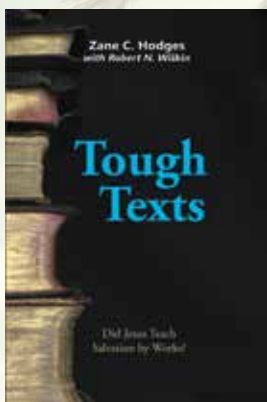
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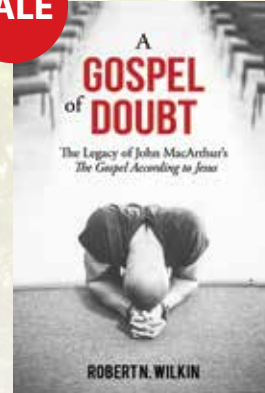


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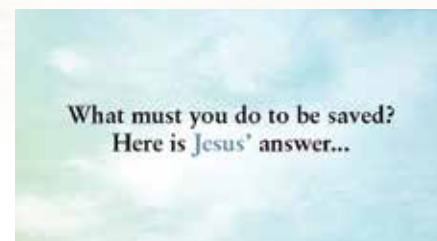
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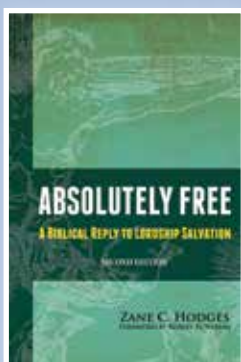
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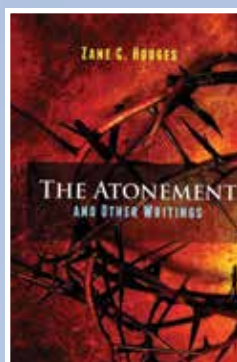


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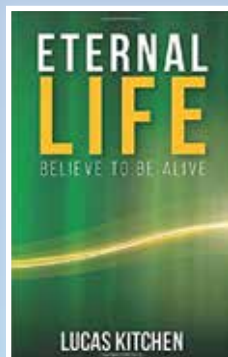


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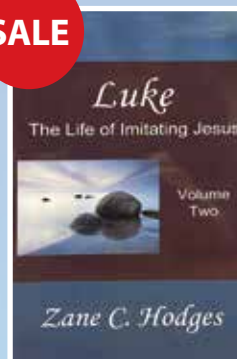
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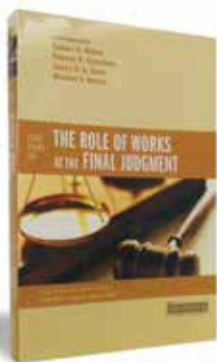


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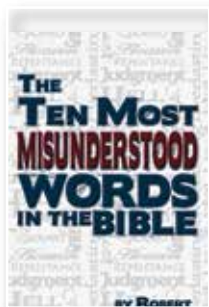
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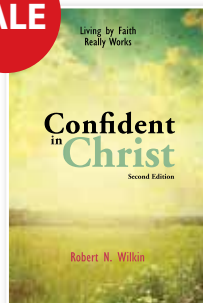


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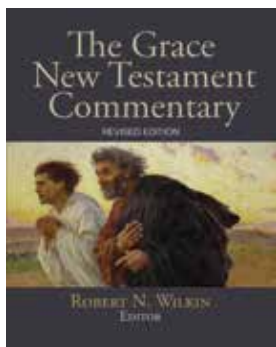


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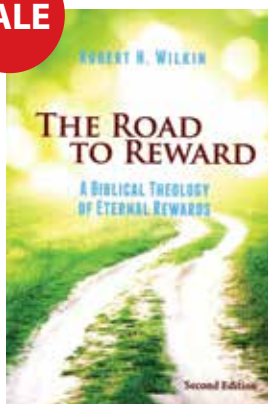
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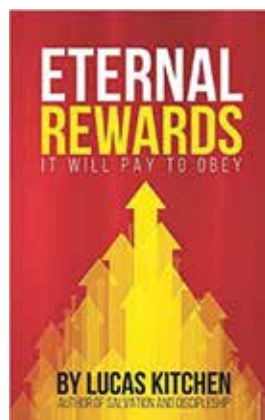
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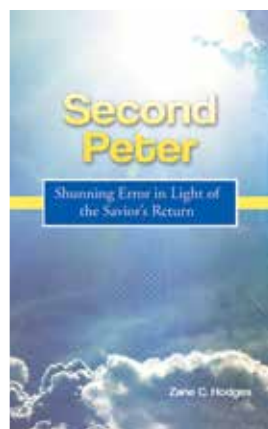
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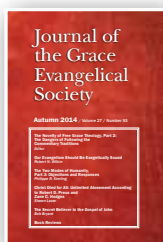
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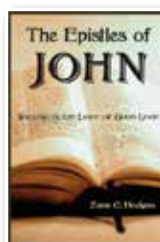
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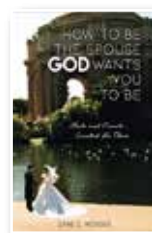


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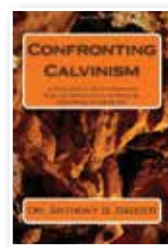
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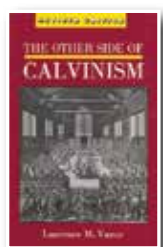


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123RF

He Never Stops Working

BY CHRIS CLARK

A few months ago, I attended a three-day prayer summit with a group of pastors and ministry leaders. I came away from that time encouraged and energized. I was reminded that *God never stops working*.

