

GRACE *in* FOCUS

Believing *in* JESUS

Easy for Some...
Hard for Others

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Sabbath Grace | "Who Are You?" | *Plus many more!*

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greatly appreciated.



Letter from the Editor

Are you grieving over what is happening in our world? What God calls *sin*, the world calls *holy* and *righteous*. Marriage and family are under attack. Sexuality and gender are shifting radically away from God's creation. Antisemitism is on the rise. Colleges are turning our youth away from God and His Word. Even Christian organizations are buying into the woke agenda.

My friend Bob Swift, now with the Lord, once told me that grieving over the world's wickedness is suffering for the Lord. He cited 2 Pet 2:7-8, where Peter says, "...righteous Lot...was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for *that righteous man*, dwelling among them, *tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds*)."

I agree with him. Being tormented by lawless deeds is not morally neutral. It is morally positive. And the opposite is true. Being complacent about the wickedness around us is a bad thing. Many Scriptures suggest that is true. Consider Psalm 1; Amos 6:1-8; Zeph 1:12; 2 Pet 2:7-8).

We are to seek to reach the unregenerate even if their attitudes and actions are offensive to us. There are two extremes to avoid.

First, having nothing to do with the wicked may seem right, but it means shirking our responsibility to be available to bring the message of life to all who will listen.



Second, approving of the wickedness we observe is more than tolerance. It is cheerleading for iniquity. That, too, we must not do.

Grace in Focus magazine seeks to help you embrace God's ways and grieve society's drift away from Him. The Lord Jesus is coming again soon. May we walk with Him and eagerly anticipate His return until that happens.

Keep grace in focus.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Bob Wilkin".

Robert N. Wilkin



The Importance of Patiently Waiting for His Blessings!

By Brad Doscocil

The Bible has a lot to say about the importance of a virtue called *patience*. The words *patient* and *patiently* occur fourteen times in twelve verses in the Bible. We are to “wait patiently for Him” (Ps 37:7; 40:1; Eccles 7:8). We are to be “patient in tribulation” (Rom 12:12; cf. Heb 6:15; Jas 5:7-8; 1 Pet 2:20) and “patient with all” (1 Thess 5:14). One of the requirements for a servant of the Lord is that he must be patient (2 Tim 2:24).

Are we patiently waiting for His blessings both in this life and in the life to come?

The word *patience* occurs twice in the OT and twenty-three times in the NT. God has patience toward us (Rom 15:5; 2 Thess 3:5). The testing of our faith produces patience (Jas 1:3-4). Patience is a crucial element in our sanctification (e.g., 2 Cor 6:4; 2 Thess 1:4; 1 Tim 6:11; Heb 6:12; Jas 5:10).

James said that patience is needed as we await the Lord’s soon return so that we might hear His “Well done, good servant” (Jas 5:7-8; note v 9, “the Judge is standing at the door”).

I was in the hospital for over two weeks. To be a *patient* in the hospital requires *patience* (pun intended)! It was Easter Sunday when I wrote this article, and I’d been a patient in the hospital for ten days. (I spent a total of seventeen days in the

hospital). Nothing in a hospital happens quickly. Things take time.

I ended up having a toe amputated and struggling with two major infections that threatened my foot.


There is no question that I wanted to leave the hospital and go home. However, being discharged prematurely would have hindered the healing process and could have led to further loss.

When God wants to teach His children to exhibit certain traits, He provides opportunities. He tests us. If believers are to exhibit love, kindness, mercy, compassion, or patience, God puts opportunities in our paths to see whether we will manifest those qualities. When we respond well to these tests, good things happen.

Fortunately, waiting for the lab process to work resulted in better medical treatment. It was a reward for being a *patient patient* (pun intended)!

Abraham was an example to us all as he patiently waited for God to fulfill His promises (Heb 6:15).

We have the example of the patience of farmers who work hard, knowing that harvest time is coming (2 Tim 2:6). We, too, know that harvest time is coming with the soon return of Christ (2 Tim 4:6-8).

God wants to bless His children. Are we patiently waiting for His blessings both in this life and in the life to come? 



Brad Doscocil is a CPA in Long Beach, CA, and the Chairman of the GES Board.



Life *in* *John's Gospel*

By Bob Wilkin

It is well known that the expressions *everlasting life* and *eternal life* occur often in John's Gospel. In the NKJV and KJV translations, *everlasting life* occurs eight times and *eternal life* nine times. But in all seventeen places, the Greek it translates is the same: *zōēn aiōnion*.

The NASB, NET, HCSB, ESV, LEB, and CEB do not have *everlasting life* at all in John. They translated *zōēn aiōnion* as *eternal life* in all seventeen places. The NIV has *everlasting life* once in John (John 6:47).

I do not know why this variation exists. I prefer translating *zōēn aiōnion* as *everlasting life* in each place.¹ But *eternal life* conveys the same basic idea.

The question this article addresses is how many of the thirty unmodified uses of the word *life* (*zōē*) in John's Gospel refer to everlasting/eternal life?

The answer is: about half of them. Here are fourteen uses that definitely refer to everlasting/eternal life:

John 1:4: "In Him was **life**, and the **life** was the light of men."

John 3:36: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see **life**, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 5:24: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into **life**."

John 5:39-40: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have **life**."

John 6:33: "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives **life** to the world."

John 6:35: "And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of **life**. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'"

John 6:48: "I am the bread of **life**."

John 6:51: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the **life** of the world."

John 6:53: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no **life** in you.'"

John 10:10b: "I have come that they may have **life**, and that they may have it more abundantly."

John 11:25a: Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the **life**."

John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the **life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

John 20:31: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have **life** in His name."

How many of the thirty unmodified uses of the word *life* (*zōē*) in John's Gospel refer to everlasting/eternal life?

Three other uses probably refer to *everlasting/eternal life* (John 5:21, twice; John 5:29).

The promise of everlasting/eternal life doesn't occur just seventeen times in John's Gospel. It occurs over thirty times when we count in places where the word *life* by itself has that significance.

This fact is recognized by nearly all commentators.

Leon Morris wrote concerning *life* in John 5:40:

Here he points out that they search the Scriptures constantly (which we know from other sources they did most diligently), thinking in this way to find **eternal life** [v 39]. And, indeed, they might have found it thus, for the Scriptures, like the “works” (v. 36) and the Father (v. 37), bear witness to him. Had they rightly read the Scriptures, they would no doubt have come to recognize the truth of his claims. But they read them with a wooden and superstitious reverence for the letter, and they never penetrated to the great truths to which they pointed. The result is that in the presence of him to whom the Scriptures bear witness, in the presence of him who could have given them **life**, they are antagonistic. The words convey a rebuke for the wrong attitude of the Jews to scripture, coupled with a profound respect for the sacred writings (*John*, pp. 292-93, emphasis added).

Regarding “I am the Bread of Life” in John 6:48, D. A. Carson says, “And their immediate inheritance and possession is **everlasting life** (NIV—the same Gk. expression stands behind ‘eternal life’ in v. 40). All this, then, is what Jesus meant by saying I am the **bread of life** (v. 48; cf. v. 35)” (*John*, p. 294, emphasis added).

John 10:10 is one of the Lord’s most famous *life sayings*: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” Gerald Borchert comments, “Jesus is the agent of wholeness, **of eternal life**, of secure pasture, and of release from the realm of darkness” (*John 1-11*, p. 333, emphasis added).

Raymond Brown commented on the expression *life in His name* in John 20:31:

Yet a similar variation of the idea modified by the “in” phrase occurs in 3:15–16: “... that everyone who believes may have eternal life in [en] him,” and “... that everyone

who believes in [eis] him ... may have eternal life” (*John XIII-XXI*, p. 1056).

Are some of those seventeen uses of the word *life* without an adjective your favorite verses in John? They are for me. I especially love John 5:24 (having passed from death into life), John 5:40 (coming to Jesus that we may have life), John 6:35, 48 (“I am the bread of life”), John 10:10b (that you may have life and that you may have it more abundantly), John 11:25 (“I am the resurrection and the life”), John 14:6 (“I am the way, the truth, and the life...”), and John 20:31 (“and that believing you may have life in His name”).

The promise of
everlasting life occurs
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Gospel when we count in
places where the word
life by itself has that
significance.

Life. Life everlasting. That is what the Lord Jesus promises to all who believe in Him. Wow! May we never lose sight of that amazing promise. ■■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and Sharon live in Highland Village, TX. He has racewalked ten marathons.

¹The adjective *eternal* suggests unending in both directions. It implies that the person with this life has always had it. That is not true of believers. The adjective *everlasting* suggests something that does not end. That is true of believers. We have everlasting life.



NO CONDEMNATION?

Another Look at Romans 8:1

By Iheanyi Njokuⁱ

Introduction

Romans 8 is one of the great chapters in the Bible. Its teaching about how the Holy Spirit operates in enabling the believer to defeat the forces of evil has always been recognized as of the utmost importance. Leon Morris suggested that while there are problems in understanding some of the details, the main thrust is clear.ⁱⁱ

Textual Discrepancy and Its Implication

The problem associated with Rom 8:1 is that most translations rely on a shortened Greek text

that reads thus: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” However, 98% of existing Greek manuscripts conclude verse 1 with a qualifying clause: “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” That is reflected in several English translations (KJV, NKJV, MEV, WEB). Some would settle this discrepancy based on external evidence—that is, the most numerous manuscripts (98%) or the oldest (2%). That debate is beyond the scope of this paper.

Most preachers rely on the shorter reading. They use this verse to allay guilt by reminding believers of their status in Christ.

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains:

“The Christian is a man who can never be condemned; he can never come into a state of condemnation again. “No condemnation!” The Apostle is not talking about his experience, but about his position, his standing, his status; he is in a position in which, being justified, he can never again come under condemnation. That is the meaning of this word “no.” It means “Never.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Charles Stanley also noted in his discussion of Rom 8:1,

Verse 1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” What a wonderful statement! It is not a question merely of what will be the justification of the believer when manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, but “now” *there is nothing to condemn* those who are in Christ Jesus. If I look at myself in the flesh, it is, “O wretched man that I am!” If I look at what I am in Christ Jesus, there is now no condemnation (emphasis his).^{iv}

Regrettably, Paul's statement in 8:1 has quite a different meaning from the commonly accepted interpretation, which holds that Paul is discussing the truth of that justification as the removal of all condemnation. It is certainly true that there is no condemnation for believers, those who are in Christ Jesus. That is what the Lord Jesus says in John 3:17-18; 5:24. However, the Greek word the Lord used when He spoke of condemnation was *krinō* (John 3:18), not *katakrima*. When He spoke of judgment, He used *krisis* (John 5:24), not *katakrima*.^v The question is, What did Paul mean by using this rare word, *katakrima*?