That is one of several truths we discover in the Lord's raising of Lazarus from the dead as recorded in John 11.

If you are familiar with the story, you know the highlights. Lazarus was sick and died. Jesus arrived at the scene four days later. He had a discussion with Martha. He raised Lazarus from the dead.

But let's dig a little deeper.

KEEP YOUR EYES ON MARTHA

In vv 1-2, John introduced the situation: "Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick."

John also identified Mary as the one who anointed Jesus with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, even though that event occurs in the next chapter, John 12. So, at this point in the narrative, Mary is the sister highlighted, not Martha.

But keep your eye on Martha as John continues reporting.

John reported in v 3 that when Lazarus was ill "the sisters sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.'"

Based on what they had already observed and knew of Jesus, the sisters knew that Jesus was the One who could heal Lazarus. It made sense, then, that they sent word to Jesus. They assumed that He would drop everything and hurry to Bethany to heal Lazarus before things got worse.

Yet that was not what happened: "When Jesus heard that, He said, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'"

That sounded like good news, i.e., the sickness wasn't fatal. The Son of God would be glorified. No one questioned it, likely because no one *understood* what He meant.

But v 4 needs to be understood in the context of the next two verses. Let's take a close look at v 5: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

Take careful note of the order described by John. Up to this point, the sisters were known as Mary (1st) and Martha (2nd). Lazarus was the one who was sick, described by his sisters to Jesus as "he whom You love." Yet it was *Martha* who is listed first as the ones loved by Jesus. Mary is not even mentioned by name, but is simply "her sister." Lazarus, the one who was sick and died, is mentioned last. The order is significant, as the context of unfolding events demonstrates.



LIGHTSTOCK

WHAT LOVE WOULD DO

Immediately after stating this truth, in v 6 John described Jesus' next action done in the context of that love: "So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was."

John tells us in v 17 that Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived in Bethany. Most commentators believe Lazarus died while the messengers were coming to Jesus, likely a one-day journey. Jesus already knew that he was dead (see vv 13-14). So, Jesus' response to the news was shocking—He stayed where He was two more days. That doesn't line up too well with our understanding of love, does it? If any of us had received similar news about someone we love, we would drop everything and do whatever it took to get to where that loved one was.

And yet Jesus "loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus."

Moreover, this sickness "is so the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Who would be the first to observe the glory of the Son of God described in verse 4?

Who in v 5 was listed first of those loved by Jesus?

Who was the one who, upon hearing that Jesus had arrived, went out to meet Him face to face?

It was *Martha*.

Look at v 20: "Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house."

Mary stayed in the house, mourning her brother's death. *Martha* went out and met Jesus, face to face, in her moment of despair, when Jesus did not seem to be working. But He *was* working! *God never stops working on behalf of those whom He loves.*

Martha expresses her faith and her frustration in vv 21-22: "Now Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.'" *If You had been here, my brother would not have died.* Can you hear the pain and the despair of Martha's statement? She brings every bit of her pain and her despair and lays it directly in front of Jesus.

What's more, Jesus didn't scold her or chastise her. He listened. He understood.

And because we are in Christ, we can do the same thing: we can lay our hearts bare before the Creator of the universe.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we can bring everything to God in prayer (Phil 4:6). The writer

of Hebrews urges us to come to God boldly with what is on our hearts (Heb 4:16).

THINKING ABOUT RESURRECTION

Instead of explaining why He delayed coming or why Lazarus died, Jesus pivoted the discussion to a new topic: *life after death*. Notice His response to Martha in v 23: “Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’”

Martha thought she understood what Jesus meant. The Jews at that time believed that one day the believing dead would be raised to life to live with their Messiah in His kingdom (see passages such as Job 19:25-27; Dan 2:24-45; 7:9-14, 26-27; 12:1-3). She knew that Lazarus was a believer and thus he would rise again on the last day. But she did not know that he would rise from the dead *in a few minutes*.

Jesus made one of His famous “I am” statements at this time: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

(For a thorough explanation of the significance of Jesus’ declaration here—that He promises physical resurrection and life that lasts forever—I highly recommend studying *The Grace New Testament Commentary*. Space does not permit a more exhaustive discussion.)

Consider for a moment the fact that Jesus *could* have healed Lazarus remotely by simply saying a word (as He did in Matt 15:21-28). It certainly would have been a magnificent miracle if He healed Lazarus while the messengers were on their way. When they arrived, He could have said, *I healed Lazarus as soon as you set forth on the journey*.

But Jesus didn’t. He waited. For two days, plus the one-day journey there.

Why is that significant?

Why did Jesus wait?

For *Martha*.

Because He *loved* Martha, her sister, and Lazarus.

He loved Martha so much that He took the occasion to give her the opportunity to make the greatest confession in John’s Gospel: “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God,

who is to come into the world” (John 11:27). Compare that with John 20:31, the purpose statement. John 11:25-27 has been used to lead untold millions to faith in Christ.

We are not told of all the mighty miracles and fantastic teaching that the Lord Jesus did during those three days after He received word that Lazarus was sick. But He was busy doing His Father’s business, even when Lazarus was dead, buried, and decaying.