What Does *Katakrima* Mean?

A big issue in understanding Romans 8:1 is the word translated “condemnation” (*katakrima*) from the original text. *Katakrima* is a noun that occurs three times in the NT, all in Romans (Romans 5:16; 5:18; 8:1).

Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, the foremost Greek lexicon, says that this word *katakrima* doesn't merely mean “condemnation,” but that it focuses on the punishment that follows the pronouncement of legal guilt. In English (and in John 3:18), *condemnation* focuses on guilt.

Arguably, *condemnation* is not a good translation of *katakrima*, because *condemnation* primarily refers to a declaration of guilt. However, the word *katakrima* refers to punishment as a result of guilt rather than guilt itself.

In his commentary, Zane Hodges translated this verse: “Therefore there is now no *servitude to sin* for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk in relation to the flesh but in relation to the Spirit” (emphasis mine).^{vi}

Hodges continues to explain:

This *servitude to sin*, Paul declares, does not exist for those of whom two things are true. These two things are: (1) they **are in Christ Jesus**, and (2) they **do not walk in relation to the flesh but in relation to the Spirit**. Regrettably the words *who do not walk in relation to the flesh but in relation to the Spirit* (found in KJV, NKJV) are omitted by most modern translations (e.g., NIV, NASB, JB). This omission by modern translators is due to their reliance on a few older Greek manuscripts that differ from the Majority Text.

The first part of Paul's statement specifies that one must be in Christ Jesus to experience this freedom from sin's bondage: **there is now no servitude to sin for those who are in Christ Jesus**. The truth that we are in Christ Jesus does not come into play in Romans until we reach 6:1-11 where it leaps to prominence in Paul's exposition. Chapter 6, in fact, begins Paul's response to the problem of the reign of sin and death that has occupied him in 5:12-21.

In 6:1-11 it is made clear that our union with Christ (by the baptism of the Holy Spirit) is the foundation for



our “walk in newness of life” (6:3, 4). By virtue of this union we have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection so that now we are “dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:11, emphasis added). The words “in Christ Jesus” in 6:11 (*en Christō Iēsou*) are precisely the words used here: [those who are] in Christ Jesus (*en Christō Iēsou*).

Being in Christ Jesus is absolutely essential to victory over sin but, as Paul’s previous discussion has shown, by itself it is not enough. The second step to victory therefore is how the Christian person walks. He must not walk in relation to the flesh but in relation to the Spirit.”^{vii}

Conclusion

The arena of application in Romans 8:1 is not to unbelievers regarding how to become justified. Nor is it to believers, reminding us that there is no condemnation for us. The application is that there is no *servitude to sin*, for those who are in Christ Jesus, [and] who do not walk in relation to the flesh but in relation to the Spirit.

Therefore, my view on Paul’s writing in Rom 8:1 is that the Spirit provides the means by which the Christian can be set free from his ongoing “penal servitude” to the flesh. We’ve been set free in our position.

Salvation is a free gift from God, but if it is going to impact your everyday life, you must walk according to the Spirit. ■



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ⁱ Iheanyi Njoku took a GES Seminary course taught by Bob Wilkin on Bibliology and Ecclesiology. This paper is an expansion of a paper he wrote for class.

ⁱⁱ *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* - by Leon Morris

ⁱⁱⁱ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 7:1-8:4, The Law: Its Functions and Limits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 271.

^{iv} See <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/romans-8/charles-stanley/on-the-epistle-to-the-romans/charles-stanley/la61473>.

^v See “Romans 8:1 Doesn’t Mean What Most Translations Say” (at faithalone.org).

^{vi} *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, p. 206.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

Watch for His Soon Return:

The Forgotten Commandment

By Bill Fiess

Many examples show how failing to obey a general's command led to ultimate defeat.

In 1968, American troops in Vietnam were ordered to search for Viet Cong insurgents in the village of My Lai. However, some soldiers misinterpreted the command and engaged in a brutal massacre of unarmed civilians, including women, children, and elderly people. The failure to follow the original command led to one of the darkest moments in U.S. military history.

I recently read an article sent out to many people by Logos Bible Software. It was written by a Reformed theologian and entitled “1 Thessalonians 4 and the Truth about the Secret Rapture.” This author’s aim was seeking to persuade people that it is ridiculous to believe that Jesus Christ could come at any moment to *rapture* believers on earth. He used many Scriptures to prove this. However, I noted that he did not mention the word *watch*, which Jesus Christ used eight times in speaking of His Second Advent.¹



For example: “Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matt 24:42).

The word translated *watch* is the Greek word *gregoreō*, which Jesus used here in the imperative form [a command]. This is the forgotten commandment. Many Evangelicals are not watching for the Lord’s soon return. Some even write articles telling us that we should not watch for His soon return.

Another example is found at the end of the Bible: “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Rev 16:15).



I am a mathematics teacher at a community college. If my boss gave me a command, I would obey it. Why should I not obey my ultimate Boss, my Master, Jesus Christ, the *Lord* of the universe?

Why Is This So Crucial?

Even during the first century, believers forgot Jesus' clear command to watch for His coming. They said, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (cf. 2 Pet 3:1-6). Some might call this *forgetfulness*, but it is actually disobedience. For one thing, Jesus wants me to know that His Advent is imminent

[could occur at any moment] and that I should be ready for it right now:

"But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt 24:43-44).

For example, if I knew my boss could come into my classroom at any time for an evaluation, I would prepare for his appearance. How much more should this be true of my appearance before Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Jesus said, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev 22:12).

Jesus offers a
great reward
for those
watching
for His
return.

If I am not watching for Christ's return, my evaluation at the Judgment Seat stands in jeopardy. For one thing, this evaluation will determine whether I rule with Jesus Christ in His eternal kingdom: "But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Rev 2:25-26).

Many Evangelicals
are not watching
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soon return.

And Jesus offers a great reward to those *watching* for His return. He says, "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching" (Luke 12:37).

The Consequences of Forgetting

The concept of forgetting God's commands is also found in the OT. For example, we read, "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has commanded you" (Deut 4:23).

The consequences of forgetting God's commands can be very great. For example, the nation of Israel, very early in its history, turned to the worship of idols, and in 586 BC was dispersed throughout the nations of the world. For over 2,500 years, the Dispersion has not been completely reversed.

Jesus Christ, after commanding His disciples to watch for His coming (Matt 24:42-44) gave a short parable about the danger of forgetting (Matt 24:45-51). When Jesus returns and finds a good and faithful servant, "He will make him ruler over all His goods" (Matt 24:47). But if the Master comes and finds an evil servant who has not expected His return and has mistreated his fellow servants, the Master will "*appoint him his inheritance with the hypocrites*" (Matt 24:51). That is, he will not be allowed to *inherit* Christ's Kingdom (i.e., they won't be allowed to rule with Christ). This bad conduct

began with the believer's thinking, "My master is delaying his coming" (Matt 24:48).

As soon as I stop watching for Jesus' imminent return, my conduct will deteriorate, and I will be in danger of not ruling with Christ.

Not long ago, something happened that I won't soon forget. I was talking on the phone with a friend from South Carolina, and said, "Let's have a brief word of prayer." Then I prayed, and he prayed. In his prayer he said, "Lord, please come quickly! I am waiting for Your soon return!" That really surprised me because although I am around Christians almost all the time, I almost never hear anyone speak about the return of Christ. It impressed me that this person was preparing for the return of Christ.

What about you, believer? Do you, like the Apostle Paul, love His appearing? "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim 4:8).

Are you, like the Apostle John, waiting for His return? "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

Will you miss out on many eternal blessings because you have failed to watch for His coming?^{ii,iii}



Bill Fiess teaches mathematics at Southwest Virginia Community College.

ⁱ I use the word *advent* to refer to both aspects of Jesus' coming—the Rapture and the return of Christ to the earth to bring in the Millennium.

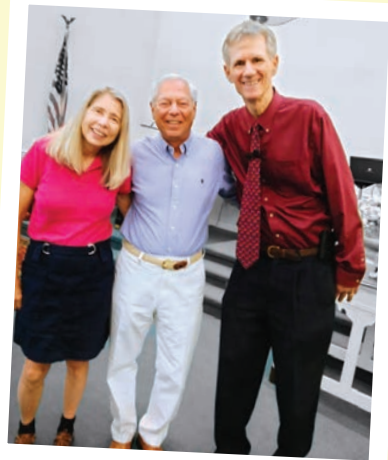
ⁱⁱ As a brief aside, Jesus Christ prophesied prior to His Transfiguration that one generation of believers will not "*taste death*" because of His Advent [Matt 16:28]. This statement had a dual fulfillment: Peter, James, and John seeing Jesus as He would appear in His Kingdom (Matt 17:1-8) and believers (perhaps us) not tasting death when He returns (2 Pet 1:16-19; 1 Thess 4:13-18).

ⁱⁱⁱ It is very possible that the sin of "leaving your first love" in Rev 2:4-5 was to no longer be watching for the return of Christ (cf. 2 Tim 4:8-10).