However, we *are* told of the miracle of raising Lazarus from that state of death and decay. This was the seventh of the Lord’s eight signs (the eighth being Jesus’ death and resurrection, John 2:18-22) that John recorded, the purpose of which was to lead the unbeliever to believe that Jesus is the Christ, in whom we receive everlasting life. So, the Lord’s apparent delay was in fact part of His perfectly timed plan to lead future readers of John’s Gospel to believe in Him.

Are *you* in a season of your journey with Jesus where He seems to be absent? Where He doesn’t seem to be answering you when you pray? When He seems to have stopped working in your life?

Remember Martha.

Remember that even when it seems like He’s not working, He never stops working. **GM**



Chris Clark is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX, and he was the Pastor of East Clairemont Church in San Diego, CA for 24 years (1998-2022). He and his wife Terri have 4 kids, 2 grandkids, and are moving to Waterford, MI.

Two Pieces of the Armor of God

BY KATHRYN WRIGHT

INTRODUCTION

I remember taking a mandatory class for all future teachers in my senior year of college. Midway through the semester, the teacher gave us a group project: we had to create a lesson plan that could be applied to all our subjects. For example, if the history teacher discussed the civil rights movement and segregation, the teacher might assign a book report for *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

As usual with group projects, one person did the bulk of the work; one guy didn't even show up, and the rest just complained about how it was done wrong. While we ultimately finished, the project suffered. However, looking back, the idea behind it was excellent. If a student were to have a full day of classes in which she went to math class, then science, then English, and each course was building on the previous one, it undoubtedly would help the student understand the material in a well-rounded way.

Sadly, most teachers never develop lesson plans in light of the other teachers. We typically stay in our lane and ignore each other. I think the same thing is often true in our churches.

In Ephesians 6, Paul tells his readers to put on the armor of God. If we look at the context of Ephesians, we see that he is not telling individual believers to do it alone, but to function as a team. He is talking about the church. In many ways, it is like a group project. In this article, I would like to discuss the first and last pieces of armor the church is told to put on. In doing so, I hope to show that putting these things on is something the church is to do.

THE INDIVIDUALISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE BELT OF TRUTH

In Eph 6:14, Paul tells the church to gird their waist with the truth, often referred to as the “belt” of truth. A common individualistic interpretation of the belt of truth is that it means each Christian should be honest and trustworthy, especially to those outside the church.

THE INDIVIDUALISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

In Eph 6:17, Paul lists the last piece of the armor, the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” This, too, is often applied to the individual and interpreted to mean each believer should read his Bible, memorize the Scriptures, and be prepared in every situation to speak the Word of God. Commentators often note the sword is the only offensive piece of armor.

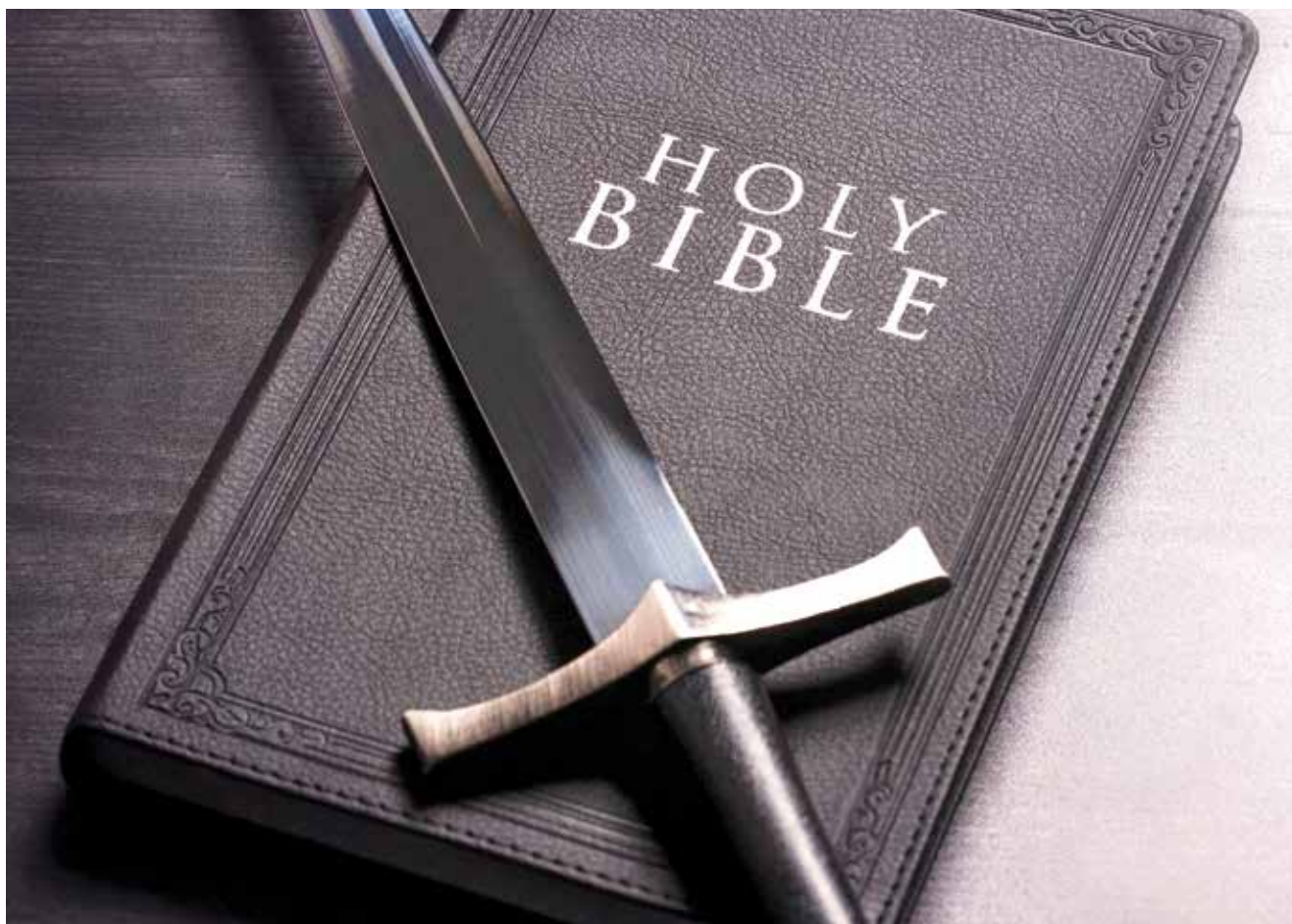
As with the belt of truth, many think believers should use this piece of armor against unbelievers. In this view, the Word of God is to be used to attack enemy forces. When we speak the truth to unbelievers, we do so with the Word of God. In other cases, we are told we use the Word of God to rebuke Satan and his demons.

But is that what Paul wants to say about these two pieces of armor?

EPHESIANS IS ABOUT THE CHURCH

Throughout Ephesians, Paul discusses the church, which is the major theme of the book.

For example, in 4:1-6, he discusses how believers are to function together *as a body*. This is important when we look at what Paul means by “truth.” While talking in 14:15 about the church, he tells them to “speak the truth in love.” Paul is not talking about speaking the truth to those outside the church. In the very next verse, he says that the *whole body* works together so that the body might grow. This occurs through love and edifies the body (4:16). Hence, in 4:15, speaking the truth in love *is to edify and build up the Body of Christ*. Paul has stressed that Gentiles are included in the church and have equal rights within the Body of Christ (3:6), which would



undoubtedly be part of the truth the church is to proclaim.

Paul makes it clear that he wants believers to speak the truth to one another: “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for *we are members of one another*’” (emphasis added).

While it is true that believers should be honest with everyone, Paul’s focus here is not on our unbelieving “neighbors” but on members of the church body. This would have been especially difficult at the church of Ephesus, where Jewish and Gentiles were coming together for the first time (Eph 2:14-15).

The discussion of the armor of God begins with a warning. The church is in danger (6:12-13). Satan wants to cause division within the church. He spreads lies within our churches. How do we combat this attack? As the church, we need to speak the truth to *one another* to maintain unity (4:1-5). It begins at home, with the family of God.

THE WORD IS FOR EDIFICATION

When we address the topic of speaking the truth, the last piece of armor plays a vital role. The Word of God is the source of truth. Chapter 4 also tells us what Paul means by it. When Paul discusses the spiritual gifts, he focuses on the teaching gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers). These gifts are to be used “for the equipping of the saints and...the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). Once again, the emphasis is on the church.

Interestingly, when Paul speaks of the spiritual gifts, he speaks of the danger that the church is in, just as he does when he tells the church to put on the armor of God. The church has been given teachers to speak the Word of God so that it can understand sound doctrine and not be tossed about by the lies of Satan or the men who do his work. The church needs teachers so it will not be tricked or deceived (4:14).

HOW DID THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS DO?

Paul instructs the church at Ephesus to put on the armor of God. Part of that armor involves speaking the truth to each other in the church, especially as it relates to sound teaching from the Word of God. This is important because Satan is an enemy of the church (cf. Rev 2:10, 12-13, 24; 3:9) and wants to cause disunity and fighting among believers. He brings in false teachers to accomplish these goals.

In Revelation, the church at Ephesus was one of the churches being attacked (Rev 2:1-7). The church was strong on sound doctrine and tested their teachers, and the Lord praised them for doing so. When it came to the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God—they were strong.

However, the Ephesians had fallen away from their first love. People argue about whether this refers to their love for God or one another. We can rest assured that if their love for God had become cold, so would their love for each other. In such an environment, they would not be speaking the truth to each other in love. The unity in the church that Paul wrote about in the Book of Ephesians would not be achieved.

We see here the importance of the armor of God. Because the Ephesians had failed in the area of putting doctrinal truth into practice, Jesus says that church was in danger of losing its effectiveness (Rev 2:5). Lack of effectiveness is Satan's goal when it comes to Christian churches.