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Bayside Community Church Congregation, June 9th



Sharon & Bob with Charlie Nunez at
BCC, June 9th



Bob & Sharon at The Don Cesar
in St. Pete



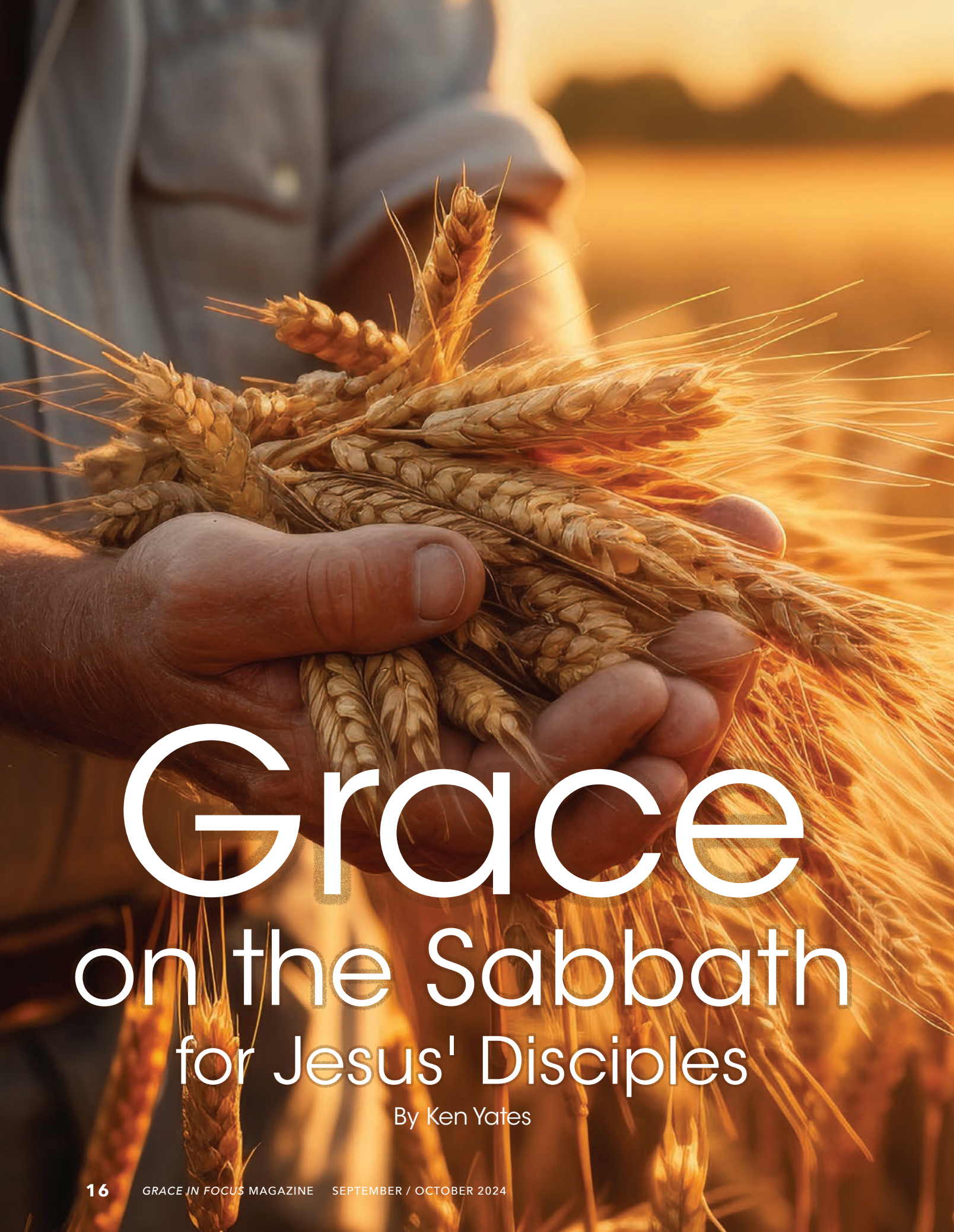
Kathryn
teaching
the Ugandan
staff



Some of the Ugandan staff with their copy of *Elisabeth*



Jen, Carissa, Kaela, and Kathryn with a few
of the Ugandan orphans



Grace on the Sabbath for Jesus' Disciples

By Ken Yates

Introduction

In Luke 6:1-5, the Lord is involved in a controversy with the Pharisees. These religious leaders take exception to the disciples eating grain from a field on the Sabbath. It was okay to eat the grain, but the disciples were rubbing it with their hands. The Pharisees said rubbing involved work, which was prohibited on the Sabbath.

Since the disciples were following Christ, the Pharisees' accusation was really directed towards Him. How could He allow the disciples to commit such a blatant sin? Keeping the Sabbath was one of the chief hallmarks of Jews in the first century. The Pharisees saw the disciples' actions as a denial of the faith.

How would the Lord respond to this attack? He does so in a way that raises several questions.

David Did the Same Thing

Christ reminds the Pharisees that King David and his men did something that was not lawful (1 Sam 21:1-6). The Lord clearly draws a parallel between David and his followers and Himself and His disciples.

In 1 Samuel 21, David was fleeing from Saul. God had anointed him king, but Saul was on the throne and sought David's life. David and those with him were hungry when they arrived at the Tabernacle. The priest had nothing except the bread set aside exclusively for the priests to eat. The priest asked if the men were ritually clean. After David assured him they were, the priest gave them the bread.

Some have suggested that this bread was placed in the Tabernacle on the Sabbath and that this event occurred on that day. If so, the parallels between Jesus and His disciples are even clearer. David and his men were hungry on the Sabbath, but what they did violated the Law. In the eyes of the

Pharisees, the Lord and His men were doing the same thing.

The Lord assumes that the Pharisees would not have condemned David. Though the priest had allowed the Law to be violated by giving David and his men the bread, there is no indication in 1 Samuel that the Lord disapproved of what the priest did. With all the similarities between the two accounts, why would the Pharisees rebuke the Lord and the disciples but give a pass to David and his men?

The Pharisees were certainly inconsistent. But an even bigger issue is involved here. Was the Lord saying that His people can violate His commandments if they find themselves in a difficult situation? Was He a proponent of situational ethics?

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What Is Going On?

In answering those questions, some say that Jesus did indeed teach that under certain circumstances it is acceptable to disobey His Word. David and his men could eat the prohibited bread because there was a greater need. The men were hungry. Connected to this view is the idea that some of God's commandments are not as important as others. David broke a ceremonial law that dealt only with food. He did not break a moral law, such as one of the Ten Commandments.

I am not comfortable with such a view. I don't think we can divide God's commandments in the OT into various kinds of laws. I think the Law of Moses must be taken as a unit. Plus, David did break one of the Ten Commandments during this episode. He lied to the priest (1 Sam 21:2).

A second view related to the first is more acceptable. It is possible that a person serving the Lord will be in a position in which a law of God must be violated because a choice must be made between two laws. In this case, David and his men

were serving the Lord. He was the anointed king of Israel but was being hunted down. In the process of being obedient to the Lord, his men became hungry and needed nourishment. It is righteous to meet the physical needs of people, especially servants of the Lord. God's people are commanded to do so. The bread in the tabernacle was the only option.

This appears to be part of the Lord's reasoning. The Lord commanded to keep the Sabbath for the good of the people (Mark 2:27). It was good for these men to eat. The priest was fulfilling the purpose of the Sabbath.

Some say that David's mission as the anointed servant of the Lord placed him in the position of a priest. The men with him were doing priestly work. David was on a holy mission, and the priest recognized that. He asked David if he and the men were ritually clean. Only after David stated they were did the priest give them the food.

An observation that is not frequently stated might also explain what happened in 1 Samuel 21. The Law said that the bread was only for the priests to eat. It seems that this prevented others from taking what was to be used to support and feed the priests. But once the priests received it, could they do with it what they wanted? It was given to them for food, and the priest willingly gave it up for those in need. In this sense, maybe there was no violation of the Law at all.

The Lord explicitly states that His disciples did not sin when they rubbed the grain in the field on the Sabbath. He could make this statement because He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5). As Lord, He had established that day of rest for the good of His people. He was the One who could determine how the purpose of the Sabbath could be fulfilled without violating it. If David and his men were innocent in their actions because they were on a holy mission, serving the Lord—and the Pharisees agreed that they were—how much more would that be true for Christ and His disciples?

Applying the Law

At the heart of the dispute between the Pharisees and the Lord was how they applied the Law of Moses. The Lord had said that the Jews could not

"It is thus the Son of Man, not the Pharisees by means of their regulations, who ruled and properly interpreted the Sabbath" (Stein, *Luke*, p. 189).

work on that day. But what constituted work? The Pharisees had come up with a long list of what *they* said was prohibited. Their list was not found in the OT. They had decided that rubbing grain in one's hands was to engage in harvesting and preparing food. These things were not allowed.

It was one thing to develop such a list. It was another thing altogether to demand that everybody follow that list. One would think that even if a Pharisee believed that what the disciples were doing was work, he should have realized that this was his opinion and that there were other ways of looking at the situation. In the case of men who were hungry, that Pharisee should show a little mercy. Maybe he was wrong. The Lord tells the Pharisees confronting Him that they were merciless in their condemnation (Matt 12:7).

We can learn from the words of the Lord here. Sometimes we come to a passage of Scriptures and wonder how we can apply it. We come up with how we will do so in our own lives. We must realize, however, that those applications are not mandated in the Bible.

Marshall says concerning this incident: "But surely the point of the saying is that here Jesus claims an authority tantamount to that of God with respect to the interpretation of the law" (*Luke*, p. 233). Stein agrees, "It is thus the Son of Man, not the Pharisees by means of their regulations, who

ruled and properly interpreted the Sabbath” (*Luke*, p. 189).

When it comes to the Sabbath, I am reminded of my past. When I grew up, it was common for church people to say that we should not work on Sundays. Their motives were good. They determined that a day of rest would be beneficial. But determining precisely what that looked like was difficult.

Some said you couldn’t eat at a restaurant on Sunday because the people there were working. Women were to prepare their meals on Saturday to not cook (and work) on Sunday. Mowing a yard was definitely out. Going fishing was debatable. Some said yes, and others said no.

Whatever rules each believer developed, one thing should have been clear. Like equating the rubbing of grain in one’s hands to harvesting a crop, people could have different views. What was allowable in one person’s eyes was not acceptable to someone else. They were all well-meaning attempts to do what was wise, but they were still just man-made applications.

Unfortunately, in my younger days I saw and heard a lot of condemnation of people who did not “keep the Sabbath.” We should all have realized how dumb that was. We didn’t even have the ordained day right. Sunday wasn’t even the OT Sabbath. The Jews rested on Saturday! We should have been a lot more gracious.

Conclusion

There are different ways of interpreting what happened with David and his men in 1 Samuel 21. I don’t think the Lord was teaching situational ethics.

But I do think He was giving us some instruction on situational application. A Pharisee could decide never to rub grain in his hands on the Sabbath. For him, that was too much like work. But he should have been merciful towards others who did not share his view. It was just a personal application. Mercy would have

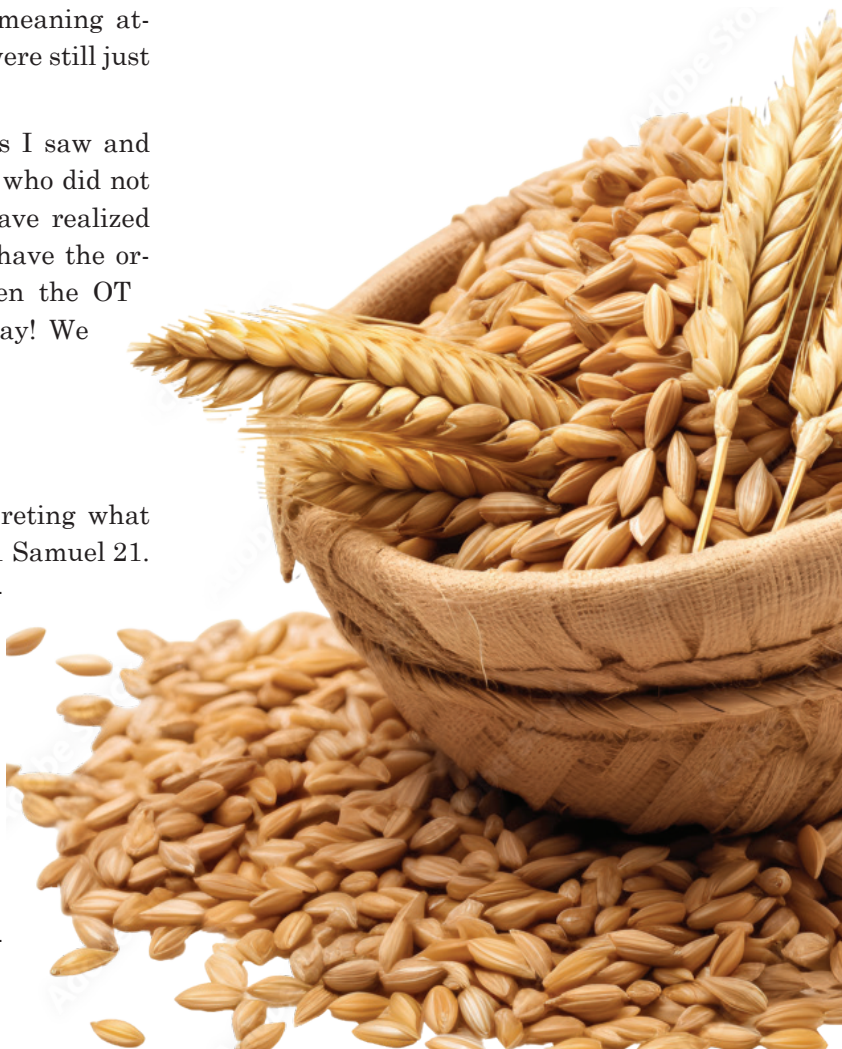
been especially needed at a time when men were hungry.

We should act that way. There are many times when the Scriptures clearly teach truths, and we should tenaciously hold to those truths. However, there are other times when different interpretations are possible. These differences will often lead to varied applications.

In those situations, may we be gracious dispensers of mercy. ■



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Voice from the Past

"Who Are You?"

(John 1:19)

By Zane Hodges

On one occasion, described in John 1:19-27, John the Baptist was visited by an important official delegation from the religious leadership of Jerusalem. Speculation had mounted that this Elijah-like prophet might be the Messiah Himself (cf. Luke 3:15). If ever there was a golden opportunity for John to “blow his own horn,” this was it.

But John didn’t. His responses to the delegations’ questions clearly indicate that he was not anxious to talk about himself. Indeed, each response is briefer than the previous one (see vv 19-21). When asked, “Who are you?” he replies with the words, “I am not the Christ.” And to the query, “Are you Elijah?” he says simply, “I am not” (three syllables both in English and Greek). But to the

final question in this series, “Are you the Prophet?” (probably a reference to Deut 18:15-19), his answer is reduced to “No” (one syllable in English and Greek).

“I am not the Christ.”

“I am not.”

“No.”

And that’s where he would have left them—with no self-identification at all!—had they not followed up with a further question: “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say *about yourself*?” (v 22, italics added). But John doesn’t like talking *about himself*, so he simply quotes a passage of Scripture where he is

Who are we? Let us be merely voices crying out to people to put their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

prophetically described as “a voice of one crying: In the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord” (v 23; our translation follows the punctuation in the Hebrew and the Majority Text).

One may humorously imagine the delegation returning to the Jerusalem leaders, who enquire: “Well, what did you find out? Who does this John the Baptist claim to be?”

The delegation answers, “We found out that he does not claim to be the Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet.”

“All right,” the leaders reply, “but just who does he claim to be?”

There is an awkward moment of silence; then the delegation leader clears his throat. “Uh, well, that is to say, he claims to be ‘a voice crying out...’”

“Yes, yes” say the leaders. “But what else does he say about himself? What personal identity does he claim *for himself*?”

“That’s it,” says the delegation. “The rest was about his message and someone who is supposed to come after him. He wouldn’t say another word about who he was!”

Of course, we can’t be sure precisely what the exchange was between the returning delegation and the Jewish leaders. However, one thing is certain. At the very pinnacle of his ministry’s success, John the Baptist was not preoccupied with his importance or self-interest—even when facing a prestigious delegation like this one. Instead, he was busy preparing—not *his own* way—but the way of *the Lord* (vv 23-27).

And that qualifies as a spiritual miracle, even though John did no miracle in the strict sense of the term (cf. John 10:41). But how rare indeed is the preacher or teacher who will not speak about himself almost “at the drop of a hat”! How easily

even we who proclaim the truth that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone can get sidetracked from our focus on the gracious Savior into a preoccupation with appearing “to be somebody” before men.

This is not to say that talking about ourselves or our ministries is always wrong. Paul and Barnabus did that for a good reason (Acts 15:12). But we must always try to ask ourselves, when we are inclined to do this, a very searching question: “If I say these things about myself, who will get the glory? Will it be Christ? Or will it be me?”

Pride may be expected in those who think that their own works contribute to or even verify their eternal salvation. But pride is an ugly anomaly in those who understand their total dependence on God’s saving grace. If the magnificent and free gift of life through Christ has not yet humbled us, we must go back to the Cross and bow our hearts meekly before it. We should be able to say with the hymn writer:

“Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.”

Who are *we*? Let us be merely voices crying out to people to put their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ■



Zane Hodges taught New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary for 27 years, authored over a dozen books, and was passionate about the grace of God.

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God Didn't Change the Patriarch's Names to Show They Were Regenerate

By Kathryn Wright

Introduction

In a recent podcast, I heard a preacher say that Saul of Tarsus' name was changed to *Paul* after his conversion. He went on to describe the miracle of *transformation* that occurred in Paul's life. Because of this supposed transformation, the Lord gave the apostle a new name. The preacher associated salvation with a marked outward change in a person's behavior. An external proof is often seen as necessary to validate the inward birth. Some people, even today, change their names after being saved in order to indicate this change.

This view is a long-standing misinterpretation by many in the Church, sadly perpetuated by Bible teachers like this podcaster. The truth about Paul's name change is far less miraculous. There wasn't a change at all. I'm sure many who are reading this article already know that *Saul* was the Hebrew version of his name, while *Paul* was the Roman or Latin form. He would have been referred to as both, interchangeably, pre- and post-salvation. It should also be noted that the claim that God gave him a new name is pure fiction. At no point in the Bible does the Lord give the apostle a new name.

However, this misconception has become popular and shapes the way some see the use of names in the Bible. A name change is often used as *proof* of salvation. Faith alone is deemed insufficient for salvation; you also need a new name. Because of this misunderstanding, whole passages have been misinterpreted and misapplied.

Jacob Became Israel

This misconception can be seen in a passage regarding the patriarch Jacob. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ. After wrestling all night, Jacob is blessed and receives a new name, *Israel*. This encounter is often seen as the patriarch's salvation experience. Lordship teachers argue that Jacob's wrestling and ultimate surrender to the Lord are indicative of his "surrendering" to the Lordship of Christ, which was necessary in order for him to obtain eternal salvation. In this view, before wrestling with the Lord, Jacob was a deceitful man who was greedy and self-serving. However, during his encounter with the Lord, he was humbled. Because the Angel of the Lord brought him down, he was able to "truly" submit to Him. Therefore, Jacob's new name is seen as the outward proof of his inward spiritual birth.

There are many problems with this interpretation, the primary one being that salvation is by faith alone and not by surrendering, submitting, or humbling ourselves to the Lord—or by wrestling with Him. This is a works-based interpretation of eternal salvation and must therefore be rejected. The lesson to be drawn from this event in Jacob's life has to do with sanctification. Bob Wilkin writes:

That the fight went on all night shows that Jacob had to persevere to gain what he wanted: a blessing. All believers must fight the good fight in order to receive God's blessings (1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 4:6-8). Jacob and the nation that came from him learned a great lesson. We cannot prevail against God. But we can beseech Him and gain blessing.ⁱ

The patriarch gained a *blessing*, not eternal life, from his encounter with the Lord. As for the name

change, the new name will be used to identify Jacob's descendants as a distinct people; it therefore has a wider, corporate, emphasis concerning the Lord's chosen nation.

Abraham and Jacob's new names indicated their roles as patriarchs, not their regeneration.

Abram Became Abraham

Jacob is not the only example of a name change in Genesis. Two more examples help to determine the purpose of name changes. Abram and his wife Sarai received new names in Gen 17:5, 15. Abraham was justified by faith two chapters earlier, in Gen 15:6, but didn't receive a new name until many years later. Abraham's name change was not indicative of his regeneration. His name change is significant as a marker of the covenant the Lord made with him. The name *Abraham* means "father of a multitude," and indicates the sure promise of the Lord. Abraham would have an heir with Sarah, and through that heir a great nation would be born. The same can be said about Jacob, since the nation would be referred to as *Israel*. In short, their new names were a sign of the Lord's promises to the Nation of Israel and of the patriarchs' role in this plan. It should be noted that the original readers of Genesis—which was written by Moses for the Nation of Israel—would have understood the national significance of these accounts to them as a people. The Genesis 32 account of Jacob's returning to the land after spending many years in exile would have resonated with the Israelites; they too were returning to the land of promise after their stint in Egypt and the wilderness. This is the account of how the chosen people of God received their name.

Jacob and Israel Were Used Interchangeably

There is another problem with seeing Jacob's name change as indicative of his salvation. He is consistently referred to by both names. The two names—*Jacob* and *Israel*—are used interchangeably throughout the Scriptures, including after Genesis 32.

If the name change was meant to indicate the man's regeneration, then one would not expect the Lord to refer to him as *Jacob* again. However, the Lord does refer to Jacob by that name many times and even identifies Himself as *the God of Jacob*. For example, the Lord identifies Himself in this way at the burning bush (Exod 3:6, 14-16), centuries after Jacob wrestled with the Lord at Peniel. God is clearly attaching a positive connotation to the name *Jacob*. The Lord also uses the name in a positive way in the NT (Matt 22:31-32; Mark 12:26; Luke 13:28).

Jacob was saved
in the same way his
grandfather was—
by faith alone in the
coming Messiah for
eternal life.

In addition to its occurrences in the Gospels, *Jacob* is used by other NT writers. For example, in the Hall of Faith, the patriarch is given as an example of one with great faith, and he is called *Jacob*, not *Israel* (Heb 11:9, 20-21; see also Acts 3:13). In both Abraham and Jacob's examples, their new names were indicative of both their roles as the nation's patriarchs and their covenants with the Lord. Neither dealt with regeneration.