CONCLUSION

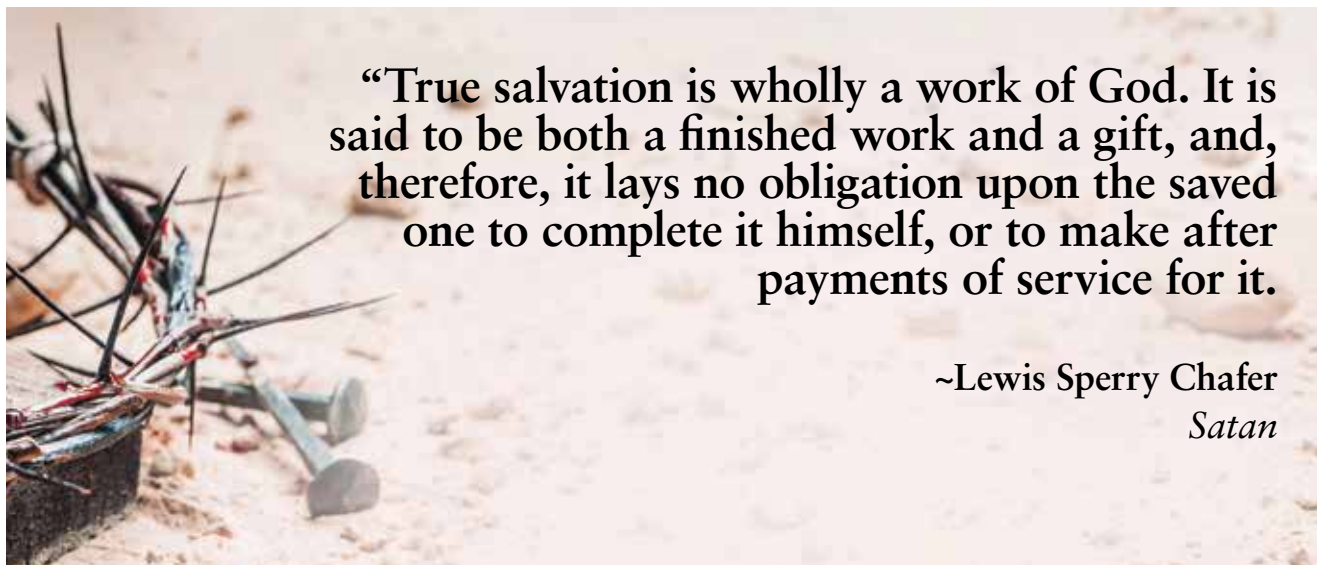
I recently heard an interesting fact about group projects. Studies show that when a group is working on a project, negative feelings about someone outside of the group (i.e., the teacher) brings the group together and leads to better work. However, negative feelings about someone inside the group can tear it apart.

If I could apply this principle to the church, we need to remember Satan wants us to fight each other and not him.

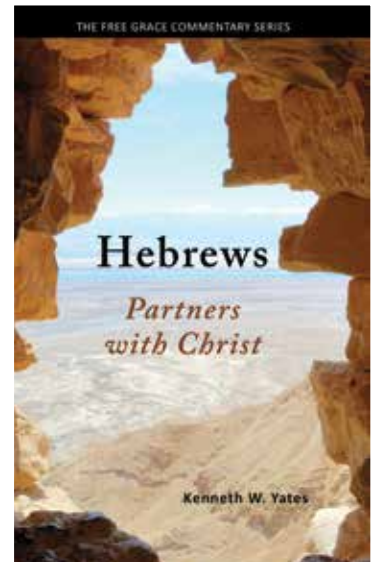
Group projects are hard. They require us to submit to one another (Eph 5:21). They force us to put the group over individual pride and desires. Thankfully, the Lord has provided a wealth of tools to accomplish this goal. We have been given His Word and the truth, and He has made us members of His body. As a body, let us use the armor He has given us to glorify Him (Eph 3:21). ■



Kathryn Wright is the GES Missions coordinator and does far more work than that title suggests.



Book Spotlight



We released Ken Yates's book, *Hebrews: Partners with Christ*, in 2019. It is a commentary on the Book of Hebrews. Even though it is written for the lay person, pastors and Bible study leaders can benefit from it as well. In fact, many have commented that they have used it for various discussion groups.

The Book of Hebrews has troubled many believers because of its severe warning passages. Many have claimed that these warnings tell people to hold firm to their faith or they will lose their eternal salvation. Others say they mean if you don't hold on, you were never saved in the first place. Both of these views are unbiblical.


Yates shows that the Book of Hebrews is all about rewards in the coming kingdom of God. The readers were being persecuted for their Christian faith, and the author tells them to remain faithful until the end. When the King comes, He will reward them greatly. If Christians deny Christ, they will be in the kingdom, but they won't reign with Christ.

Hebrews also highly elevates the Lord. The two main themes of the book are that Jesus is the King of the world to come and our great High Priest.

If the warning passages in Hebrews have ever troubled you, this book will be a great help. It would also be a good resource for anybody who wants to teach the book to others.

In addition to buying one or more copies, we encourage you to take the time to give the book a review on Amazon. People who are not aware of our ministry rely upon reviewers to gain insights into our books. Just a few minutes of your time might result in hundreds of people deciding to read this book.



Follow this QR code to order *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* for just \$10. 

Miracles Are Possible

BY DIX WINSTON

“If we admit God, must we admit Miracle? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain.” ~C. S. Lewis

A certain pastor observed a little girl standing outside the preschool Sunday school classroom between Sunday school and worship, waiting for her parents to come and pick her up for “big church.” The pastor noticed that she clutched a big storybook under her arm with the title “Jonah and the Whale.”

Feeling mischievous, he knelt beside the girl and asked, “What’s that you have in your hand?”

“This is my storybook about Jonah and the whale,” she answered.

“Tell me something,” he continued, “do you believe that story about Jonah and the whale?”