Conclusion

At first glance, this may seem a benign issue. Certainly, believers pass from death into life when they are born into the family of God. This is a change in position. L. S. Chafer famously lists thirty-three changes that occur regarding our position when we come to faith in Christ for everlasting life. However, these changes are in our position, not our outward expression or experience. Changes in our experience require time, both in the Word of God as we walk with the Lord, and in our interactions with the people of God. Ironically, Jacob is a classic example of the fact that believers don't automatically follow the Lord or live righteously. While Reformed and Lordship proponents seek to find an external transformation in Jacob's behavior after Gen 32, we see many pitfalls and wrong turns in his life, even after receiving his new name. After his encounter with the Lord at Peniel, Jacob is still fearful, has idols in his home, lies to Esau, and continues to exhibit deceitful behavior. In the end, whenever men seek to find assurance in external proofs, rather than the words of Christ, they will only find uncertainty.

While believers are positionally changed at the moment of faith, having been born again into the family of God, this is not the same as present sanctification. A new name can be a way to reflect a job or covenantal status. However, if Bible students associate a new name with proof of regeneration, it can lead to a misinterpretation of the text and even a misunderstanding of the saving message. Jacob wasn't saved because he wrestled with the Lord, surrendered his life, or received a new name. He was saved the same way his grandfather was — by faith alone in the coming Messiah for eternal life (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-4). ■



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¹See this blog by Bob Wilkin: <https://faithalone.org/blog/why-and-how-did-god-wrestle-with-jacob-genesis-3222-33/>. Last accessed 2/26.2024.



A Message for John:

By Ken Pierce

Jesus Did Not Release the Captives

Matthew 11:1-15 and Luke 7:18-23 record parallel accounts of a fascinating exchange between Messiah and two disciples of *Yochannan ben Zecharyah* (John, the son of Zechariah, better known as John the Baptist or, more accurately, John the Baptizer), in which Jesus relayed a covert message to his incarcerated cousin.

Herod Antipas had imprisoned John over an embarrassing rebuke. Herod had violated the Torah's injunctions against taking his brother's ex-wife Herodias as his own (cf. Lev 18:16; 20:21; Mark 6:17-18; Luke 3:19-20). Faithful to his duties as a prophet of Israel, John publicly called the powerful ruler out. Herod sat as tetrarch over Galilee and Perea. Though of Edomite extraction, he posed as a Jew and exercised ruling authority over God's people. Thus, John held him accountable to uphold the righteous commands of the Torah. In a fallen world, speaking out publicly for God's righteousness often carries the risk of retaliation by earthly authorities. In John's case, that risk became a reality.

Before his arrest, John had generated some excitement along the Jordan River valley (Luke

3:3-4). Through a successful ministry featuring iconic use of the garb of a *Tanakh neve* (Old Testament prophet; Mark 1:6), he drew multitudes of ordinary people, along with some prominent Jewish religious leaders, to hear him exhort Israel's First Advent generation to prepare for Messiah's impending arrival (Lev 26:40-42; 2 Chron 7:14; Jer 3:11-18; Isa 53:1-6; Hos 5:15-6:3; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 1:16-17; 3:7-9).

John's public ministry as Israel's premier prophet (Luke 7:28) ended abruptly with his arrest (Matt 4:12; Mark 1:14). Details concerning his incarceration are sparse, but Josephus locates his imprisonment and execution at the Hasmonean fortress of Machaerus, located in Perea. His imprisonment was lengthy, probably exceeding a year or more and ending with his abrupt execution by decapitation. Undoubtedly, his time in Herod's custody was unpleasant. Like anyone, he would have welcomed rescue and liberation.

Crucially, and intentionally, He omitted a line from Isa 61:1 about "the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

When believers suffer unjustly in this life, it is normal to hope and pray for divine intervention—particularly when suffering comes from standing on God's Word, as John had done. God has not promised to shield His people from earthly trials; on the contrary, they are a fact of life in a fallen world (cf. Jas 1:2-3; 1 Pet 1:6). Nevertheless, when trials come, believers are encouraged to call on the name of the Lord in time of need (e.g., Heb 4:16; 1 Pet 5:6-7). Come what may, for church-age believers, faithful endurance in service to the King carries the promise of eternal reward at Messiah's

Bema (Matt 25:21-23; 1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10; 1 Pet 1:17).

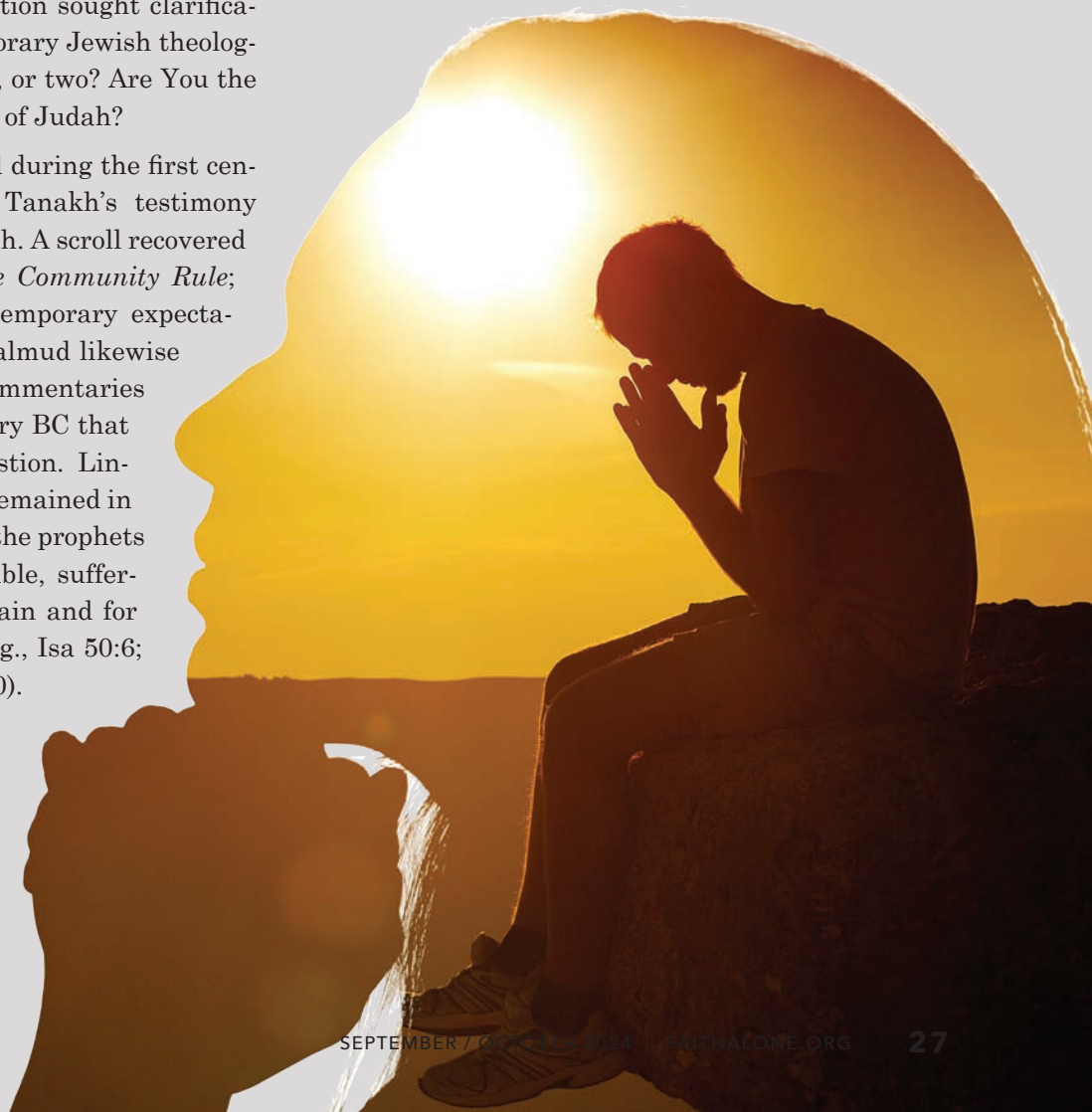
Though the text doesn't record it, one may assume that John prayed fervently to God from his prison cell, seeking divine intervention. But John had another card to play. He lived at a very special time in Israel's history. Israel's Messiah was present then, teaching and ministering to God's chosen nation, Israel. John had served his cousin, the Messiah, faithfully. He had been honored to baptize Him, witnessing God the Spirit descending upon Him, and hearing the authenticating voice of God the Father inaugurating His public ministry (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:21-22; 2 Pet 1:17). It was therefore reasonable that John sent messengers to inquire on his behalf.

Matthew and Luke record the account of two of John's disciples approaching Messiah. From his prison cell, John had charged them with a special mission: Go find Jesus and ask Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (Matt 11:3; Luke 7:20). John's question sought clarification from Jesus on a contemporary Jewish theological conundrum: one Messiah, or two? Are You the Suffering Servant or the Lion of Judah?

Jewish scholars before and during the first century struggled to reconcile Tanakh's testimony concerning the coming Messiah. A scroll recovered from the Qumran caves (*The Community Rule*; 1QS VII:200) attests to contemporary expectations of two Messiahs. The Talmud likewise bears witness to Mishnaic commentaries from the first or second century BC that also wrestled with that question. Lingering doubts and confusion remained in John's day. On the one hand, the prophets portrayed Messiah as a humble, suffering Servant who would be slain and for whom Israel would mourn (e.g., Isa 50:6; 53:3-6; Mic 5:2; Zec 9:9; 12:10). Yet they also attested to a conquering Warrior-King who would liberate Israel from Gentile oppression and rule gloriously from Jerusalem (e.g., Psalm 2; Dan 7:13-14; Zech 14:2-4, 8-9).

Harboring hopes of Messiah's imminent eschatological regency, John's question involved more than a desire to resolve a theological conundrum. The answer Jesus gave would reveal what John could expect concerning his personal fate. Was the Messiah going to liberate him from Herod's custody? John very likely held just such a hope as he sat on death row inside Herod's prison.

Jesus' answer is of great interest because it contains an implicit message to John. "**Go and tell John the things which you hear and see,**" He said (Matt 11:5). One pictures Jesus slowly giving the message to John's disciples to make sure that they got His words down verbatim: "**The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me**" (Matt 11:5-6; Luke 7:22-23).