The girl said, “Why, of course I believe it!”

The pastor inquired further, “You really believe a man can be swallowed up by a big whale, stay inside him all that time, and come out okay?”

She declared, “Yes! This story is in the Bible, and we talked about it in Sunday school today.”

Then the pastor asked, “Can you prove to me this story is true?”

She thought for a moment and then said, “Well, when I get to heaven, I’ll ask Jonah.”

Finally, the pastor asked, “What if Jonah’s not in heaven?”

The girl put her hands on her hips and sternly declared, “Then *you* can ask him!”



ISTOCK

THE IMPORTANCE OF MIRACLES

Miracles are central to Christianity. Other religions would not suffer harm from lack of miracles, but if you were to remove them from Christianity, you would leave a lifeless carcass. In this article, I aim to do three things. First, I will define what a miracle is. Second, I will clarify two common misconceptions concerning miracles. And third, I will offer a logical authentication that miracles have occurred.

DEFINING THE MIRACULOUS

If you ask the average person to define a miracle, you will get many different answers.

For instance, after the birth of our grandson, Gunnar Titus Winston, many people commented about the “miracle of birth.”

When the Boston Red Sox won the World Series, some called it a miracle.

When Lyle Lovett married Julia Roberts, many called that a miracle.

Now, while birthing babies, breaking the “curse of the Bambino,” and a beautiful babe marrying

a homely man are all *rare* occurrences, they are not *miraculous*.

A miracle is more than a natural or unique event, but “a special act of God that interrupts the natural course of events.”¹ The key here is that it is an *interruption*. An *interruption* of nature requires an *Interruptor*, God, who is above nature. So, a genuine miracle requires God to interrupt what would have normally or naturally taken place.

God *interrupts*, not *disrupts*. Some might argue that this natural interruption would lead to chaos, but that is the distinction between an interruption and a disruption.

For example, the difference is similar to the law of gravity versus the law of aerodynamics. The law of gravity says that a 747 will not float off the ground. But the law of aerodynamics says that if sufficient lift is generated over the prevailing edge of its wings due to those wings moving through the air, gravity will be interrupted, as long as sufficient lift is maintained.

So a miracle does not disrupt the natural order. It is simply a Higher Being’s acting on the normal course of events.

IS NATURE ALL THERE IS?

Some people do not believe that miracles occur today. They are called naturalists. That is, they do not believe in a supernatural interruption. One of the most vocal and effective critics of miracles was the Scottish naturalist David Hume (1711-1776).

Hume became skeptical and scornful of the miraculous. He wrote *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* in which he thought quite highly of his argument against the miraculous. In his *Introduction* he said, “I flatter myself that I have discovered an argument...which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion and consequently will be useful as long as the world endures.”²

Geisler summarizes Hume’s argument as follows:

1. A miracle is by definition a rare occurrence.
2. Natural law is by definition a description of regular occurrence.
3. The evidence for the regular is always greater than that for the rare.
4. Wise individuals always base belief on the greater evidence.
5. Therefore, wise individuals should never believe in miracles.³

The weakness and fallacy of Hume’s argument is in what he called regular or “uniform” experience. As Norm Geisler noted:

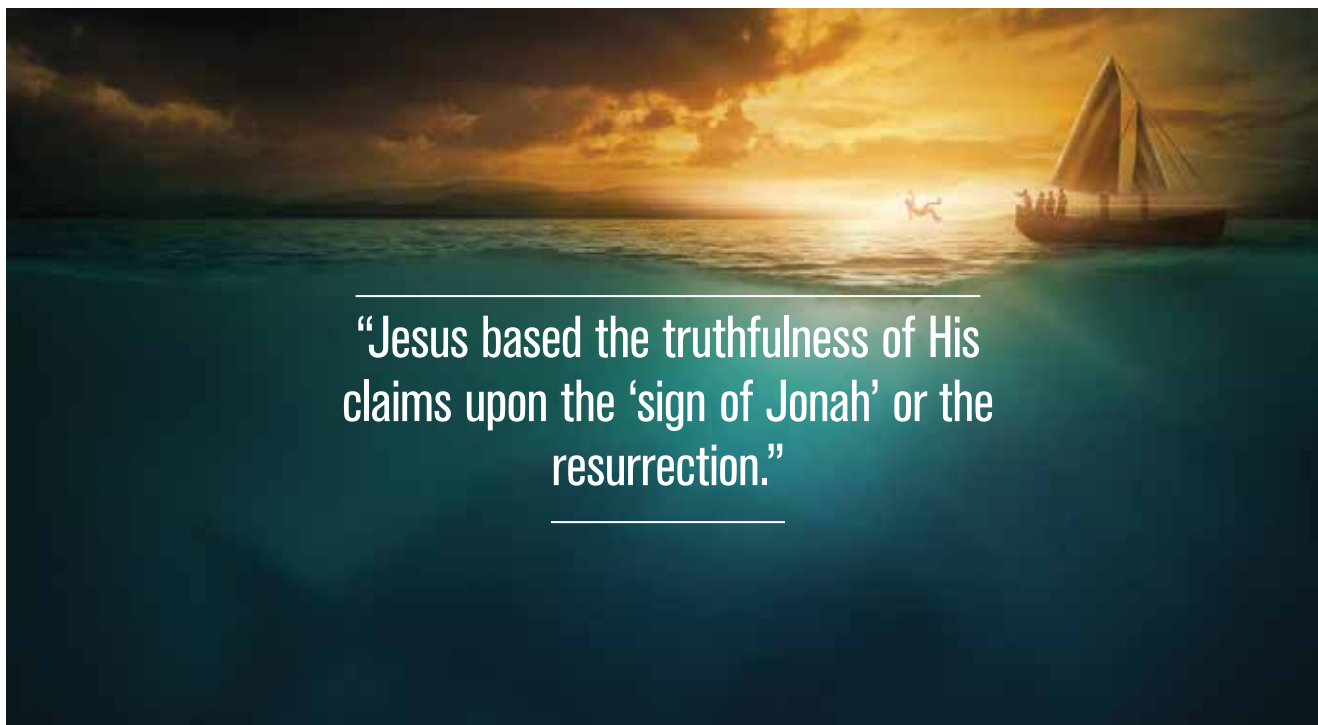
It begs the question if Hume presumes to know the experience is uniform in advance of looking at the evidence. For how can we know that all possible experience will confirm naturalism, unless we have access to all possible experiences, including those in the future? If, on the other hand, Hume simply means by “uniform” experience the select experience of *some* persons (who have not encountered a miracle), then this is special pleading. For there are others who have claimed to have experienced miracles.⁴

This is Hume’s best argument for discounting the miraculous. But the argument is strong if you assume no one has ever experienced a miracle. In other words, as C. S. Lewis pointed out, Hume is arguing in the proverbial circle:

Now of course we must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely “uniform experience” against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately, we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.⁵

Like all naturalists, Hume believed in a closed universe without a God who can act in space-time history. That is a philosophical position, not a scientific one. Naturalists will not allow for a

“Like all naturalists, Hume believed in a closed universe without a God who can act in space-time history. That is a philosophical position, not a scientific one.”



ISTOCK

“Jesus based the truthfulness of His claims upon the ‘sign of Jonah’ or the resurrection.”

theistic universe created by a supernaturalistic being.

When Ronald Nash spoke to Russian educators who were naturalists, he creatively demonstrated the difference between a naturalist and a supernaturalist using two small cardboard boxes. One box was opened, and one was closed.

“Here is the difference between your world view and mine,” he began. Pointing to the closed box, he said, “You believe that the physical universe is closed; that the universe is all that exists, and there’s nothing outside it.”

Shifting to the open box he continued, “I believe that the physical universe exists as well; but I also believe the universe is open – that there’s something outside the universe we call God.” Nash paused and added, “And God created the box!”

He then reached into the open box and said, “Just like I can reach into this box to manipulate its contents, God can reach into our universe and perform what we call miracles.”⁶

Therefore, miracles are both plausible and possible if our universe is not closed. And if you believe that creation requires a Creator, you have already agreed to an open or supernatural universe.

A CLARIFICATION ABOUT MIRACLES

A common misconception concerning miracles is that they are common. In fact, many Christians are mistaken in their desire to “expect a miracle today,” thinking they are a daily occurrence. But that is not what the Bible teaches. Many people, especially Christians, might be surprised at how rare miracles are in the Bible.

THE TIMING OF MIRACLES

There are primarily three periods of time when you see a profusion of miracles. One is during the time of Moses and Joshua, then the time of Elijah and Elisha, and finally, the time of Jesus and the early Church.

Interestingly enough, each of these periods roughly lasted forty years.

Each period corresponds to the giving of a new revelation and a new stage in the plan of God.

The first period centers on the Law, the second on the prophets (especially Elijah and Elisha), and the third on the birth of the Church and the NT.

So miracles are indeed rare events in the Bible. In other words, most people have never experienced a miracle. C. S. Lewis put it this way:

You are probably quite right in thinking that you will never see a miracle done...God does

not shake miracles into Nature at random as if from a pepper-caster. They come on great occasions; they are found at the great ganglions of history—not of political or social history, but of that spiritual history which cannot be fully known by men. If your own life does not happen to be near one of those ganglions, how should you expect to see one?...Miracles and martyrdoms tend to bunch about the same areas of history—areas we naturally have no wish to frequent.⁷

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

But why would God choose to do miracles? Does God, like a magician, wish to conjure and entertain, or communicate or inform? The following helps illustrate the purpose behind miracles:

In the days before mass communication—when all long-distance messages were sent by hand—a king would place his seal on his message. This seal would be a sign to the recipient of the message that the message was authentic—it really came from the king and not from someone just posing as the king. Of course, to make this system work, the seal needed to be unusual or unique, easily recognizable, and it had to be something only the king possessed.

God could use a similar system to authenticate his messages—specifically, he could use miracles. Miracles are unusual and unique, easily recognizable, and only God can do them. Even skeptics, by demanding a sign from God, are implicitly admitting that miracles prove his existence.⁸

So a miracle of God is a supernatural signet ring authenticating a message from God.

THE PLAUSIBILITY OF MIRACLES

Now that we have defined miracles as a special act of God that interrupts the natural or normal course of events and clarified that they occur during rare and special periods for the purpose of communication, one question remains: Are they plausible?

The answer is very simple: *acts of God are possible if there is a God who acts.*

While most world religions could exist without the miraculous, Christianity cannot.

Jesus based the truthfulness of His claims upon the “sign of Jonah” or the resurrection:

“An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:39-40).