The Lord's reply was a quotation from Isa 61:1-3. There, Isaiah had detailed a roster of miraculous works identifying Israel's Messiah. Notably, it was the same passage from which Jesus read in the Nazareth synagogue early in His public ministry (Luke 4:16-21)—very likely the *haftorah* selection to accompany the weekly Torah portion read in synagogues across Israel at that time. It was a passage that Jesus knew John would know well.

Crucially, and intentionally, He omitted a line from the passage. That line, found in Isa 61:1, reads: **"To proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who**

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are bound." Because Jesus knew that John would immediately recognize the passage—and note the omitted portion—the message served two purposes. First, it affirmed that Jesus was the Coming One (not one of two). Second, and painfully on a personal level, the omitted line told John that Jesus would not be coming to rescue him from prison. John would face a martyr's death in service to the Messiah; hence, He added a pledge of blessing to the one who did not take offense.

When faced with difficult circumstances, it is natural to cry out to the Lord for immediate rescue. Many times, He answers in the affirmative—healing the cancer patient, granting financial relief to the indebted, repairing a shattered marriage, or

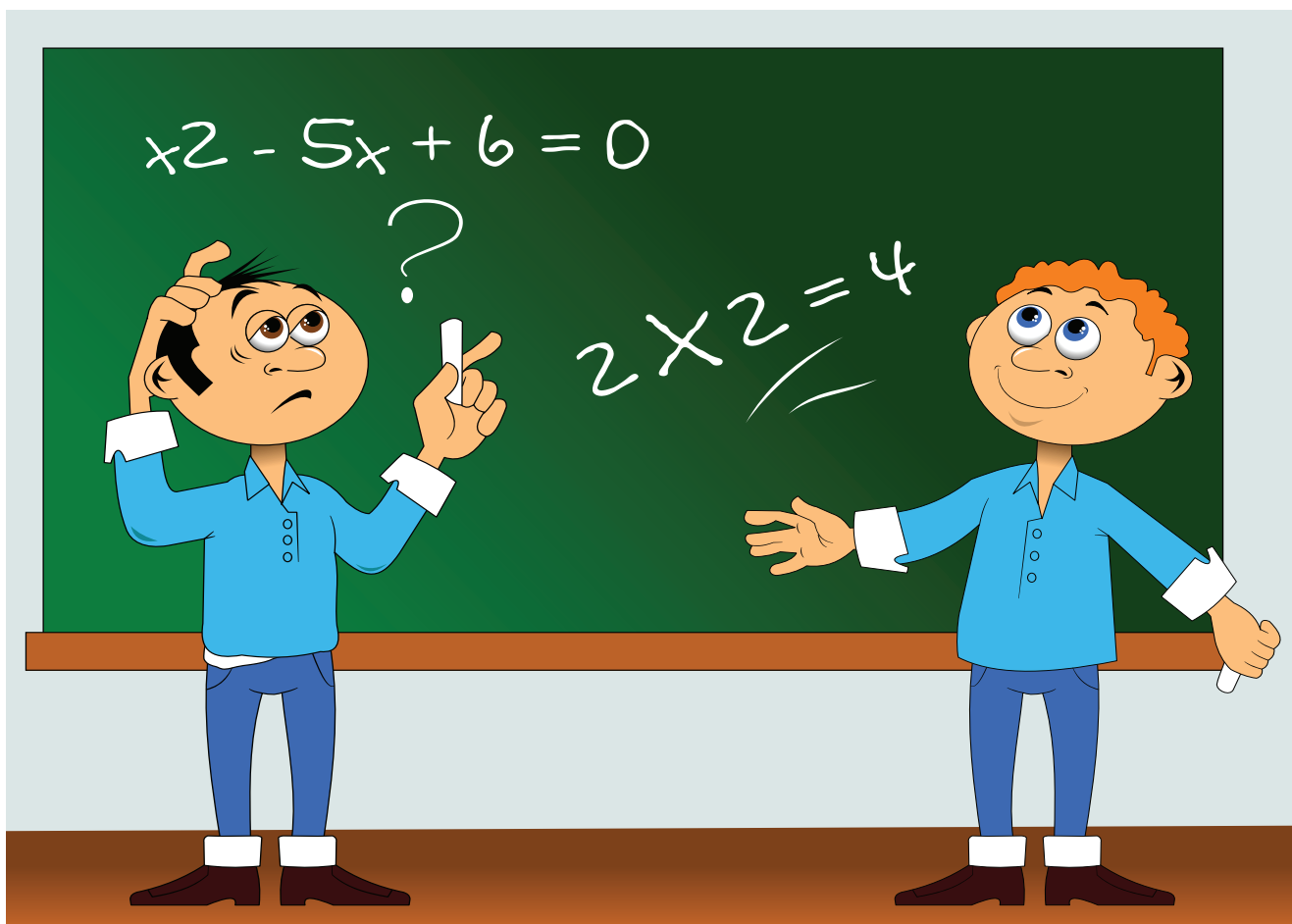
indeed, releasing the unjustly accused from incarceration. But He has not promised to do so in every case. Like John, believers must stand on faith, not losing heart when the deliverance sought does not come (cf. Rom 8:18).

In John's case, Messiah's message must have been difficult. The text of Scripture does not record his reaction, but one imagines his disciples carefully repeating Jesus' message, perhaps with tears in their eyes, realizing the reality of John's situation. When the end came for John, it is reasonable to assume that he received a torrential supply of dying grace, much akin to that received by Stephen at his death (Acts 7:59-60), and by so many others through the centuries upon dying martyrs' deaths in faithful service to the King.

Today, a tide of evil is rising on this fallen planet in a way that stuns even the casual observer. Eruptions of violent antisemitism and open displays of hatred for Bible-believing Christians raise the specter of abuse and possibly martyrdom for church-age believers who remain openly faithful to the Lord (John 15:18-21; 2 Thess 2:1-4). The good news is that if earthly commanders know how to recognize and honor fallen battlefield heroes, how much more does the Commander of Heaven's armies (Rev 22:12)? ■



Ken Pierce is a retired Navy intelligence officer with combat service in Panama, the former Yugoslavia, and Iraq. Ken studied Biblical Hebrew and Archaeology at the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies. After retiring from active duty, he worked as a civil servant at U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt AFB, NE, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Office of Naval Intelligence. In Nebraska, Ken pastored a small Bible church. Now retired, he leads a lively men's Bible Study using Zane Hodges' commentary on Romans, occasionally fills the pulpit for his and other pastors in NE Florida, and is contributing to a forthcoming GES commentary on the Tanakh (Old Testament). He and his wife Ana Maria recently celebrated thirty-eight years of marriage.



Believing in Jesus

Is Easy for Some and Hard for Others

By Mike Lii and Bob Wilkin

Introduction

Have you heard it charged that those of us who accept the Focused Free Grace position teach "easy believism"? Those who level such a charge usually mean that we make salvation too easy by not requiring that people turn from their sins, commit their lives to Christ, and obey Him. Instead, we teach that people are eternally secure simply by being convinced that Jesus gives everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

We plead guilty as charged. Salvation is free and potentially easy—for *us*. The Lord Jesus Christ has done all the work. It wasn't free and easy for *Him*. All we need to do is believe in Him to receive the

gift of everlasting life. But He had to suffer greatly in order to make salvation possible (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2).

Is the Saving Message Easy or Hard to Believe?

Is it easy to simply believe (be convinced that it is true) the saving message of Jesus found in John 3:16?

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Both authors of this article were evangelized with Eph 2:8-9. One of us believed in Jesus for secure salvation right away. The other took a long time to believe. Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Is it easy or hard to believe that Jesus gives everlasting life to everyone who believes in Him alone for that gift with no works ever required?

The answer to this question depends on the individual and the amount of theological misunderstanding and debris that need to be cleared before one can believe in Him for everlasting life. For some, believing in Jesus for the free gift of everlasting life is easy. For others, it is hard to believe.

Mike's Easy Believism

I am an example of “easy believism,” in the sense that it was easy for me to believe the gospel. I didn’t grow up attending church regularly. Even when I attended church, the teaching was often in Mandarin Chinese or Taiwanese. Since I was born and raised in the United States, language was a barrier to my understanding of what was being taught when I went to church.

My understanding of Jesus and the Bible during my high school years was as follows:

From childhood stories, I knew that Jesus was a special person (but didn’t know that He was God) who turned water into wine, walked on water, and fed the 5,000. I thought of the Bible as a special book containing truth, although I knew relatively little of its contents. Due to my limited knowledge of the Bible, I had never heard of any of the problem passages that are misinterpreted to teach salvation, or proof of salvation, by works (e.g., Jas 2, 1 John, and Heb 6 and 10).

I did not know that Christmas celebrated Jesus’ birth. I didn’t even know why the cross was the symbol of Christianity, just as I did not know the story of Jesus dying on the cross and rising again on the third day.

When I was a junior in high school, it was finally explained to me that Jesus died on the cross for my sins (although I don’t recall the Resurrection being mentioned when I was evangelized). Using John 3:16 and Eph 2:8-9, the youth group counselor explained that only by believing in Jesus (and not by any works), I could be sure that my eternal destiny would be with Jesus in heaven.

I did not know that Christmas celebrated Jesus’ birth. I didn’t even know why the cross was the symbol of Christianity.

I don’t recall anyone’s telling me the saving message before that night. Despite my limited knowledge base, I knew enough about Jesus and respected the authority of the Bible enough that I was ready to believe as soon as someone explained the message of John 3:16 and Eph 2:8-9. So, I was convinced of the truth in those verses the first time they were explained to me. That evening, I experienced the joy of knowing that I had everlasting life and that my eternal destiny was with Jesus forever.

In a sense, I was blessed by not growing up in the church and being subjected to years of the false teaching that works are necessary to being saved or to proving one’s salvation. My ignorance of problem passages and relative freedom from theological misunderstandings made it easy for me to believe the truth of Eph 2:8-9 the first time it was explained to me. My experience was a case of “easy believism.”

Bob's Hard Believism

I was raised in a sinless-perfection holiness group that taught an extreme form of works sal-

vation. In my senior year of college, a friend, John Carlson, asked me, “Is it possible your view of the gospel is wrong?”

I had been enslaved to salvation by allegiance for fourteen years. I had prayed long and hard for assurance of my eternal destiny. But I could not find it.

John’s question shook me up. He helped me contact Warren Wilke, an Athletes in Action staff member. I asked Warren to help me find assurance of salvation.

In our first meeting, Warren quoted Eph 2:8-9. I told him, “That’s too easy. What about Jas 2:14-26?” He answered and quoted Eph 2:8-9 again. He must have quoted it ten times during our first meeting.