And in John’s Gospel, the offer of eternal life is supported by the miraculous (cf. John 20:30-31).

Failing to make a case for miracles logically undermines the message of life. ■



Dix Winston is senior pastor of Crosspoint Community Church in Centennial, CO.

1. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 450.
2. David Hume, “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,” in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. C. W. Hendel (New York, NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), sec. 4, pt. 1, 40.
3. Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and the Modern Mind: A Defense of Biblical Miracles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 27-28.
4. Ibid., 28.
5. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1969), 105.
6. Ron Nash, quoted in Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 202.
7. C. S. Lewis, “Miracles,” *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002), 451.
8. Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have*, 216.

Reality Is Christocentric (John 1:1-3)

BY SHAWN LAZAR

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:1-3).

The word *radical* is overused, but if it fits anything, I think it fits the first three verses of John's Gospel. Why? As David Ford says, "It is a daring, innovative account of God and all reality" (Ford, *The Gospel of John*, p. 25).

These verses will challenge what you think about everything, including Jesus.

A DARING VIEW OF GOD (V 1)

In the beginning. There is no mistaking the opening lines of Genesis. Why did John choose to begin his Gospel with those famous words?

Since John began his book by quoting the first words of Genesis, *In the beginning*, there can be little doubt his readers would immediately remember the famous words of the creation story:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day (Gen 1:1-5).

According to Moses, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth by *speaking* them into existence. In the beginning God spoke, and there was light.



Just as Moses began with God's speaking, so does John. *In the beginning was the Word.* The Greek is *logos* which can mean "word, saying," "speech in progress" (MM, p. 379), or "a communication whereby the mind finds expression" (BDAG, p. 599).

The Word was in the beginning. Notice that John does not tell us that the Word *came into being* the way he will later tell us the Word *became* flesh. No, in the beginning the Word already *was*, which means He pre-existed the creation of the world.

John's claim is all the more striking because there was a rabbinic teaching that Wisdom was *created* at the beginning: "Before all other things wisdom was created" (Sirach 1:4). But for John, the Word was not created, nor did He come into being, but He already *was*.

Have you ever thought about what it would mean for God to speak? If you were to draw a strict division between Creator and creation, where would you put God's words? John has an answer.

The Word was *with* God. To say the Word was *with* God means He was not exactly *identical* to God. You cannot be *with* someone you are completely identical to. There is a difference between God and the Word, though John does not explain what that difference is. Later in the Gospel, as

you see how Jesus interacts with the Father, you get the impression that we are evidently dealing with two Persons. But does that mean we are dealing with two Gods?

No.

While the Word was *with* God, suggesting a distinction, **the Word also was God**. John used the word *theos* without the article, which means it could be indefinite (“a god”), definite (“the God”), or qualitative (“deity”). Daniel Wallace thinks the qualitative meaning is the most likely of the three options. In other words, the Word was *with* God because they are distinct persons, and yet the Word was *fully divine*. As Wallace says, “The construction the evangelist chose to express this idea was the most concise way he could have stated that the Word was God and yet was distinct from the Father” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 269).

During His ministry, Jesus said and did things that made people question Who He was. This is especially emphasized in John’s Gospel, where the Evangelist notes that even His enemies realized that He claimed to be “equal with God” (John 5:18) and to “make Yourself God” (John 10:33). Near the end of the Gospel, doubting Thomas finally makes the extraordinary confession, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). That theme is already evident in v 1.

Have you ever wondered why Christians came to believe in the Trinity? It is because of verses such as this, where John introduced plurality into the Godhead and radically changed our understanding of God. Instead of a simple monotheism, John helped us to see that we cannot properly understand God without Jesus Christ, because Jesus is the Word and the Word is God.

AN INNOVATIVE VIEW OF CREATION (VV 2-3)

As much as John alters our view of the Creator, He also changes our view of creation.

The Word **was in the beginning with God**. God is eternal, and so is the Word. We know He existed *before* creation because **all things**, whether the heavens or the earth, **came into being through Him**.

The fact that all things were created through the Word emphasizes the deity of the Word, for Who else but God can create all things?

The Word was God’s agent in creation. In other words, God did not create things directly, as it were, but mediately, through His Word. That is what Moses already revealed, but John highlights how important that is.

The Word’s supremacy over creation is evident from the fact that **apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being**. Everything came into being through the Word, whether the material universe or, as Paul later says, “thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Col 1:15-16). Reality is not religiously neutral. All the facts of creation point back to their Creator, Who is the Word.

And that not only has a radical implication for reality but for truth itself. If truth is correspondence to reality, and all of reality is Christocentric, then truth itself must ultimately correspond to Him. It all traces back to Jesus. All of it.

CONCLUSION

So in a few terse verses, John has wholly upended our ideas about reality.

People often think of Jesus as a great moral teacher, and He certainly was. But if you take the first few verses of John seriously, you must conclude that Jesus is far greater than a moral teacher. As Eaton says, “He is the most extraordinary person, far beyond anything we could ever imagine” (Eaton, *Branch Commentary*, p. 259).

He is the beginning and the end. He is the truth at the heart of all reality, including the reality of God. He is so extraordinary, that everything from Creator to creation is Christocentric. ■



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. He is happily married to Abby, and tries to impart a Christ-centered worldview to his three children.

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