We met four more times. Each time, he quoted Eph 2:8-9 over and over again. He was like a broken record. When I’d ask how he could explain another tough text, he’d give a short answer and then say, “But whatever that text means, it can’t contradict ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.’”

I finally believed it. It took going to a College Life meeting and talking with Warren for five hours over five days. It was a real struggle for me. But once I believed, I was overjoyed. I wanted to tell everyone this amazing message.


Conclusion: It’s Always Believism

Whether it’s “easy believism” or “hard believism” depends on how difficult it is for a person to be convinced¹ of the truth of Jesus’ promise:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47).

For some who have been indoctrinated with years of false teaching, it is hard to believe the saving truth. For others who don’t have such theological baggage but know about Jesus and respect the authority of the Bible, it is easy for them to believe the truth when presented. In all cases, whether

I had been enslaved
to salvation by
allegiance for
fourteen years.

easy or hard, it is believing in the saving promise of Jesus that brings everlasting life that can’t be lost. 

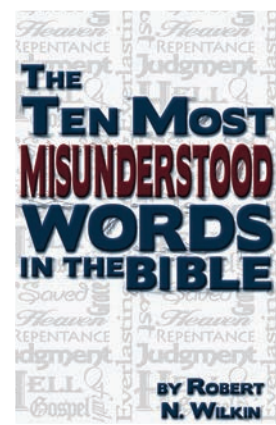


Mike Lii is a finance attorney. He and his wife, Letitia, a member of the GES board, and their son, Payton, live in Dallas and serve at Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship in Lewisville, Texas. Mike and Letitia also run the Zane Hodges Library online (zanehodges.org).



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and Sharon live in Highland Village, TX. He has racewalked ten marathons.

¹The word *believe* is one of the most misunderstood words in the Bible. It means to be *convinced* or *persuaded*. It does not mean to be committed, to surrender, to obey, to turn from sins, or to follow. See Chapter 1 in Bob’s book *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*.



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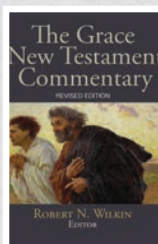


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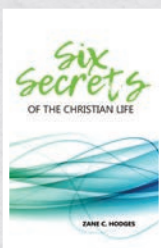


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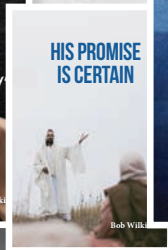
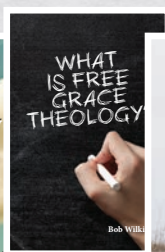
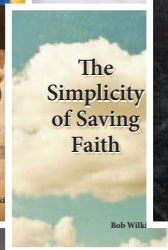
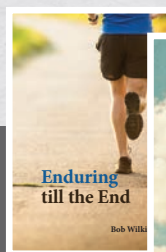


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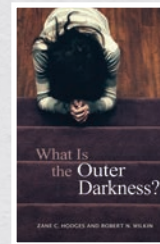
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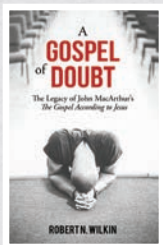
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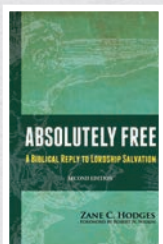
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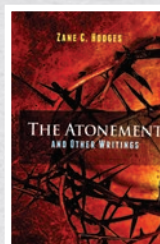
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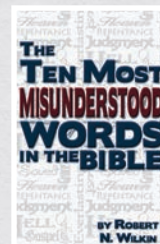
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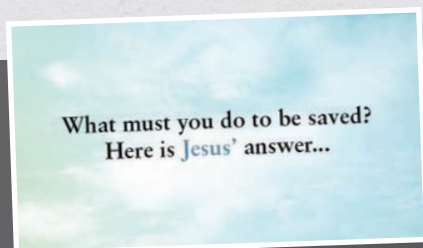
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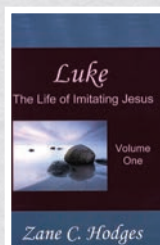
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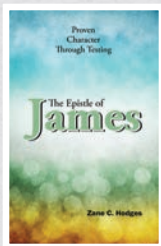


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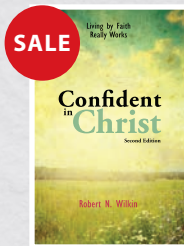


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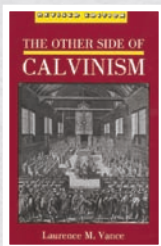


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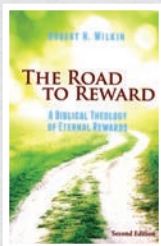


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Ken and Kathryn having lunch with interpreters and Pastor David, before the regional conference in Italy this May.

Are You a Good Team Player in Your Church?

By Ken Yates

Introduction

The 1995 Chicago Bulls were quite a team. They were a historically successful team. Not only did they win the NBA championship, but they did something no other team had done during the regular season. They won over seventy of their eighty-two games against the best competition in the world. They were practically unstoppable. What was their secret?

It was not what most fans thought.

The View from the Stands

If you ask a basketball fan what they think about the 1995 Chicago Bulls, they will almost always say that it was Michael Jordan's team. Jordan is considered by most fans as the GOAT. He was the Most Valuable Player of the league that year. The popular view is that the Bulls succeeded in 1995 because of Jordan. He was the reason they won the championship in such a convincing way. That evaluation, however, is seriously flawed.



The Bulls were not a one-man team. Scottie Pippen was a member of that team. If Jordan was Batman, Pippen was Robin. If the opposing team concentrated too much on Jordan, Pippen would destroy the other team with his own talents.

But the Bulls also had Dennis Rodman on the team. Rodman did not score many points, as Jordan and Pippen did, but he kept the other team from scoring. He was considered the best defensive player and rebounder in the league. If somebody missed a shot, Rodman was usually the one who grabbed it for the Bulls. Many times during the season, he dove for balls when others were afraid to do so.

Ron Harper was the player who brought the ball up the court for the Bulls. He did not get the headlines that Jordan and Pippen did, but he was the one who passed the ball to them. He was great at what he did. If the other team prevented that from happening by concentrating on Batman and Robin, Ron would pass the ball to James Edwards. Edwards was old and slow, but he was seven feet



tall and could easily score if the other team ignored him.

The Bulls even had Steve Kerr. He was short and slow. But he was a dead-on long distance shot. During one playoff game, when the Bulls were marching towards the championship, the other team was ahead by one point as time was running out. With great effort, they kept the ball away from Jordan, Pippen, and Edwards. Harper passed the ball to Kerr, who hit a last-second long shot to win the game. The other team was demoralized and never recovered.

A casual fan might conclude that Jordan won the 1995 NBA championship for the Bulls. But the knowledgeable fan, watching that team play, would know that the *team* won it. Jordan had been in the league for many years prior to that season. He had never done, as an individual, what the Bulls did as a team in 1995. Without Pippen, Kerr, Edwards, Rodman, and Harper, people would not be talking about the 1995 Bulls the way they do today. When they won it all, they all lifted the trophy up at mid-court. That was the way it should have been. They

all contributed to the success of the team. They couldn't have done it without each other.

Principles for the Church

I realize that Paul did not know about Michael Jordan, and even if Paul had been alive in 1995, he probably wouldn't have had much interest in the NBA. However, the 1995 Chicago Bulls can serve as an example for a Christian church. In Rom 12:3-85, Paul told the believers in the church at Rome that they should be like that team. If they did, they would also be successful, but in a much more important way.

In these verses, Paul discusses spiritual gifts. God has given each believer a gift with which to serve the Body of Christ. Each Christian is not to "think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (v 3). One point Paul addresses is that a believer is not to be jealous of the gifts others in the Church have. It is easy for a Christian to want a more publicly recognized role in the Church. If he sees somebody who is a good preacher, he might want to do the same, even if he does not have that ability.

Imagine how destructive that attitude would have been for the Chicago Bulls. If the rest of team had resented the press clippings of Jordan's publicity, they could have insisted that the team function in a different way. Rodman could decide not to play defense or rebound and instead demand that Harper pass him the ball so that he could take more shots. Pippen could demand to be Batman, when he was perfectly suited to be Robin. Harper might tell Jordan to bring the ball up the court and pass it to him, instead of the other way around. They would not have won the championship that year if they had acted in that way.

A church full of envy will not be successful either. A good teacher should teach. A good exhorter should exhort. A person with a particular gift of serving should concentrate on using his gift in that way. Each believer should be content to fulfill his role in the body.

Paul states this clearly. Each member of the body has a function (v 4). We do not have the same strengths. The whole body benefits when we use

The Christian cannot be successful if he sees himself as an individual Lone Ranger. He needs the gifts and strengths of other believers.

our strengths without insisting on doing what others can do better.

In case they missed his point, Paul reminded the believers in Rome that they were a part of a body (v 5). They were not to serve the Lord as individuals. We could say it in another way: Believers are members of a team. They serve the Lord as a team.

In fact, we could say that the Christian cannot be successful if he sees himself as an individual Lone Ranger. He needs the gifts and strengths of other believers. Jordan needed his teammates to succeed. They needed him. They wouldn't have won the championship without each other.

Conclusion

Americans love superstars. When it comes to basketball, there is no greater superstar than Michael Jordan. But basketball is a team sport. Jordan could have accomplished nothing without the rest of his team.

Unfortunately, even Evangelicals apply this thinking to the Christian life. We can desire to be superstars. We can think we don't need others.

But that is not how God operates. He has placed us in a body—on a team. He has designed things so that we need others to serve and please Him. If we

want to be successful in His eyes, we must function that way.

One day, every person who has believed in Jesus for eternal life will be in His kingdom forever. Before that kingdom begins, we will stand before Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ. He will evaluate what we have done in order to determine our rewards in that kingdom. On that day, He will judge us on how we served in the Body of Christ, the Church.

Whatever our gifts were, the Judge will determine what kind of teammate we were. Were we humbly content with the role we played? Did we serve in such a way that the body might succeed, whatever personal acclaim we may have or may not have received?

I hope that on that Day, that the Lord will look at my life—and the lives of the believers with whom I worshipped—and say that we were a successful body. How great will it be if He says that we worked together to bring glory to Him? If that happens, no matter what role each of us played, we will be able to lift our crowns together, because we did it as a championship team.¹ ■



Ken Yates is a retired Army chaplain (Lt. Col). He has many theological degrees, including a Ph.D. from D.T.S. in New Testament. He leads the GES international ministry, cohosts the daily podcast, and assists Bob in all aspects of the GES ministry. His new book, *Elisabeth*, is a powerful testimony to the power of God manifested in a Christ-centered family. He and his wife, Pam, live in Columbia, SC.

¹Editor's note: Ken is not suggesting that everyone in a local church will get equal rewards at the Bema. Some will be overcomers. Some will not. Some will be wholehearted (Luke 19:17) and some halfhearted (Luke 19:19). Each one will be judged individually (2 Cor 5:9-10). We will not only be judged for how well we served on the team that is our local church, but also for our deeds as children, spouses, parents, employees, bosses, neighbors, friends, citizens, witnesses, and so on.



Voice from the Pastⁱ

How to Have An Effective Quiet Time

By Art Farstad

“What a beautiful service!” is a comment you often hear after a fine public worship gathering. But we shouldn’t be *dependent solely* for our spiritual nourishment on weekly or bi-weekly services at church. We need “Christian” vitamins *every day*! It is appalling how many believers *don’t* follow the advice of the (true) chorus:

Read your Bible,
Pray every day,
And you’ll grow, grow, grow!

The object of this little study is to share some practical pointers on how to improve the quality and attractiveness of your own personal devotions—your daily “Quiet Time.”ⁱⁱ

The Persons:

You and your Maker!

The Place:

A quiet place, preferably away from all electronic sounds, including the telephone. If you can be outside in a garden, on a hillside, by water, on a

mountain—at least sometimes—grab the opportunity! Remember, God started humanity outdoors—in a garden. If, like this writer, you enjoy background music while working, studying, or reading, make this the exception: God deserves your *full* attention.

The Time:

Morning is best. Jesus met His Father “a long while before day light” (Mark 1:35). A morning “Quiet Time” will steel you for the stresses of the day. If you cannot possibly find time in the morning (“I’m not a morning person”), at least take a few spiritual vitamins, such as reading the day’s devotional in *Our Daily Bread* from Radio Bible Class of Grand Rapids. (They’re free.)

The Order of Service:

1. *A Hymn.* Read (or sing, or play and sing, if you can!) a hymn a day. Go through a hymnal, song by song. (You may choose to do Christmas and Easter sections leading up to those days.)

Which hymnal? Use the one your own church uses to start with, unless it is one that has mostly songs that can't stand on their *words* alone (i.e., just catchy tunes with repeated lines and not much content).

It will take you a year or two to get through a hymnal.

Next, for enrichment, buy or borrow one from a *different* tradition than your own (but not so different as to be apostate or cultic, obviously!). I recommend, for example, the classic British hymnal, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

Keep in mind, however, that *nearly every* hymnal will need your doctrinal “filtering.” Works for salvation can crop up in the most surprising places!

2. *A Devotional Reading.* Try a short devotional reading before you get into the Word itself (one based on the Bible, of course!). Some days your regular reading may be in a section of the Bible that isn't *immediately* applicable to your day—a genealogy, perhaps.

I recommend: *Our Daily Bread* (Radio Bible Class), *Opened Treasures* by Frances Ridley Havergal (Loizeaux Bros.), *One Day at a Time* by William McDonald (Everyday Publications, Toronto, Ontario), and *Daily Walk* (Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, Atlanta, GA).

3. *The Word of God.* Read your Bible reverently and prayerfully, expecting to find wisdom for that very day. The *amount* you read is not nearly so important as the *meditative* attention you give the text that you do read.

Is there a virtue to work on here? A vice to shun? A doctrine that bears study? An example to follow—or *not* to follow (plenty of rebels and sinners are written up in the OT especially!)?

Read the Bible *before* you pray, though a short opening prayer for guidance is wise. Let God speak *first*, then you answer in a simple heartfelt prayer.

4. *Prayer.* I recommend you keep a “prayer book”—a little book listing requests and answers, including notations regarding when you began to pray for something and when it was answered. This will encourage you to keep at it. Get a little alphabetized address book that you can slip in your

pocket or purse. Put in your family, friends, yes, your enemies (if any), those in authority in church and state, and pressing needs—finances, health, and the salvation of others. Have a mix of your *own* needs and intercessions for *others*. You may find your prayers for others get answered before your own needs!

5. *A Commentary.* If you have time, you can get some help on hard passages which come up in your daily Bible reading. Some one-volume books are good. I recommend: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Victor Books) and *Believer's Bible Commentary* by MacDonald (Thomas Nelson). Both these sets have one volume per Testament.

Be part of a *marvelous minority*: Have truly Biblical devotions every day!

As one who confessedly at one time let required Bible School studies sometimes “double” as daily “devotions,” let me repeat the chorus with emphasis:

Read your Bible,

Pray every day,

And you'll grow, grow, grow! ■■■



Art Farstad earned a Master of Theology in Old Testament and a Doctor of Theology in New Testament from Dallas Theological Seminary, where he also taught Greek for five years. He was the editor of the *New King James Version*, the *New Scofield Study Bible*, and the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. He passed in 1998.

[†]This article was published in the September-October 1992 issue of *Grace in Focus* and is available online at faithalone.org.

[‡]Editor's note: Art practiced what he preached. I doubt he missed his daily quiet time more than a handful of times in his adult life. He would rotate his Bible reading. He'd read from the Greek NT, Hebrew OT, English Bible (picking a new version each year or two), Norwegian Bible, French Bible, and German Bible. He was my friend, and his personal practice moved me. He never boasted about his quiet times. He rarely talked about them. And he did not let other things in his schedule get in the way. He so loved his time with the Lord each morning that he would not think of having breakfast before his quiet time.



What's the Relationship Between Assurance and Saving Faith?

By Mike Lii

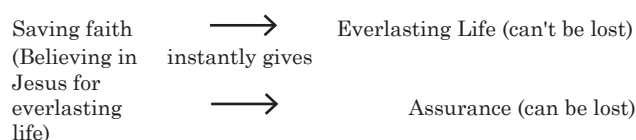
Introduction

At the 1997 Grace Evangelical Society National Conference, Zane Hodges gave a message titled, “Assurance Is of the Essence of Saving Faith.”¹ His title differs from “Assurance Is the Essence of Saving Faith” only by the addition of the word *of*. This has led many to confuse the two statements. GES, in its Affirmation of Beliefs,² states: “Assurance is of the essence of believing in Jesus for everlasting life.” Yet occasionally, even GES has inadvertently omitted the word *of* when referencing *assurance* and *the essence of saving faith* in various publications.

What is the difference between “Assurance is *of* the essence of saving faith” and “Assurance *is* the essence of saving faith”? For Hodges, adding the word *of* was not optional; it was crucial in describing the saving message.

Assurance Is of the Essence of Saving Faith

“Assurance is of the essence of saving faith,” may be represented by the following diagram:



This diagram represents the truth that assurance of everlasting life is the instantaneous and inescapable result of believing the saving message (saving faith).

In addition to being a careful student of New Testament Greek, Hodges was a careful student of the English language. This author has at times inadvertently omitted the word *of* when referencing *assurance* and *the essence of saving faith* in GES publications. Hodges never did in either his 1997 conference message or subsequent 1998 *JOTGES*

article.³ What is the significance of including the word *of*?

The purpose of including *of* is to demonstrate that assurance of everlasting life is the necessary immediate byproduct of *believing the saving message*. In John 11:25-26, Jesus states to Martha:

“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?”

It is impossible for a person to believe what Jesus has stated to Martha, yet remain unsure of whether he will live with Jesus eternally. If a person is unsure of this, he is not believing

that when he dies, “...he shall live.” He is, therefore, not believing what Jesus said. On the other hand, a person who believes “this” (what Jesus has stated to Martha) is assured of eternal life, based on Jesus’ promise. Saving faith always results in immediate assurance of everlasting life. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47).

A person who is unsure of whether he has everlasting life, is not, at that moment, exercising saving faith. He lacks assurance because he is not believing Jesus’ promise. Note that being unsure at a particular point in time does not mean that a person has *never* believed the saving message. When a person believes in Jesus for everlasting life, that life is secure forever and can never be lost. Assurance may be lost if one stops believing in Jesus for everlasting life, but the life received is eternally secure.

Assurance Is the Essence of Saving Faith

However, that does not mean that *assurance* is equal to or synonymous with *saving faith*.

Assurance of everlasting life is the immediate and inescapable byproduct of saving faith.

“Assurance is the essence of saving faith” may be represented by the following diagram:

Assurance of everlasting life = Saving faith

Note that this diagram equates “assurance of everlasting life” with “saving faith.” In other words, whenever you have assurance, you then have saving faith. The problem with this statement is that it is possible for a person to have assurance for a reason other than believing Jesus’ promises in the Gospel of John. For example, one might be sure of his salvation because he has the self-righteousness attitude of the Pharisee in Luke 18:11:

“God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”

The source of the Pharisee's assurance was not belief in Jesus' saving promise.

Although this Pharisee may have been sure of his salvation because of his good works, this was not saving faith because the source of his assurance was not belief in Jesus' saving promise.

The saving message is not “believe that you have everlasting life.” It is “believe in Jesus for everlasting life.” If the saving message were the former instead of the latter, then anyone who feels assured that he has everlasting life has it—even if that assurance is based on thinking that one is good enough or has done the appropriate works (e.g., baptism, confession, or communion). While such a person may be 100% sure, he does not have everlasting life. Being sure of having everlasting life is not the same as believing the saving message.

When asked about the importance of distinguishing between *faith* and *assurance*—in other

words, why should one avoid saying, “Assurance is the essence of saving faith”—Hodges answered:

Saving faith has objective content to it. Its content, essentially is the content we stated in John 11:25-27. This is what we believe, but because of the nature of the content, an inescapable byproduct of that content if I believe it, is that I know that I'm saved. Therefore in my mind, it is unguarded to say that assurance and faith are synonymous.⁴

The statement, “Assurance is of the essence of saving faith” clarifies that, while the presence of assurance does not guarantee that saving faith is present, saving faith (e.g., belief in the saving truth of John 3:16; 5:24) always results in the immediate assurance of everlasting life.

Conclusion

Assurance of everlasting life is of the essence of saving faith. There may be times in GES publications when *of* has been inadvertently omitted, but the Focused Free Grace and GES belief is that assurance of everlasting life is the immediate and inescapable byproduct of saving faith.



Mike Lii is a finance attorney. He and his wife, Letitia, a member of the GES board, and their son, Payton, live in Dallas and serve at Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship in Lewisville, Texas. Mike and Letitia also run the Zane Hodges Library online (zanehodges.org).

¹ See <https://youtu.be/LZ-3vY6VJtl>

² See <https://faithalone.org/beliefs/>

³ <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/of-the-essence-of-saving-faith/>

⁴ See <https://youtu.be/LZ-3vY6VJtl> at 56:36.

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